

**How To Be**  
**YOUR OWN BEST**  
**PSYCHOTHERAPIST**

*The Key to Your Psychological Health  
in a Nutshell*

**BY**  
**DR. MICHAEL MAMAS**



How to Be  
Your Own Best Psychotherapist

by Dr. Michael Mamas

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*I would like to dedicate this book  
to my students. They have filled my heart  
and continue to inspire my work.*

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>viii</i>
<i>Foreword</i> .....	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	<i>xi</i>
<i>Why you Must be Your Own Best Psychotherapist</i> .....	<i>xii</i>

## **Day One: Understanding the Human Psyche . . . . . 1**

*What is Psychological Health? Your Self-Correcting Mechanism, Modern Psychotherapy in a Nutshell, Identity, The Three Levels of Motivation, Exploring your Motivations, Your Desire to Destroy, Vulnerability, Your Psychophysiological Baseline, Exploring your Childhood Conditioning, Your Identity With Your Conditioning, Your Relationship With, Non-attachment vs. “Letting Go,” Your First and Second Responses, First and Second Responses in Your Personal Relationships*

## **Day Two: Doorways to Your Psyche . . . . . 34**

*Transference, The Five Divine Currents*

**Day Three: Strengthening Your Inner Being . . . . 60**

*Sex and Sexuality, Trying to Turn Apples Into Oranges, Your Center, The Three Aspects of Healing, Your Relationship With the Holding Space, Band-Aid Therapy, Self-honesty, The Experiment Called Your Life, Your Finest Feelings*

**Day Four: Mastering Your Inner Process . . . . . 76**

*Cultivating a Healthy Sense of Self, Your Personality, Your Relationship With Power, Inner Space, Good Evil and the Finest Feeling Level, 100% Responsibility, Fulfillment of Your Inner Longing, Your Notion of a Higher Self, Your Notion of a Lower Self, Your Notion of the Mask, The Reason, Will, Emotion Model, Pre-Verbal Issues*

*Conclusion . . . . . 102*  
*Selected Readings . . . . . 103*  
*About the Author . . . . . 105*  
*The Surya Program . . . . . 106*

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## Foreword

The art of psychotherapy is about to take an evolutionary step forward. In this little book, Dr. Michael Mamas proposes a radically different yet profoundly simple approach to the process of self-actualization. This powerful understanding of the human condition has helped many lead deeper, more fulfilling lives. This approach, which Dr. Mamas has termed *Transgradient Counseling*<sup>™</sup>, has an incredibly powerful potential to help us gain deeper and deeper levels of self-knowledge.

Since working with the principles of *Transgradient Counseling* over the past six years, I've watched my clients move faster and deeper in therapy than I ever thought possible. Those suffering from depression feel better quicker, relationship issues untangle, and those who just feel stagnant in their lives resolve their dilemma and move on quickly. I sit in awe as a participant in my clients' unfoldment.

A quick note to my fellow professionals: We have invested a lot of time, energy, and money in our training. We mean well and pride ourselves in our ability to help and "be with" our clients. Much of what Dr. Mamas presents can be threatening. It may be tempting to dismiss it with, "Oh sure, I get it." Please don't do yourself this disservice. Take the time to explore your relationship with your mod-

els and preconceived notions. Challenge yourself to loosen your beliefs on what you believe your clients should think or feel in any given situation. See what happens when you risk knowing nothing. Sit with your clients as they explore their inner landscape from a multitude of perspectives. Join in that exploration with them. I can promise you that you will become a better therapist. I have seen the impact this work has had on those professionals who have studied with Dr. Mamas. You will free yourself from the onerous burden of always having to be one step ahead of your client. You will develop a deeper respect and appreciation for those who enter your office. Remember, *psycho* means “soul” in Greek; *theraputae* means “healer.” Take the risk of exploring your models, beliefs, and self to become a true facilitator of the healing of souls.

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September 12, 2000

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## *Introduction*

**T**his book, a transcription of a four-day lecture series I recently gave in New York City, is not just about theory. It is a tour through your inner landscape that concludes with a healthier, wiser, and happier you. Each section corresponds with one day of the training. At the end of some of the chapters are questions. I suggest that as you go through the book, you write down your answers to these questions in a separate notebook, and refer back to them when you are asked to do so.

## *Why You Must Be Your Own Best Psychotherapist*

*What does it mean to be psychologically healthy?*

**T**he experts disagree. According to a recent count, there are over two hundred and fifty distinct types of psychotherapy. That doesn't include spiritual and holistic approaches.

Therapeutic methods vary widely. Some therapists hypnotize you, others try to program (or deprogram) you. Some tell you how to behave, others tell you how to misbehave. Some think it is their job to figure you out, others hold you under a mattress and tell you to fight your way out.

As a group, psychotherapists have not come to any consensus of what it means to be psychologically healthy or how to help their clients attain psychological health. Consequently, unless you wish to cast your fate to the wind, you must take charge of your own psychotherapy and look to the fundamentals. Only then do the divergent perspectives come together and make sense. Not only *can* you be your own best psychotherapist, you *must* be. The alternative is to play dice with your own mental health.

There is an additional and very important reason why

you must become your own best psychotherapist: to live life responsibly. This requires that you be psychologically healthy. The alternative is to live your life as a victim of your own psychological conditionings and traumas. It is of utmost importance that you spend some time exploring and working with the landscape of your inner psyche. In our culture we understand that if you do not brush your teeth, your health will suffer. Likewise, if you do not “brush the teeth of your own psychological landscape,” your life will suffer.

In my years of teaching advanced training programs, I have come across a small handful of psychotherapists who I feel have a solid and responsible approach to helping their clients. It has been fascinating for me to note that every single one of them say the same thing about their work. They essentially say, “I have rejected much of what I learned from my psychotherapeutic training. Of course I picked up a little here and there that was of value and incorporate it, but I certainly don’t practice what I was taught. I don’t understand what I do, I only know that it works.” After attending my lectures and workshops, they tell me that what I am offering is not only a clear understanding, but a systematic practical approach to their work. They feel it is where psychotherapy has been trying to go since its inception, and call it the next major step in the field of psychotherapy.

I do not call what I teach psychotherapy. I call it *Transgradient Counseling*<sup>TM</sup>. Some classify my work as

spiritual counseling. Though I am uncomfortable with some of the connotations that title carries, I am willing to be put into that category. It is not to be employed as an approach that is suitable for the mentally or emotionally unstable, but is directed more to people of reasonable stability and psychological health. Yet, I believe its underlying principles are fundamental to everyone and all of life. Whether you choose to work with a psychotherapist or not, I feel you will find these principles to be invaluable in understanding yourself and others. Literally thousands of people have benefited from this practical knowledge.

In my years of private practice, a large percentage of my clientele became composed of psychotherapists who learned about me through their clients and decided they wanted to work with me themselves. One psychotherapist who happened to know a number of my students once said, "I have only one question for you. Where do you find all of those incredible people?" I responded by saying, "Everyone is already incredible. I only introduce people to who it is they truly are."

## Chapter 1

### *Day One: Understanding the Human Psyche*

**L**osing yourself to the complexity of your life is like losing the landscape of the forest to the details of a tree. You can navigate the waters of your most complex problem by understanding a few fundamental principles. Today we are going to explore those principles. They are the gateway to a healthier, happier, and more productive you.

## **What is Psychological Health?**

Our psychological health is really just a matter of stress. But I mean the word “stress” in a larger sense than what you feel at the end of a busy day. By “stress,” I mean any fatigue or distortion imposed upon our physiology that impacts our psychological health. I refer to that part of the physiology as the psychophysiology. Just as we have a physiology that determines our physical health, we have a psychophysiology that determines our psychological health.

There is a very direct and intimate connection between the amount of stress that we have accumulated in our psychophysiology and the state of our psychological health. For example, if we have a particularly jolting experience, such as an emotional trauma, it has a physiological correlate. If that trauma impacts the physiology significantly enough, it is held in the psyche as a distortion, or stress. Stress can result from an occurrence that is experienced as either negative or positive.

## **Your Self-Correcting Mechanism**

The development of psychodynamic health (the healthy function of the psychophysiology) has to do with the alleviation of stress. Inherent in that statement is a rather intriguing understanding: the state of the physiology itself is intrinsic to the state of psychodynamic health. I don't think modern psychotherapy embraces this understanding to the extent to which it should. This under-

standing is fundamental to an effective, wise, and intelligent approach to psychological health. I sometimes express it by saying, “You’re already fine. It’s just the stress in the physiology that needs to be purified out. The basis of your psychodynamic health, inner wisdom, and intelligence is already there.”

We know that if we cut our finger all we have to do is put a bandage on it and keep it clean. The inner intelligence, an inner self-correcting mechanism, will cause it to grow back together. The finger knows how to grow back together. We just have to create a situation that accommodates that process.

We need to recognize that the self-correcting mechanism which heals our finger is the same mechanism that comes into play in our psychological health. Our attitude about our mental health is that we need to impose health upon it from the outside. We say, “Think this way. Hold on to these commandments. Get rid of that aspect of your being. Align with this behavioral modality. Do it like this and you will be healthy.” If you look at the modern approach to psychotherapy, that is generally what you see.

Everyone knows that a rose bud cannot be turned into a blossom by peeling back the petals. Doing that would only make a mess out of the bud. Everyone knows the ability of the bud to unfold into an exquisite blossom is inherent in the nature of the plant. Our psychological health is the same. I call that inner intelligence the self-correcting mechanism.

## **Modern Psychotherapy in a Nutshell**

Modern psychotherapy can be understood as consisting of three different fundamental approaches. In practice, most modern psychotherapeutic approaches are a combination of the three.

The first is the cognitive approach. In this approach you develop some intellectual understanding of what's going on in your head. Maybe you have issues with your mother. Or maybe you have issues with men. The idea is that because you have a cognitive understanding (you understand intellectually what you have been doing wrong), the next time you meet a man, you decide that you won't act in your habitual way. But to draw a parallel to the finger, the cut is still there. It hasn't grown together—it's not healed. There is no organic physiological change in your psyche that has taken place as a result of the cognitive approach. You are just holding on to a new attitude, an overlay. You may say to yourself, "Okay, now I get what I was doing, so now I'm going to do this instead." But all the organic physiological attributes that were there before still remain.

The second approach is the behavioral approach. By modifying your behavior you attempt to change your psyche. For example, suppose you want to be successful in life. The therapist might prescribe a program like this: on the first day, before you go to bed, you write down everything that you want to accomplish tomorrow. On the second day, you force yourself to do at least three things that



are on your list. This approach is like jumping through hoops. Each day you jump through a new hoop and in thirty days you'll be a "new you." Like the cognitive approach, there's no organic physiological change that takes place in you. You have only overlaid a modified behavior.

The third aspect of modern psychotherapy is the affective approach—emotional release. If you feel angry towards somebody, the therapist tells you to pretend that the pillow on the floor is that person, and encourages you to beat it up. There can be some organic change here, but it's manipulation. You're pushing the physiology in a certain direction you are told it should go. You're forcing something out. Often more distortion is driven into the psychophysiology than is released, if any is released at all. In contrast, when we heal the cut finger, all we do is accommodate the innate self-correcting mechanism. The finger knows how to heal. We don't grab the skin, force it together, and try to make it grow according to our guidelines. We know that it will grow together on its own.

So this idea of the self-correcting mechanism, as it applies to the human psyche, is really revolutionary. It is not the way psychotherapy is usually understood to work. We usually try to make our psyche function in some manner that we think is better. A psychotherapist might think, "Well, I see this is going on with my client's psyche, and if I can get him to stop functioning that way and start functioning this other way, then he'll be healthy." It's what I

call out/in. You look at the surface of your client, and you try to drive your ideas into his depth. You have some parameters or convictions about what a person would be like on the surface if he or she was healthy. Based on that ideal, you gauge your client's level of health and try to restructure whatever you can identify and access on the surface of his or her being. Once your client starts lining up with your ideas, you declare your client's inner being to be healthy. That's out/in. Starting from the outer and trying to work into the inner. It has nothing to do with the self-correcting mechanism.

I compare the out/in approach to building a 25-story structure starting with the 25th floor. You use props and scaffolding to hold it up. Next you build the 24th floor under it, employing more props and scaffolding. Then you put in the 23rd floor along with more props, and so on. Eventually, you work your way down to the foundation. But there is going to be some misalignment. There has to be.

Likewise, when you apply the out/in approach to your psyche, things are not going to align with the depth of your own inner being. The out/in approach does not respect the uniqueness at the depth of your inner being. It's all about the surface.

The in/out approach, on the other hand, recognizes your innate wisdom. Just as your finger heals with an innate intelligence, so does your psychodynamic structure. If you just allow that intelligence to be the guiding light

and the determining factor that facilitates the healing, then you're working in a way that's in accord with your nature. You are tapping into that place in the depth of your being that is already fine, has always been fine, and always will be fine; and just allowing the rest of your psyche to align with it. It is something that is inaccessible, and cannot be defined from any superficial perspective of what you are supposed to be like. It honors the freedom and naturalness necessary to accommodate the uniqueness of your own individuality.

*Question: Isn't the self-correcting mechanism somehow accessed by the traditional approach of psychotherapy?*

The self-correcting mechanism is initiated by the out/in approach to some extent. But the problem is that it is an accidental side effect. It may happen, but the entire focus of our own whole personal psychodynamic process needs to be founded upon that understanding. To depend on just an occasional accidental side effect is not effective therapy. Staying focused on the facilitation (or awakening or freeing) of the self-correcting mechanism is the most important thing.

## **Identity**

We already mentioned that improving psychological health is about alleviating stress. What is stress? What form does it take? What's its nature? How does it look or act when it impacts the human psychology? And how can

we facilitate the self-correcting mechanism?

The first way stress impacts the human psyche is through what I call identity. We “identify with” things. It’s as if the physiology gets programmed when it is impacted with stress. In other words, it gets conditioned. This conditioning can take the form of your affinities as well as your aversions.

Each of us has developed a habitual identity with different modes of behavior that are more a functioning of our conditioning than the functioning of our true nature. One behavioral example might be smoking. We condition the physiology to desire something that’s killing us. Another example might be our relationship with men: “All men are jerks.” Another example might be our relationship with women: “All women are stupid.” Another example might be our belief systems about the world: “It’s not safe to go out there. It’s a dangerous place.” These are some examples of aversions.

Another common aversion is a dislike of the intellect: “Oh, I don’t want to think, I just want to feel.” Others have aversions to emotions: “Emotions are a waste of time.” That is a form of denial. We feel things, but we want to deal with life by being like Mr. Spock or Commander Data from Star Trek. What we are trying to do is wall off aspects of our being. It doesn’t work.

Conditioning can also be the basis of your affinities. Some of these affinities are so sweet and so innocent that you might ask, “Well, how can that be wrong?” I remem-

ber I was giving a lecture and mentioned what I call the “love and light” mentality: going through life trying to view everything with love and thinking, “Oh, we’re all love and it’s all beautiful. We all have to just see the sunny side of people and life.” A lady at that lecture (she was very sweet really) put up her hand and said, “Well, you know, you’re saying that about being loving and all, but how can that be bad?” And she said it from such a sincere, innocent, and loving place, that it really touched my heart. “How can that be bad? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we had a world where everybody loved each other? Maybe if we all started living that now it would make the world a better place.” But there are other realities, other aspects of life that we need to allow for. Why? Because it is simply the nature of life. Otherwise, you’re going to walk down the street in love and light, and get mugged. So affinities based upon stress, even our most laudable and noble affinities, ultimately get in our way, as do our stress-based aversions.

So our evolution is about resting into that value of our being that is already fine, that’s already healthy and integrated, that spontaneously and naturally upholds all aspects of our life. And that has to come from in/out, just as much as the healing of a cut on our finger has to come from in/out, not out/in. So the wisdom of facilitating our own personal process parallels the same simple and obvious wisdom we have about healing our cut finger. What is truly amazing is that our society has embraced an approach to

mental health that has lost sight of this simple truth.

Yes, there are things we can do to facilitate that process, but they must be done with a certain humility. This humility comes from the understanding that healing cannot be done by aligning with some superficial identification of how it is we think someone is supposed to be. Although different psychological concepts and notions can be useful, they can hinder you if your relationship with them isn't healthy. To be healthy, that relationship needs to be based upon an in/out approach.

Although these different psychological understandings must not be used to create a system or set of buzzwords with which to align your psyche, they may have a function. They can be used to "till the soil," or to free up our psychophysiology, so that we then naturally rest into the intrinsic, already healthy, and already fine value at the basis of our being. In other words, we can use them to loosen the stress and purify it out of our physiology. When the stress has been purified out, you discover that you are fine. You've always been fine. It's just that all the stresses that have been imposed upon you and taken the form of your identities have gotten in your way.

### **Questions To Facilitate Your Inner Exploration**

If you would like, I recommend that you get a notebook and write down your answers to the questions at the end of these chapters. We will work with your answers as you go through this book.

1. What are some of your attributes that you feel particularly good about?
2. What are some of your attributes that you would like to change?
3. Make a list of people that you respect, admire, or have an affinity for. Make a list of their positive attributes that you appreciate.
4. Make a list of people that you have an aversion toward. Include a list of their attributes that you do not care for.

### **The Three Levels of Motivation**

How do we responsibly do our personal process? We'll start with some principles. The first principle is the notion of motivation. It's a very important term. Motivation, we could say, exists on three levels.

#### **Motivation of Communion**

At the source of your being, your motivations are based upon that place inside that's already fine, that's pure. In that place, your motivations involving your relationships with other people are quite laudable. They are to perpetuate the feeling of communion in love, to make things better, and to be in support of all concerned. It's a very positive and life-supporting sort of motivation that's inherent to your own true nature. Your own true nature

is pure. Every individual's essential underlying nature is pure. From that pure place at the basis of our being, what motivates us is the desire to share that purity with others.

### **Subconscious Motivation**

At the depth of even the most wicked person is loving, compassionate, and pure intent. What they do may be totally inexcusable, but at the depth of even a murderer's being is purity. What happens is that as stress accumulates in the physiology, the psyche gets distorted. Little kids don't care about belief systems, models, or identities. All they care about is Mommy's and Daddy's love. They just want to feel loved. If Mommy says, "You're bad if you do this," they try not to do it. When Mommy says, "You're good," they feel her love. This is where the overlays start to take root. Children begin to identify with whatever behavioral modality seems to get them what they long for: communion and love. Over time, the purity of that underlying motivation becomes shrouded underneath the distortions resulting from these identity overlays.

In our workings on a day to day level, these distortions result in a second level of motivation; yet it is often hidden in our subconscious mind. Getting in touch with your hidden motivations is a major part of tilling the soil of your own inner landscape. It is very much about self-honesty. The motivation behind what you do or what you say can be very elusive at times.



## **Conscious Motivation**

The third level of motivation is the most superficial. It's the motivation that we're clear about and comfortable with in our conscious awareness. We believe and tell ourselves and others that it's our real motivation. You can say to somebody, "I love you," and believe you are being honest and straightforward. But you can simultaneously have a hidden underlying motivation that says, "I hate you," that it is actually based on: "I hate you because you don't love me, so I want to make you feel bad by telling you that I love you." But it is not stated or even understood. Where you think your motivation comes from is actually only the surface. Of course, simultaneously, you have the underlying pure motivation based in the longing for communion, love, and mutual support. However, this deepest purest love is usually hidden from view, buried under the stress in the psychophysiology that creates our more superficial and distorted motivations.

### **Questions To Facilitate Your Inner Exploration**

1. Think of a recent conflict you had with someone, and remember the things you said to that person.
2. What did you tell yourself your motivation was for saying those things?
3. Can you identify a more hidden motivation that was making a very different statement or had a different