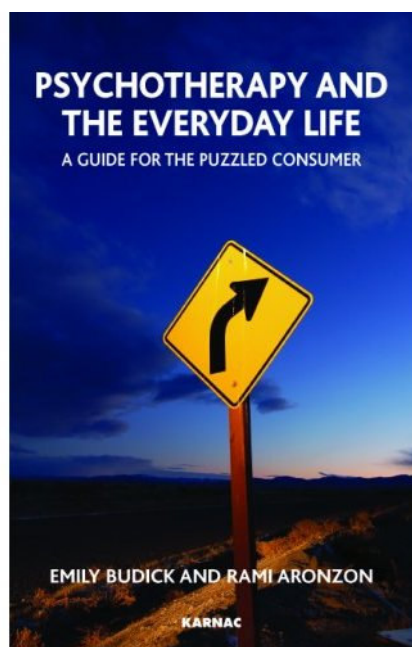


## Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life : A Guide for the Puzzled Consumer

Budick, Emily & Aronzon, Rami.

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### Synopsis

First and foremost this book is written to serve as a guide for prospective and beginning patients of psychotherapeutic intervention of the particular kind known as psychoanalytic or psychodynamic psychotherapy. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy (hereafter also referred to simply as psychotherapy) is the kind of therapy that most closely follows Freud's own dynamic model of mind, both in theory and in practice. This is so despite its important differences from Freud, which we will also be detailing (the title of the book echoes a famous work by Freud).

ד"ר רמי אהרונסון, פסיכואנליטיקאי, פסיכיאטר למבוגרים וילדים ולמתבגרים. ניהל את המרפאות של המרכז לבריאות הנפש "טלביה" בירושלים ושימש סגן מנהל שלו. מורה בבית הספר לרפואה "הדסה" ובקורס לפסיכותרפיה שליד המכון הישראלי לפסיכואנליזה. חבר באיגוד הישראלי לפסיכותרפיה. הפרק מועלה באתר באדיבותו.



### Description

Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is in every way a perplexing business. Through a frank dialogue between a former patient and her former therapist "Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life" introduces psychodynamic therapy to prospective and beginning patients. It addresses individuals who are seeking psychological help and wish to determine whether this particular form of psychotherapy is appropriate for them. It is also intended for those whose therapy is already underway, to assist them in furthering understanding and clarifying their experience so that they can better avail themselves of what it has to offer. The book can also serve as a reminder to novice professionals (and perhaps some more experienced professionals as well) concerning what psychotherapy feels like from the patient's point of view and what complexities of response and intention lie behind the therapist's interventions. [It] is not meant to substitute for the psychodynamic conversation that is therapy itself. Rather, it is an attempt, in straightforward, non-professional language, to help facilitate the clinical experience.

'An original and welcome contribution to help one navigate through the choice of and commitment to psychodynamic therapy. In a flowing, well-written and easy to understand style, this "Guide for the Puzzled" is a rewarding tool and guidebook for the psychotherapy consumer in thinking through whether, why, how to and in which direction to proceed in embarking on the journey towards "Self" help, understanding and discovery.'

- Aryeh Maidenbaum, PhD, Director, New York Center for Jungian Studies

"Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life" is truly a marvelous achievement. It is a book on psychotherapy that makes it possible to understand this impossible vocation and the often indescribable efforts of the therapeutic couple to understand, appreciate and influence the life and character of at least one of them. It makes the major technical terms and theoretical underpinnings of the process accessible to prospective patients, the curious public, advanced students and professionals alike. And it accomplishes this all in a manner and language that are elegant, precise, eminently down to earth, experience-near, and above all, highly readable and fascinating.'

- Shmuel Erlich, Sigmund Freud Professor of Psychoanalysis (Emeritus), The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Training Analyst and former President, Israel Psychoanalytic Society

'[This] is an original, entertaining, candid and highly readable tour of the experiential fabric as well as the theoretical basics of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. It is written from the unique perspective of a patient- analyst dyad who have joined their literary forces to reflect on the journey they have travelled together. From this



vantage point, it offers an intimate view of “what the process looks and feels like, in particular from the patient’s perspective.” [It] is therefore, first and foremost, a tale of a psychotherapeutic encounter in which two coffee mugs, given as a gift and left unanalysed and untouched on the analyst’s desk, set the plot in motion. Resistance, transference, the dynamic unconscious, therapeutic action and even the emerging neurobiological underpinnings of the talking cure are all examined and woven into the very personal narrative of what transpired and unfolded during that psychotherapy.’

- Yoram Yovell, MD, PhD, Co-Director, Institute for the Study of Affective Neuroscience, Israel

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#### About the Author

EMILY BUDICK, Ph.D., holds the Ann and Joseph Adelman Chair in American Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she is also chair of the Department and coordinator for English literature studies. She has published and edited eight books and numerous essays in the field of literature and cultural studies. Her recent work includes psychoanalytic readings of Israeli as well as American Holocaust fiction. She is also the co-author (with Dr Judith Besserman) of *The Jerusalem Diet: Guided Imagery and the Personal Path to Weight Control*.

RAMI ARONZON, M.D. is a practicing psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and psychotherapist in Jerusalem, where he is a member of the Israel Psychoanalytic Institute. He teaches and consults at various institutions in Israel, including The Hebrew University and the Hadassah Medical School. For more than two decades he headed outpatient services at Jerusalem’s Talbieh Mental Health Center, while serving as well as consultant and supervisory psychiatrist for the Shaar Hanegev Mental Health Clinic of the



kibbutz movement. He continues to work summers as a general medical officer in northern Norway.

## Introduction

*Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* is neither a textbook in the theory or practice of psychotherapy, nor is it a self-help manual. It is also not an autobiographical narrative – although the book has something in common with all of these genres of writing. Primarily, however, this book is, as its subtitle suggests, *A Guide for the Perplexed Consumer*. It is intended to help a variety of individuals with differing relationships to the field of psychotherapy to negotiate its somewhat perplexing and slippery terrain.

First and foremost this book is written to serve as a guide for prospective and beginning patients of psychotherapeutic intervention of the particular kind known as psychoanalytic or psychodynamic psychotherapy. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy (hereafter also referred to simply as psychotherapy) is the kind of therapy that most closely follows Freud's own dynamic model of mind, both in theory and in practice. This is so despite its important differences from Freud, which we will also be detailing (the title of our book echoes a famous work by Freud).

*Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* is intended to help individuals who are seeking some sort of psychological help to determine whether psychoanalytic psychotherapy is appropriate for them, and why. It is also geared to helping those who have already entered such therapy to understand what the process entails so that they will be better able to stick with it, especially in the early weeks when (as we shall see) the



"resistance" to therapy is extremely high. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy is in every way a perplexing business. Its value to its recipients might well be enhanced through certain sorts of clarification, concerning both its goals and its processes.

There are therapists who would disagree with this approach. They would argue that psychotherapy is best entered into innocently, precisely because of the centrality of "resistance" to the therapy itself. Yet, who of today's consumers enters psychotherapy or any other sort of therapy "innocently"? In the 21<sup>st</sup> century Freud is a household word, and often a dirty word. Most of us are also familiar with different sorts of psychological interventions and their purported benefits and disadvantages. We therefore decide to enter psychotherapy, or not, on the basis of partial information, including misinformation, and a good measure of false expectation and misconception. These can be fatal to either initiating psychotherapy or sticking with it. In the same vein, even though psychotherapy of the type we are going describe shares many features with the *ur* therapy psychoanalysis, including the concept of *resistance*, nonetheless psychotherapy is a compromise with the rigors of psychoanalysis proper. It is already an accommodation to the very different demands and expectations of the contemporary patient. By entering psychotherapy knowing something about how it works and what you are likely to gain from it, it may be possible to help augment this shift from some of the premises and structure of psychoanalysis without losing altogether the vital connection of psychotherapy to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

In this way, *Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* is a guide to the perplexed consumer who is considering or only beginning to experience



psychoanalytic psychotherapy. But the book imagines a second audience as well. *Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* is not a scholarly book. Nonetheless, it does undertake to say things that might well be of value to students of psychotherapy and novice psychotherapists as well, concerning what the process looks and feels like, in particular from the patient's perspective. As a guide to all of these perplexed consumers and practitioners, *Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* hopes to transform some of the often times off-putting difficulties of psychoanalytic psychotherapy into useful frustrations and even fascinations. It also hopes to help sustain them as such.

Psychotherapy of the particular kind we are going to present in this book is about discovering meanings. It is about what we might think of as the meaning-making-ness of our lives. In the psychoanalytic psychotherapeutic view of things, such meaning-making-ness does not refer simply to how our lives – our thoughts, feelings, perceptions, wishes, fears, and so on – seem meaningful to us in some ordinary, rational, common-sense kind of way. Rather, psychoanalytic psychotherapy is concerned with how meaningfulness is produced in our lives in sometimes troubling and less than satisfactory ways and often in ways that we barely grasp. When we examine the production of the meaningfulness of our lives, we discover that (sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse) it often has very little to do with what we think is meaningful to us, or what we would wish our meanings to be. In large measure, psychoanalytic psychotherapy is concerned with exposing the discrepancy between our rational, intellectual comprehension of our lives and some other way we might have of understanding ourselves. It is also



about providing us with tools for mediating the gap between what we mean and what we think we mean or want to mean.

Most of us do not, however, go into therapy in order to discover something so abstract as how our lives make sense. And this is the rub. We go into therapy because we are in psychological distress. We are in pain. What we want is comfort. We want relief. And, indeed: because the simple act of talking to another person, whatever the nature of the conversation, often does provide some measure of relief, many people do experience the comfort they seek, at least initially. And then, feeling better, they quit. Or, staying on a bit longer, they discover what psychoanalytic psychotherapy is really about, which is the often frustrating and difficult process of reflecting on those psychological mechanisms by which we are who we are. And then they quit.

A major objective of this book is to help the patient to psychotherapeutic intervention to stay with the therapy beyond both the initial satisfactions and the initial frustrations that the process entails. The perplexing paradox that this book is intended to help unravel is how and why the route provided by psychoanalytic psychotherapy might be a better path to psychological health than other seemingly simpler and more straightforward therapeutic paths, at least in the long run, and at least for some of us. This is so even though the process, as we've begun to suggest, does not, initially, except in a very superficial way, provide the comfort most of us come into therapy seeking.

In the years since Freud first developed his psychodynamic model of mind, many competing and conflicting theories and practices have entered the field of psychological therapy. Although *Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* is not a theoretical or scholarly book and is not





intended as an introduction to Freudian or other theories of mind, we will, in the course of our discussions, be explaining certain basic Freudian and non-Freudian concepts – for those whose interest in their own minds might also lead them to be interested in theories of mind as such. We will also be specifying some of the important differences between psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, which make a book of the sort we have written a useful tool for patients of psychotherapeutic intervention in particular. We are throughout this book very mindful of the transformations in the fields of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, some of which began to develop during Freud's own lifetime. Yet, *Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* is an unabashedly Freudian book. In what follows we will suggest why Freud's model of mind, even if we want to reformulate some of his theories, might still be the best way we have of conceptualizing mental process. We will also suggest why, therefore, it might also still be the best guide for developing strategies of psychological intervention.

When all is said and done, what almost all psychological theories of mind give us are verbal "pictures" or descriptions of what are otherwise incomprehensible, inexpressible, and largely unimaginable mental activities. This is true of all the contenders in the field, from the behavioral and cognitive therapies to object relations theory and relational psychology to Freudian theory itself. It is the case even with the more scientifically adduced models produced by fields such as neurobiology or neuro-psychoanalysis (about which we will have more to say in the later chapters of this book). The technical vocabularies of the mental sciences almost inevitably fail to adequately capture the concepts they are meant to describe. Nonetheless, the mental activity that forms of





the basis of Freudian psychoanalytic theory as of other contending theories is not dependent on our ability to name and describe it. Whatever terms particular analysts use to define this or another phenomenon of the psychological life doesn't change the basic fact that we *have* an internal, mental world. Concerning this fact, analysts, therapists, scientists, and most of us ordinary folk as well are agreed. Definitions shift; theories change; the human mind persists and begs to be understood. Therefore, another objective of this book is to contribute (even if in a small way) to the project of understanding who and what we human beings are as creatures of consciousness and mind.

### *The Two Voices*

A final word of introduction before we begin, concerning who is addressing you in this book; for this is a book written in two voices, not one.

One of these voices is the voice that most of us expect to hear in a book like this. This is the voice of the professional psychotherapist, who, in this case, is also a psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst. This professional person, of over thirty years' experience, has headed a major department of psychiatry and psychotherapy. He has also maintained a private clinical practice, and he is currently active in numerous institutes and institutions involved in psychiatric, psychoanalytic, and psychotherapeutic work. Sometimes this expert voice of the professional therapist speaks on its own – especially toward the end of the book. More often, however, it speaks either through or in combination with the less tutored, more



anecdotal voice of the non-professional, former, psychotherapeutic patient – in fact, his own former patient.

This other non-professional voice is the more pervasive and persistent of the two voices in this text. It is the voice that you have been hearing until now. Be assured: even where this non-professional voice is speaking more or less independently, it has been everywhere informed by extensive reading in the field of Freud, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy. It has also been informed by the professional expertise of the professional therapist. The professional therapist has acted to insure that all the statements made in this book are accurate and that the therapist's, as well as the patient's perspective on psychotherapy, is fairly represented. Nonetheless, it is the non-professional voice that dominates this book: her stories and anecdotes, her experience of psychotherapy. Since this non-professional voice is also the voice of a professional literary critic, a feature of psychoanalytic psychotherapy that will emerge very strongly in these pages is its story-telling – story-listening quality. But we get ahead of ourselves.

Most introductions to psychotherapy, whether for the popular or the professional audience, have been written by professional psychotherapists (psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, and so on). These are individuals who are often sufficiently removed from their own early experiences of psychotherapy that (perhaps) they may no longer remember precisely what it feels like to encounter this strange and bewildering terrain of therapeutic process. They lack the non-professional patient's more basic and immediate experience of therapy. It is this immediacy of experience that we hope to provide in this book. It is our hope that by presenting psychotherapy



through the personal experiences of a non-professional patient we will provide access to the processes of psychotherapeutic intervention in a way that makes these processes more comprehensible and (even more importantly, perhaps) more tolerable to the potential or beginning patient. By the same token, even though this book is *not* a handbook or guide for professionals, nonetheless professionals, especially those at the beginning of their careers, may also find here a useful picture of the therapeutic process from within the patient's experience of it. For those who have had the experience of psychotherapy in the past, whether they are now professionals in the field or not, this book might even serve as a useful, friendly reminder of where you've been and what you experienced there.

There are other advantages, we believe, to the non-professional, autobiographical approach.

Common to almost all of the professionally authored books on the market (many of which we cite at the end of this book) is that they assume a great amount of familiarity with psychological theory and clinical practice. Often, too, there is a blurring of the lines that differentiate one kind of therapy from another, such that the theory and practice they present do not correspond to the experiences and needs of the ordinary reader. Most of these studies also proceed through multiple case studies taken from the analyst/therapist's own practice. As such, they often deal with individuals whose life crises are more complex and troubled than what many of us experience in our lives. This means that many of us, whose life problems seem to us more mundane and uninteresting, cannot quite find ourselves in the studies presented.

Even though psychoanalytic psychotherapy very often deals with very serious psychological problems (such as chronic depression, border-



line personality disorder, and any number of psychotic, as opposed to neurotic, conditions), it is also geared to treating the more common and less life-threatening situations that characterize many of our psychological lives. Therefore, even though *Psychotherapy and the Everyday Life* proceeds from a much narrower and less dramatic base than many of the professionally authored studies, it may be more pertinent to most of us seeking professional help with our emotional problems. In staying with the same patient, it can also tell a more continuous, coherent story of the ordinary, individual person confronting the paradoxes of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy puts in the way of the patient hurdles that can be so off-putting as to interfere with the process getting underway. These hurdles are integral to the psychotherapeutic process. Without them, psychodynamic psychotherapy cannot proceed. By presenting a single, non-professional, albeit informed experience of psychotherapy, we hope only to help prospective and beginning patients to psychological intervention to navigate those hurdles with a bit more ease.

As a co-authored book, we will also be opening up to view, not only the patient's experience of psychotherapy, but the therapist's as well. Even if the cooperation and mutual interaction between the two voices through which this book has been written might seem to imitate the dialogue through which psychotherapy proceeds, it is, as we hope to make clear, very *unlike* that other conversation. For the most part, we will be presenting the conversation of psychotherapy as the patient experiences it: as having to do with patient's thoughts, feelings, wishes, enactments, and so on. Yet, we did not want to lose the special opportunity afforded by the post-therapy relationship between the



therapist and the patient to let the patient into the arena of the therapist's mind as well, even though this is precisely *not* the site of psychotherapy itself. By gaining access to the therapist's inner thoughts and responses (the internal dialogue, as it were, which the therapist does not necessarily bring directly into the clinical setting, and certainly not in so many words), we can, we believe, achieve additional insights into the therapeutic process. These insights can also be of assistance in helping the psychotherapeutic dialogue to proceed, especially in the early stages of therapy.

For the therapist, as for the patient, there are considerable hurdles and paradoxes to confront in the psychotherapeutic conversation. There are feelings of frustration, failure, even irritation and anger, which the therapist needs to negotiate in order to keep himself available to the patient. The psychodynamic component of psychodynamic therapy doesn't have to do with the patient alone. It has to do as well with the therapist. This aspect of the therapist's experience will also be brought to bear on the picture of psychotherapy that this book presents.

In general the therapeutic relationship between the patient and the therapist ends with the end of therapy itself, often to the great consternation of the patient as well as some sadness on the part of the therapist. We will also speak, in our after word, about this often painful but very important final stage in the therapy. There we will also talk about why this particular therapist, still reluctant despite the gap of many years, finally consented to participate in the writing of this book and what that has meant for the book as such. Throughout our authorial collaboration we have tried to use the post-therapy exchange between us to reflect on psychotherapy itself from the somewhat unique perspective



that our co-authorship provides. Since "post-therapy" is the place most of us come to occupy in our experience of therapy, there is in this final dimension of the exchange between us also some insight into how therapy changes the way we perceive and act in the world.

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Preserving our ability to remain self-conscious and self-reflective can be one long-range effect of psychotherapy. The same might be said of our ability to maintain our ongoing conversation with ourselves and our world – a conversation that this book itself endeavors to embody. Therefore, it is with the conversation that is psychoanalytic psychotherapy that we open this book. Or, more precisely, it is with the *resistance* to that conversation that we begin. Somewhat ironically, perhaps, the resistance to therapy and the many resistances to self-knowledge through which the psychotherapeutic conversation proceeds and on which it will reflect are the fundamental (if highly perplexing) components of this particular brand of psychotherapeutic intervention. Resistance is at the heart of psychotherapy. It is, therefore, the resistance-to-therapy to which we now turn.

