



ENERGY PSYCHOLOGY IN DISASTER RELIEF

DAVID FEINSTEIN



WENZEL PHILLIPS/CELESTIAL IMAGE

ENERGY PSYCHOLOGY IS AN APPROACH to psychotherapy and emotional self-management that stimulates “energy points” on the skin in order to change specific emotional response patterns. Its methods have been highly controversial within the psychological community. On the one hand, the rapid positive results being reported make no sense in terms of psychotherapy’s stock concepts, such as insight, contingency management (incentive-based change), or the curative powers of the therapeutic relationship. On the other hand, when you see a person with a lifelong fear of

heights walk toward the edge of a balcony, start to sweat, shake, and back away, but thirty minutes later watch that same person after a largely mechanical treatment walk calmly to the railing and enthusiastically lean out into the view, it is striking. When you see a comparable scenario ten times out of twelve, it is persuasive. Although energy psychology is backed by a credible and growing professional organization, acceptance, as might be expected with any radically new approach, has been slow within the broader psychotherapeutic community.

ENERGY PSYCHOLOGY IN THE FIELD

For a therapeutic innovation to prevail, it must pass many tests. These tests are even more stringent if the technique, as in the case of energy psychology, is rooted in a paradigm adopted from a foreign culture (in this case, Traditional Chinese Medicine) and uses unfamiliar and odd-looking methods (such as tapping on acupuncture points). One acid test for therapies such as energy psychology that claim to be effective with trauma relief is their use in the wake of a profound disaster. Even

while systematic research studies on energy psychology are only beginning to appear, a legacy of the method’s effectiveness in disaster areas has been accumulating.

Carl Johnson, PhD, a clinical psychologist retired from a career as a PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) specialist with the Veteran’s Administration, has traveled over the past six years to the sites of some of the world’s most terrible atrocities and disasters to provide psychological support based in energy psychology methods. About a year after NATO put an end to the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, Johnson found himself in a trailer in a small village where