

Humor and playfulness in core energetic therapy

Post graduate paper
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“Amuse” (appetizer)

When I started with this paper, I thought that humor and playfulness are very close concepts. So I took them together.

After a while I realized that they are close indeed, but very different in content and in contribution to psychotherapy.

I could write two papers about these subjects!
Should I have chosen one? I don't want to choose!

This is my faith:
I always buy two glasses and two pairs of shoes,
because I need them both.

In this way psychotherapy needs humor and playfulness both, they are connected and strengthen each other.

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Preface

Once my supervisor said to me: “perhaps a lot happened in your life that influenced you, but you have a good printed circuit board.” I felt it is the truth, although I often was not always in touch with my positive, playful PCB. On the contrary, in earlier times I could feel a lot of heavy, sad energy.

For me my PCB is my Core, my undamaged and not-able-to-be-damaged Me, connected to and a part of the Divine. It is my soul, which received all the experiences. I think the task of everyone is to choose to grow from the experiences, instead of being buried by it.

My PCB feels like a sunny funny innocent child, with a powerful vulnerability. I feel more and more that I can live that child without danger. Even that I (and others) benefit from that part of me. But it took me years to learn how to do this. And I’m still not ready with this learning process. It has a tremendous amount of lively energy in it, but is also easily shocked. So it needs care, without hiding or avoiding risks. That’s a challenge!

But when I feel the vibrancy of it, it feels so good! So it is de challenge worth. And that is what I love to bring to my clients.

In my practice my clients of course bring serious problems. Of course I take my clients and their problems serious. But what an expansion it brings when we can both burst into laughter! In Core Energetics it is not the aim of therapy to solve problems. The aim is expansion and increased liveliness. And I love to have my humor, tuned to the humor of the client, to contribute to his process.

With this paper I want to take a closer look to humor and playfulness as an active agent in therapy. I want to learn how to use it in an optimal, conscious way. Humor and playfulness ask for freedom, out of the box thinking, but it needs consciousness. Otherwise it can be acting out, or harming the client. At the same time I am a little reluctant. I don’t want to put too much pressure on it, because then the humor is gone. That will be the challenge of writing this paper.

First I will have a look at what literature had said about humor and playfulness in general and in therapy. What is humor? What are the effects? And what literature says about using it in therapy?

Then I want to look at how this connects to the models used in Core Energetics. How does this connect to the ideas of energy and consciousness and the model of personality? How you could use humor and playfulness in Core Energetics to help your clients?

At the End, I hope that, by focusing on this part of me, I can enjoy the energy of the sunny child in me more and more. I hope you do to.

By the way: where I use the words “therapist” and “client’ and “he” or “she”, I mean the possibility of the two sexes.

1. Humor and playfulness, what is it about?

Humor and playfulness are a like married couple. They are different but inseparably connected, although they can sometimes go their own way for a very short while. Humor is "that what makes us laugh". It is the joke, the funny event or image. Playfulness is the attitude that gives you the space to make or experience humor, but it is more. It is the light energy, the atmosphere in which people can experiment, out of their habits, into the new.

When humor comes in, playfulness is very likely to join and when playfulness is in the air, the humor will come in too. You can choose where to start with!

Laughing is often the effect of humor and playfulness, sometimes "just" social behavior. That's why I mention laughing therapy and the effects of it too later on in this paper. But for me there is a lot more magic in humor and playfulness than in the act of laughing itself. So laughing is not the main focus of this paper.

In literature, a lot is written about humor, in general and in therapy. Also about playfulness a lot is written, often in relation to creativity and innovation in business organizations, or to learning and education. Playfulness is also mentioned in mental health studies, but less. For me it was strange to see that most articles were about humor OR about playfulness, while for me these concepts are very connected. Only Paul McGhee (2012) writes about playfulness as mood or attitude in which humor can take place. He sees humor as a way to play; playing with ideas.

Let's see first what is written in general about humor and playfulness.

Humor at first sight

The first sight on humor, are the jokes or funny events and how laughing helps to relax, to free our mind. And indeed there is a lot of literature around this positive side of humor. It is a way to discharge the nervous system and has a lot of biological effects, like decreasing stress hormones, diminishing pain perception, activating the immune system, restoring balance, lowering blood pressure, muscle relaxation, cardiac exercise, enhances respiration (cleans the lungs) etc. (Dr. Lee Berk 1996)(Wild 2012)(Steenkiste 2015).

Humor involves the whole brain. It integrates and balance activity in both hemispheres. In that way it connects analysis with emotion. The emotion system influences the immune system (Patty Wooden, 1984). Emotions are registered and stored in the body in the form of chemical messages; they are the bridge between mind and body. A funny mind brings a healthy body.

Humor has besides biological functions, also important psychological and sociological functions. (Steenkiste 2015,).

It starts with the laughing of the baby. By the ability to laugh, the child can show that it is satisfied, or cry when it is not. The caretaker can fulfill the needs better. The caretaker feels attracted to a laughing baby. With humor and laughing people show that the thread is over, that the victory is there. Laughing at out-groups makes the group bonding stronger. With laughing the relation can be defined: in the subordinate position, people laugh more. Laughing brings people together, connects, and bridges even cultural gaps. It is contagious, people feel more bonded and at the same time more free.

Laughing just feels good and makes anger less likely. Laughing blocks aggression. "Humor opens the window for possibilities", relativizes, makes space. (Wild 2012). It can be seen as an interchange between people, like lousing. Humor can be used for a safe expression of aggression, to discharge and to widen social norms. With jokes the contact can be restored.

The word humor is direct coming from the Latin word HUMOR, which means moisture. Hippocrates thought that people could be characterized on the base of the ratio of four body fluids ("humors"): black bile, yellow bile, blood and mucus. When i.e. black bile predominates, the person is melancholic, depressive. Rudolf Steiner defined 4 main character styles on the base of the humors: sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic (Anschütz 1991).

Hillman (1996) also indicates the original meaning of humor, as body fluid. Humor is in his view the expression of someone's core. It is laughing about something painful of the self, not about another person and not by laughing off, or that laughter is perished.

"Humor moisture and softens, makes experiences in common. Pomposity hates it atrociously, because it cultivates self-reflection and it removes us from conceit. Laughing at your own absurdity is as effective in banishing the devil as the cross and garlic are." People without humor are the most dangerous, because of taking themselves too much serious.

He introduces the word "down growing", meaning the process to come more and more close to your core.

Of course comedians have a vision on humor. John Cleese says that humor is about imperfection. He says it is characteristic for our earthly existence. Nobody is perfect, and that's where we can laugh at. He says besides that creativity is coming from the unconsciousness. So you need to open your mind, make space.

Godfried Bomans, a Dutch writer, defined humor as overcome sadness. When you are sad in the moment, you coincide with the sadness. When you went on through the process, you can get more distance. Then humor can come in.

When I myself started to think about humor, I remembered a quote a teacher gave to my youngest son. My youngest son is a very smiley boy. When he laughs, the sun breaks through. He sees humor everywhere. His primary school was a Rudolf Steiner school.

Teachers make every year for every child a drawing and in that drawing a poem, a story or a quote. The child declaims those sentences every week in the class. This is meant to confirm the child in an aspect he needs for his development. At the last day of his primary school, the teacher gave him the sentence "Humor is a quality of the heart". I

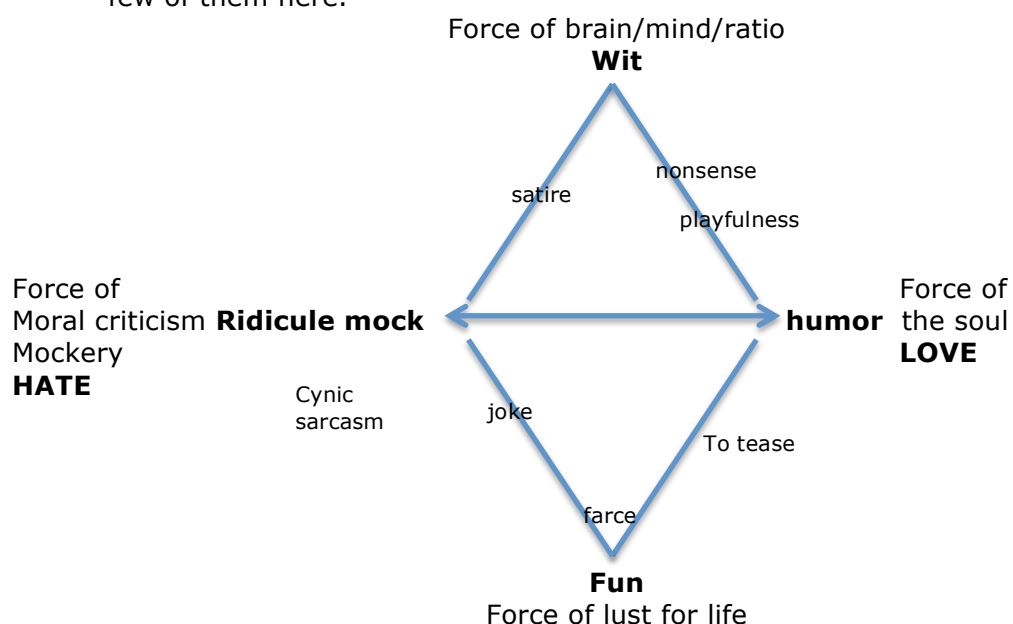
looked on the Internet where she could have get that sentence and found a text from the Archangel Gabriel, channeled by Marlene Swetloshoff (www.therainbowscribe.com).

Humor is there named as a quality of love. It brings lightness in the heart and helps people to face the difficult sides of life in a light, enthusiastic way and with courage. It brings people to their center again, whatever happens.

Humor as a quality from the heart

Willibald Ruch (2012) examined the semantic meaning of all kind of words, connected to humor, like humor, playfulness, sarcasm etc. He found that the words could vary on two dimensions:

- The force of wit (ratio) versus the force of lust of life (fun)
- The force of spirit and love versus the force of morality, mockery and criticism. In the table below you can see how he ordered the words, although I only show a few of them here.



Besides Ruch looked at how humor is named as a virtue and described Positive Psychology in his article. In Positive Psychology (Seligman and Peterson) six virtues are named which people need to have a fulfilling life:

- Wisdom and knowing (traits: cognition, curiosity, creativity)
- Courage (traits: emotional strength, the power to overcome barriers to reach your goals)
- Humanity (traits: ability to love and to be loved, to build relationships, emotional intelligence)
- Righteousness (traits: charitable traits, fairness, teamwork, leadership)
- Moderation (traits: forgiveness, modesty and humility)
- Transcendence (traits: thankfulness, sense of beauty and excellence, *humor*, hope, spirituality)

As you can see humor would be a trait of transcendence, of the helicopter view, of the ability to bring nearby the Higher Spirit.

Because humor however also seems to belong to the virtue humanity, Peterson proposed two factors on which the virtues can vary: Strength of the heart versus strength of the mind and strengths focused on self versus others. Humor is then at the site of the heart-strengths.

So it becomes clear that from diverse perspectives, humor is seen as a quality of the heart. Humor without love, is not possible. Without love jokes become sarcasm, cynicism, the sharp ways of laughing about something or someone. Besides the transcendence character of humor comes forward.

Humor as a level of consciousness

Vera Kast (2012) quotes Plessner, when she says that humor is a really human quality, because for humor you need the ability to look from a distance to yourself. Animals are there body; human beings not only are there body. They also HAVE their body. That is the essence and the base of human consciousness.

Pain and satisfaction are the most direct feelings, direct living in the body. It is the direct signal about the homeostasis in the body. You don't need to have any consciousness to experience this. You can have it without being aware of it.

Sadness, fear, gaiety and anger are already on a slightly different level. You are sad ABOUT something you lost. So you need to have awareness about situations differing over time. The same counts for anger. You are not angry as an emotion itself, you are always angry about that a situation is not the way you want it to be, or seems good for you. Fear is the emotion you want to avoid something because of danger. Gaiety is the feeling that things are going in the way you want. With these feelings you consider a situation.

The next level of consciousness is looking at ourselves in a certain situation. You take a distance to yourself and your feelings. You developed a kind of independent instance, with which you look at your feelings. You dive again in the here and now, but from another level. Still however, you can do this in a very serious way. You look from a distance, but still a close distance.

The highest level of consciousness is that the distance you take is big enough to be able to laugh at yourself in that situation. You feel what is happening, but you are not attached to that feeling anymore. You are in the here and now, but you are able to let go, you are free.

So the levels are:

- No consciousness, 100% living in the here and now (pain, satisfaction)
- 1st level of consciousness: ability to consider a situation (fear, anger, sadness, gaiety)
- 2nd level of consciousness: ability to consider yourself and dive into the moment again, but still attached to the feeling

- 3rd level of consciousness: living in the here and now, experiencing feelings, but not attached to it. You laugh!

People differ in the level of consciousness they can reach. Some people never pass the first level. A lot of people are able to be in the second level, and even a lot of people arrive in the third one. But everyone can fall back in lower level. When you are in an traffic accident, it is likely that you experience level 0 and 1 first, after a while you can look from level 2, but perhaps you can't see the humor of it ever. Stress is for every one of us a state of being that diminishes our ability to have a humorous look on the world. And of course traumatized people are more often stressed because of the over-sensitivity of their nervous system. (see also Sachsse 2012). It is like a rubber band. By stretching you make the possible space bigger, but you can always be drawn back. That's life.

The Dalai Lama and Eckhart Tolle are the living proof the 3rd level. They immediately can laugh at themselves, at least what I see of them on youtube.

Now for me it is clear that an important task of psychotherapy should be to enhance humor, because it develops the 3rd level of consciousness.

In the Christian culture however, there are a lot of negative believes around humor. In this tradition humor is viewed as moral suspect, connected with laziness and cowardice, diminishing self-control, only for amuse, leading to sexual debauchery, irresponsible, hostile, anarchic and stupid. (Wild, 2012). Life is a serious business. The first "therapists", guides, were priests. So it is not that strange that a lot of therapists feel the tendency to be serious.

A closer look to playfulness: learning, passion and expertise

The philosopher Huizinga defined three main characteristics in human play (Stoppelenburg, 2008):

- Play is voluntary, freely
- Play is outside the real world, limited by time and space
- Play creates order. The rules determine the space of the time and place of the play

Huizinga states that playing is a very human activity, from which culture develops.

In education playing and learning are very connected. I think that insights from this field could contribute to using play in therapy sessions.

According to Piaget (publication SLO), children develop by nature and by learning. Children develop structure in their thinking (learning) by handling objects in an active way, on its own initiative and with interests. That is the function of playing. In different stadia of development, dependent on the possibilities of that phase, different kinds of play are appearing.

According to Vygotsky, learning is a process of adding new activities, proceedings to a repertoire. The actual developmental level determines what somebody can do on his own. The zone of proximal development is where the child can experiment with new thinking and behavior, with the help of an adult.

Playing is the way to learn. It is safe, has space for experiments, it has a social component and playing is a good way to solve problems.

Douglas Rushkoff (2008) distinguishes between play as a reason to win a game and deep play. Deep play is not about winning, but about prolonging the game, because it is fun. The question then is: How can we keep a play going? By constantly finding and exploring challenges, by keeping asking questions and by answers that open up for new questions: the infinite game. With that you create a sacred space in which everything you bring, also errors, don't have real consequences. It is not yet in contact with the "real, outside world". It is the space to freak out with your talent, to be really obsessed by your subject and to love that, without hesitation. It needs the freedom of no consequences, i.e.

without the direct connection with earning money. Your mindset is crucial in this. Of course things have consequences, but you leave that out for a while.

Still playing needs rules. Not coercive conditions, but social agreements about the boundaries within which the play will take place. And if needed, they can be changed. Indeed: breaking the rules and the patterns is part of the play.

Playing is only possible when voluntary. You need passion to do it. But still you can force yourself to play when it is needed. The more stress in a situation, the more difficult to put yourself in a play, but also the more important, because just then you need your creativity the most. In deep playing space, passion and expertise come together.

Conclusion about humor and playfulness

Playfulness is seen as the space to experiment. It is the circumstances and the attitude in which you are free to try out. The circumstances are that you can experiment without immediate consequences in the real world of your behavior. It is freedom, but still with the safety of the boundaries in time, space and rules.

The attitude of playfulness is that your mind is able to keep the space between your action and your fear of consequences, or your action and taboos, your feelings of shame. It is the magic combination to really be in the here and now AND step into fantasy at the same time. Playing is a way of learning. When you are able to let the playing go on forever, it is a way to live your passion and become an expert.

Humor is the way to stay on an appropriate distance from the direct experience. Not too close, because then you coincide with the experience and lose your I-feeling. But still in connection, otherwise you split from the experience. When you are not in connection, humor becomes cynical. It needs the highest level of consciousness, the ability to accept and laugh at it. Only then humor is a quality of love, of a clear mind and of lust for life. Playfulness and humor are related, in that in the space of playfulness, humor can arise and humor can be seen as playing with ideas.

2. Different views on humor and playfulness in psychotherapy

Katrien van Steenkiste (integrative psychotherapy) (2015) did a lot of research in the field of humor and psychotherapy. She listed from literature elements or aspects characteristic for humor, like:

- It is about aspects of humanity
- It is down-to-earth, has connection with reality
- Eliminates unattainable ideals, brings the self image to reality
- Use of exaggeration, recognition, repetition, reversal, contrast, combining elements that don't fit, sudden shift of perspective
- Is often about taboos, or the forbidden, beyond rules and morals, gives space
- Is often when control is gone: bloopers, imperfections
- Is playful, creative, gives a new perspective
- Is vital
- Brings relaxation

Also in her view, humor is a way of looking from a distance to yourself, especially concerning your dark sides, your limitations.

Vera Kast (2012) says that humor is possible, when people are able to withstand contradictions, i.e. ideal and dark self. Often our dark sides are covered with shame. With humor, the dark sides become acceptable. Humor liberates. When someone has a very high self-ideal, acceptance and humor about dark sides is not possible. The self-esteem then is not stable enough to be able to be laughed at, or to laugh at your self. Humor enhances this ability. If a therapist brings in humor that is attuned to the client, it makes space for the acceptance.

It works the other way round also. Therapy enhances one's distance to the self and with that the sensitivity for humor increases. During therapy progress people are more and more able to laugh about their imperfections and the imperfections of others. It enhances a friendly, accepting attitude. "Bad experience" can become "a good story to tell afterwards" (Kast, 2012).

Ruch (2012) distinguishes between the trait "heiterkeit" (cheerfulness, liveliness), the mood "heitere stimmung" (mellowness, the mood cheerfulness) and the experience "erheiterung" (amusement, being amused). The first is the most stable in personality; the last is the most dependent on the situation. He found that the three are interacting. Consequence is that it is possible for people to enhance their cheerfulness by influencing situations and their moods. That's where chances are for psychotherapy.

Different currents in the therapeutic landscape have different approaches. I mention here different views from the most important currents that say something explicitly about humor. For completeness, I also mention therapy with the focus pure on laughing. My ideal is to be complete, but perhaps it is not!

Psychoanalytic view

Freud says about humor that it is only a way to gain pleasure again, in spite of disturbing painful feelings (Kast, 2012).

Frans Schalkwijk wrote an article about humor and psychoanalysis (1996). In psychoanalytic perspective there is a distinction between a joke and humor. A joke is only perceived as funny in interaction with the audience. You need a storyteller, audience and a person about whom the joke was told (could be the audience). The funny part is the change of perspective: from primary to secondary. At first you are in the story and suddenly you have more distance and another view. That brings laughter and discharge.

Humor has the same switch, but the storyteller is the one who perceives him self, take some distance of his own process and laughs about that. The audience only listens, is not a part of the humor itself.

Humor is perceived as of a higher level than a joke, because the storyteller has more internalization. It is about himself, but still he looks upon himself with distance and acceptance. It is not an abreaction of something he doesn't want to see or feel, but with consciousness.

For humor an empathic relationship is a condition. Without empathy, humor creates a distance between you and the other. But it also reassures the relationship. Together you share the same field, in which you feel connected ("we understand each other").

Humor is a creative and playful strategy to handle experiences, situations or problems. According to Freud, humor comes from the super-ego, the instance with which you can watch yourself (id and ego) from a distance, not only punitive, but also mild. By taking a more distant perspective (superego) and letting some control of the ego lose, out of the box thinking becomes possible and energy from the id (unconscious material) becomes available. It enhances your range of possibilities to react on situations and to solve problems. After this broad-mind-phase, the ego can again have its synthesizing quality to connect it to reality again.

Freud supposed that the function of humor is playing, introspection, to handle situations and to fulfill forbidden strives (sexual, aggressive) (Van Steenkiste, 2015)).

In psychoanalytic terms you can look at humor from a dynamic and a structural view. From a dynamic view humor is a high level defense mechanism. With humor you lead the energy connected to pain towards pleasure. It is a way to be able to bear the pain, to make it lighter.

When someone uses humor, the energy (libido) stays available for the self, instead of been put on the other. Energy will not be abreacted, but contained, although discharged. By this the ego can use the energy to stay active and goal-directed.

From de structural point of view, humor shoots from the super ego, the caring parent authority part of the personality. The person takes distance form himself, above himself. The superego helps the threatened ego to restore control and even experience pleasure. In that way the person can feel that the world is not that dangerous, as it was perceived at the start.

In that point of view, humor is a way to comfort you, to take care, to reassure yourself. Precisely the humorist has a lot of melancholy and depression. The humor is a way to be your own loving mother, which you never had.

In a narcissistic personality for instance, humor (together with insight and empathy) can be used to survive the thread of vulnerability, to transcend the narcissistic injury. Instead of being hurt in your self-image and drop into shame and anger, you take the lead, embrace your imperfection and laugh about it.

The ability to handle oneself with humor shows an inner flexibility, the freedom to feel and think. It makes the switch from primary to secondary thinking possible, freeing oneself from the 1-dimensional primary thinking. It is a means to tolerate feelings and to integrate them in the sense of the self. And it has a comforting quality, enhances the self-soothing capacity.

Winnicott: Playfulness

Winnicott belongs to the psychoanalytic school and had his own very important contribution to psychoanalytic theory. He introduced the good enough mother, who gradually less meets the needs of the child. In that way the child learns to tolerate frustration and develops a sense of the outer world, different from the self. Of course this frustration brings feelings of hate in the child towards the mother. If the child can experience that he can be angry with his mother without losing her, he learns that his anger doesn't have direct negative consequences. Then the child can learn that the space

between him self and the mother is a non-threatening area to explore. The space that can arise then, is called the intermediate space: between the inner and the outer world. In this process of developing a sense of the outer world, the "transitional object" is central, like a teddy bear that comforts the child when mother is not there. The transitional object is the first way of the child to create in the outer world a way to satisfy his own needs, to comfort him self, when the mother is not there to meet them. This again is the space, where the inner world of the child and the outer world come together in an "in between world", the intermediate space. This is where play takes place; the connection of the inner world with a safe part of the outer world, without direct consequences.

With that, Winnicott is, as far as I know, the only one who brings in playfulness as a concept in therapy. This is a more comprehensive dimension around humor and therapy. In this view playfulness is an intra-psychic field (intermediate space) in which the client can explore new ways of dealing with his life or with problems. This is not only about humor as a new view on a concrete situation; it is a field in which things can happen. It needs spontaneity and humor contributes to that.

He writes in *Playing and Reality* (1971):

"Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together. The corollary of this is that where playing is not possible then the work done by the therapist is directed towards bringing the patient from a state of not being able to play into a state of being able to play" (p. 51).

The intermediate space is a field in which the client can experiment. The self of the client can encounter objects and other people without entirely dominating or being dominated by them. Reality and fantasy mingle. He plays with that someone/something is there, although it is not true, and that he could do this or that, although it doesn't yet has real consequences. Sometimes the client is so much prey to his feelings that this is too scary to work in this way.

When the child has not learnt that the space between him self and the mother is a non-threatening area to explore, he has to learn that in therapy. The therapist gives the space to play. An important opportunity in this is that a client has all his transference feelings to the therapist.

Sachsse (2012) also mentions this ability to play with reality (the world outside) and mind (the world that is inside), developed during childhood. He calls this "Mentalisierung", which is the ability to make an image in your mind about the world outside and what could happen if..... You need this ability to consider new options or to move in the thought of other people. It makes you less attached to your own point of view and less victim of a situation. With humor you are "a cool actor leading in your own play", instead of the victim of the situation.

Seligman: Positive Psychology

In 2000 Martin Seligman developed Positive Psychology. He advocates that research should focus on the mechanisms and processes around optimal functioning of individuals, relations and society, instead of on the mechanisms of dysfunction. The concept of wellbeing is central in this, because research made clear that it is a distinct factor from pathology, but has its negative influence on the development of psychopathology. The more wellbeing present, the less pathology is.

Wellbeing has the following aspects:

- Emotional wellbeing (having positive emotions or pleasure, happiness and not having negative emotions)
- Psychological wellbeing (goal directedness, personal growth, autonomy, controlling the environment, self acceptance and positive relations)
- Social wellbeing (positive view on people, believe in society progress, understanding society, participating in society, feeling at home in society)

If you stimulate the client to develop these aspects, it is a direct way of getting a satisfying life. The discussion is about the causality. If you feel good, you function better psychological and social. And when you function better there, you feel better.

Feeling good has a lot of impacts. It enhances direct your psychological and social functioning, but it also enhances your resources:

- Physically: feeling stronger and healthier
- Cognitive: optimism, problem solving
- Psychological: controlling environment, self acceptance, reaching goals
- Social: social support, positive relations

The way of developing this wellbeing, is by developing the virtues also meant in chapter 1:

- Wisdom and knowing (traits: cognition, curiosity, creativity)
- Courage (traits: emotional strength, the power to overcome barriers to reach your goals)
- Humanity (traits: ability to love and to be loved, to build relationships, emotional intelligence)
- Righteousness (traits: charitable traits, fairness, teamwork, leadership)
- Moderation (traits: forgiveness, modesty and humility)
- Transcendence (traits: thankfulness, sense of beauty and excellence, humor, hope, spirituality)

In this virtues humor is called a trait of transcendence. Humor helps to look with more distance, to accept and to connect with spirituality. Playfulness can be found in the trait creativity, a trait of wisdom and knowing.

Diverse research showed the positive correlation between these virtues and life satisfaction.

In positive psychology exercises are developed to enhance the wellbeing of people (Bohlmeijer et al, 2013, referring to Seligman, 2006).

- *Use your strengths*
Discover your strengths and look for ways to really use them more in your daily life
- *Three positive things*
Every night think about three positive events of that day. Question: why do you think they happened?
- *The Epitaph*
Imagine you had a fruitful and satisfying life and you passed away. What would be written on your epitaph? Write then a short story about how you would like to be remembered best.
- *Expressing gratitude*
Think about the person you are very grateful at, but you never expressed it in an appropriate manner. Write a letter to this person and read it aloud for him or her.
- *React actively*
At least once a day react enthusiastically and actively at a positive message of somebody.
- *Enjoying*
Every day you have to enjoy an activity you normally do in a hurry. I.e. eating, walking, showering. Afterwards you describe what was the difference in the experience.

These interventions appeared to enhance significantly emotional and psychological wellbeing and diminished depressive symptoms (Bohlmeijer 2013, referring to Bolier et al. (2013))

Within this therapeutic trend, there is **wellbeing therapy** that works on consciousness and expanding of positive experiences. A method is monitoring good moments and the cognitions that end these good moments. Not-realistic thoughts are challenged and replaced by realistic ones.

Besides the client formulates actions to expand the different aspects of psychological wellbeing.

Mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy and existential therapy are all kind of therapies that focus on enhancing wellbeing instead of on complaints. They all fall within the trend of positive psychology.

Paul McGhee: 7-humor-habits-trainingprogram

Paul McGhee sees humor as a coping style, to cope with problems and stress and stay healthy. He sees his view and his program as within the therapeutic trend of positive psychology. Indeed positive psychology focuses on resilience, happiness, satisfaction and wellbeing. His strategy to raise the sense of humor, contributes to positive emotions and wellbeing. He stresses the relationship between wellbeing and coping. Positive emotions raise problem solution and this raises positive emotions again.

He made a program you can follow to raise your sense of humor by working on 7 habits:

1. Immerse Yourself in Humor & Start Thinking about the Nature of Your Sense of Humor
2. Cultivate a playful attitude
3. Laugh more often and more heartily
4. Create your own verbal humor, telling jokes
5. Look for humor in every day
6. Take yourself lightly, laugh at yourself
7. Find humor in the midst of stress

Essence of his work is training you to take the humorous perspective, focusing on the funny side of experiences. Besides he advises to take yourself lightly and laugh at yourself, which seems the most difficult to train. By training these skills, or make them a habit, you can learn to use or evoke them even in the midst of stress.

Paul McGhee connects playfulness with humor. He says people are made to be able to play, because that is the way to learn skills needed in the adult world. The older people become, the abstracter the play can become, like symbolizing. Humor is a more abstract way of playing; it is intellectual playing with ideas. He promotes that adults stay playing, because then they stay flexible and able to learn new skills. If someone lost this ability to play, it is possible to learn it again.

Hillman: humor as down-growing from heaven to the human heart

Hillman studied at the Jungs Institute and worked there a couple of years. After some years he however developed his Archetypal psychology. He emphasized the ego less than Young, focused more on the psyche and the soul and the deepest patterns of psychic functioning. He uses dreams, fantasy and images to work with underlying patterns.

In *A Blue Fire* (1989) he writes that humor is much more than just a moment of discharge. The ability to laugh is not only connected to a joke or a wit. It is the ability to feel joy when something funny could be coming, is going on, or even without something funny. The way he describes it, is like an attitude to life. The possibility to laugh is always there and can burst out at whatever moment. When the laugh is repressed, then that is what must be cured.

Humor is the expression of ones core in his point of view. To have real humor, connected to your core, the process of down-growing is needed. As long as we don't recognize the truthfulness and lawfulness of this, people "will be busy desperately with giving meaning to the eclipses and desperations the soul needs to indulge in life". Hillman puts the tree as a symbol for growth upside down. With that he puts the statement that we grow from heaven downwards to the heart of the human being; "the Tree of the Kabbalah in the Jewish and Christian mystical tradition." (Hillman 1996)

Frank Farrelly: Provocative Therapy

Frank Farrelly states that soft therapists don't heal. He states the provocative style as a way to challenge clients to come forward with their power.

The provocative coach challenges the client to look different to his problem. The three tools:

- Warmth and respect, as the basis for the relationship coach-client
- Humor, to relativize and discharge
- Challenge, to get rid of limiting thoughts and behaviors

He exaggerates the benefits of the problem, so that the attachment of the client to the problem becomes clear and with that the free choice. Defining the problem, the causes and the solutions in a ridiculous way, the client (and the coach) laugh a lot, the client gets a free mind to think about taking new steps out of the situation.

It is like positive psychology, in that it focuses on the strengths of people, instead of on their weakness. The coach excites and challenges, to address the resilience and responsibility of the client. He i.e. makes chaos in the story, so that the client will start to work on structure.

The provocative coach acts like a jester, so it is a role he is playing. He advocates the dark side of ambivalence the client, the side that resists against life, against relationships and against the goals he aims (could be the lower self in CE). He plays the Satan by exaggerating the doom feelings and expectations of the client, tempting to continue with the bothering and the sinning (could be the mask in CE). What he can do for instance:

- exaggerating
- bringing absurd solutions
- giving ridiculous causes
- using stereotypes
- being dramatic, playing theater
- being a distorting mirror
- saying what he thinks
- talking a lot
- being biased
- being warm
- laughing a lot

Laughing meditation

Laughing meditation is a meditation in which you just start laughing. (<http://www.do-meditation.com>). The idea is that with laughing you cannot think about anything. It brings you in the here and now. Besides it is said that it stimulates the production of endorphins, which make you happy. It lowers stress level, blood pressure and energizes the immune system, like "normal" laughter. A laughter meditation has three phases:

Stretching (1-2 minutes)

- Stretch your whole body by standing on your toes while pulling the arms above your head with fingers of the two hands intertwined
- Loosen and stretch the muscles of your jaws and face - a yawn or two will help

Laughing (5 minutes)

- Gently turn the corners of your mouth upward and start smiling softly
- Broaden your smile and start laughing without exerting any force
- Deepen your laughter so you feel it from your belly
- Try and laugh 'with' yourself or a partner, but not 'at' or 'about' someone or something
- Bring mindful awareness to the moment of laughter - whatever you experience in the moment laugh with it

Stillness (5 minutes)

- Stop laughing and close your eyes
- Still your body - find a place to sit, if you were standing while laughing
- Become aware of the silence
- Ignore any thoughts that may arise and instead shift focus to any feelings or sensations in your body

The mystic Rose Meditation from Osho, adds a phase to the laughing (and before stillness): tears (www.osho.com). Osho states that the purpose of laughing meditation is "to bring out all the poison from your being that has been injected by every generation for centuries." Laughter is the first step, to release tension and to increase consciousness. Osho sees laughing as something that is repressed since childhood. Laughing meditations helps to come out of that repressive conditioning. The second step is crying your tears out. He says that tears have been repressed even more deeply, because they are seen as a symptom of weakness. Crying not only cleans your eyes, but also your heart. It softens you, is a biological strategy to keep you clean.

Humor as diagnose, diagnosing humor

The extend to which a client can laugh about himself, can be used as a diagnostic tool. What kind of humor the client uses? Is it a loving form of humor, accepting imperfections? Or is it an aggressive form, with hate and suppression? This gives information about someone's self-image, the image of relationships and how the client deals with pain. (Wild 2012).

Martin developed in 2007 a Humor styles Questionnaire, in which four styles of humor are distinguished (Wild, 2012). The styles are about the aim of the humor.

- Two adaptive styles: connecting humor and self-strengthening humor
- Two maladaptive styles: aggressive humor and depreciatory humor

Connecting humor is used to amuse people, to enlighten relations and to reduce tension between people.

Self-strengthening humor is the skill to keep a humorous perspective in stressful situations.

Aggressive humor is used to criticize others, manipulate (sarcasm).

Depreciatory humor is used to make fun of ones own bad features in order to get love, but with a negative feeling underneath.

Of course people in a more close relationship and with a positive self-image use more the adaptive forms.

Sachsse (2012) states that the ability of using humor is an important differential diagnosis for people with heavy psychic distortions. People with a schizophrenic distortion (psychosis) cannot interpret and use humor. They are not able to play with the distinction between reality and fantasy, between the outside world and the world in their mind. People with dissociation distortion (i.e. borderline) however can use humor, but only when they are not too much stressed.

Conclusion about humor and playfulness in therapy

Playfulness is needed to be able to live your life with all the challenges and to be able to be empathic. People come to therapy to learn to play, so that they can deal with experiences and circumstances and see how other people could feel or think. Playfulness arises during the attachment process, when the child learns that in the relationship with the parent there is space between feelings, behavior and consequences. The relationship with the therapist is the place to develop this. The therapist can enhance this by showing that he can stand transference. Humor contributes to this.

Humor can be used as a diagnosing tool: in which extend is the client able to look from a distance to himself? In which extend is the client able to stay connected? Is the humor loving and light or hating and depreciatory?

Humor is useful in therapy

- to get more distance from the experience and the self
- to enhance acceptance and diminish the force of taboos
- to let go the idealized self-image
- to focus on strengths instead of on complaints
- to make space for experiment
- to tolerate difficult feelings and discharge

- to come in contact with and express your core.

3. Humor and playfulness as an healing agent

"The simple truth is that happy people generally don't get sick"
Bernie Siegel MD

In psychology humor is connected with psychic health (Katrien van Steenkiste, 2015). It is mostly seen "as an individual reaction on a humoristic stimulus, the confrontation of an individual, with his/her specific mood, personal characteristic, interests, with a joke". Humor is besides a social accepted way to bring up less social accepted ideas. A lot of positive effects of humor and laughing are named:

- General feeling of wellbeing
- Stimulation phase, after that relaxation (charge-discharge)
- Long lasting relaxation
- Reduces tension and anxiety, helps in this way to release emotions
- Provides an acceptable way to deal with hostility and taboos
- Provides insights and breaks resistance
- Enhances objectivity, distance
- Less occupation by problems and negativity
- Enhances self confidence
- Enhances I strength
- Gives energy
- Strengthens the relationship

Wild (2012) collected research around the chronic effects of humor on health. She found diverse outcomes. In research a negative correlation is found between adaptive humor and anxiety and depression. But if humor really diminishes anxiety and depression, or that humoristic people are less anxious and depressed, is not clear yet. Research results seem to show that humor is not a direct factor in health, but an intermediate between stressful circumstances and relative health. Humor as a trait brings not an easier life, but a more effective way of dealing with the problems. In other studies expectation of life and humor were positive correlated. The risk of the burn out syndrome is diminished by a sense of humor.

Humor works by distracting from negative emotions. The positive side is that people suffer less by negativity; negative circles (patterns, anxieties) can be come through. Humor brings the necessary distance. The negative side is that it can be "used" as avoiding strategy.

In therapy, the relationship is a very central agent in the treatment. Therapists are focused on carefully setting a safe and effective relationship. Humor can contribute, but must be used in a careful way. When people don't have enough cognitive space to look at themselves from at least some distance, humor of the therapist can be experienced as not taking seriously.

Wild (2012) reviewed research around the effect of humor in the treatment of psychopathology. Especially around anxiety and fear humor can be used, because humor and fear are contra-dictionary emotions. People with humor experience less fear, and see more possible solutions. Humor can help to relative fear. The fantasy of a spider with a pink skirt can help to diminish spider fear. People with presentation anxiety are often advised to imagine the audience in underwear. But when someone had fear for mistakes or social fear, humor can also enhance their fear to be laughed at.

Around depression, results are mixed. Wild (2012) concludes that people with depression recognize humor, but it doesn't influence their mood in a positive way. Depressed people lost their sense of humor, but not as a trait but as a mood. People with sense of humor are not less likely to get depressed.

The 7 Humor-Habit-Program of McGhee however seems to effect people with depression in that they are more able to look with humor to their situation and to use humor as a

coping strategy (Falkenberg 2012). The depression seemed to become less severe, but these results were not significant. The exact relationship between raising humor skills and development of depressive symptoms has to be researched over. Perhaps the program needs to take longer time and more integrated in the therapy.

Humor has a comforting capacity (Schalkwijk 1996). It makes it possible to accept and to embrace your inner conflicts or your imperfections, which would otherwise be too painful. But, according to psychoanalysis, to be able to use humor for this, the person needs to have stable and strong sense of self, combined with a healthy modesty and respect for the other. It should not be a joke at the expense of the other, but humor about you. Humor brings a sudden transformation in relationship and feelings. It brings closeness, "we understand each other". If a therapist can laugh about the joke of a client, client feels confirmed (Kast 2012). Working with clients, therapists are always working on the relationship. Humor can enhance the feeling that you are common (enough), in a shared field, that you understand each other, that the therapist understands the struggle of the client. Humor is a way to give background and safety, a holding environment. In that Winnicott's "intermediate space" can arise. In this connecting effect, humor is healing. But with too much humor you give the client the illusion that you are connected too close. So humor is a technique to use in the tension between closeness and distance. If used well, the therapist even can tease the client by exaggerating things that the client tries to hide, or challenging the client in taking himself too seriously.

Until now research made clear that humor and playfulness have the following helping aspects in therapy:

- Making space in the personality (intermediate space) that gives the possibility to look from a distance to events and relations, to experiment and to have new experiences
- Change of perspective, so that new views and new solutions can be found
- A way of looking from some more distance to our situation. The client is less coincided with problems or negative feelings. He can look over the edge of his situation, experience less feelings of a prey or a victim
- Enhancing wellbeing, positive feelings
- Discharge of tension
- Restoring the balance, make the unacceptable acceptable
- Handle the tension between the poles reality and ideal
- Reassurance of the therapeutic relationship

4. Humor and playfulness in Core Energetic Therapy

Central Concepts in Core Energetics

Before writing about humor in Core Energetics, first I want to summarize the main concepts.

In Core Energetics every person is an incarnation of an aspect of the "Infinite Life force". Before incarnation, this is pure energy. Once incarnated, the energy has different densities in different layers of personality. In the model below this is shown (Lisa Loustaunau). This model is an elaboration of the model of personality of John Pierrakos. Ideally, the energy from the Infinite Life Force is able to run through all the layers of personality. If that is the case, there are no blocks. The person lives in harmony with the Life Force and with the Universal Life Plan. The person can receive all the support there is. But in every layer, blocks are possible. In every layer there is the possibility to say Yes to the Life force Energy or to say No. The parts that are along the Yes, are called aspects of the Higher Self (HS). The parts that resist the energy, saying NO to it, are called aspects of the Lower Self (LS).

The layer with the highest frequency of energy is the layer of the Spirit. This is where the person can feel connected (HS), or not (LS) to the Infinite Life Force, or to guides or angels.

Below is the layer of the Will, or the intention one has in life. Intention can be positive, (Yes to life, to connection, to love) or negative (No to life, connection, love).

Denser is the layer of the mental level. This is about thoughts, images and beliefs. Also the energy in this layer can be split. Some images are along the Universal Life Plan (i.e. "I believe that in my life I can get the support I need") and some are resisting this (i.e. I have to live my life on my own, there is no support for me").

On the emotional level, feelings are the form that the energy has. Emotions can be in harmony with the Life Plan, or resisting it. "In harmony" does not mean that the emotions are per se positive. Anger as self-confirming anger, or mourning about a lost beloved one, can be emotions that move the person in the direction along the Life Plan. Other emotions can be against it, like anger as a resistant, or sadness as the expression of helplessness.

Finally, the body is the densest form of energy. Through the body energy can flow, or be obstructed. The latter is expressed by illness, symptoms, but also in the life of the person, as in negative relationships, work problems, financial problems etc.

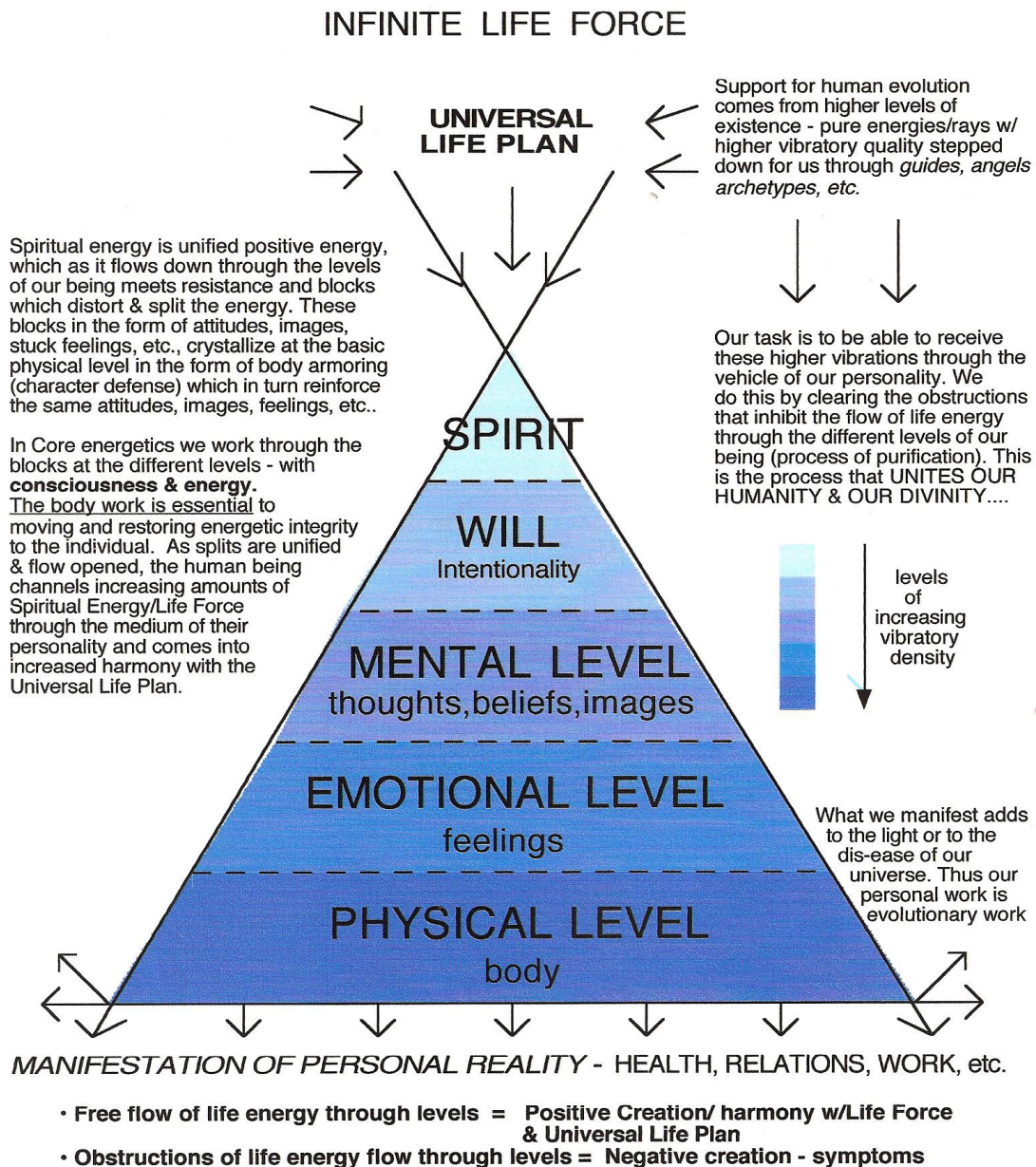
So in every layer, energy has it's own density. And in every layer there is the possibility that energy and/or form is along the Universal Life Plan (Higher Self), or resisting it (Lower Self). The fewer blocks, the more the person is able to channel and enjoy the Spiritual Energy and to live a rich and fulfilling life.

The blocks always have a different expression in the different layers, but they are connected. I.e. a negative image, like "It is dangerous to show my vulnerability" has an impact in every layer. The spiritual energy will be restricted, the will or intention will be negative, held back, the emotional level will have anger or fear, the physical level will show stiff shoulders, or a diaphragm with tension.

Furthermore, the Mask covers the negative intention, the Lower Self. The Mask is the part of our personality that we intentionally want to show to people. We all have the more or less unconscious fear, that showing our Lower Self is dangerous. In early life it was. It was our anger against our parents, who frustrated us in living our life energy fully. Anger against parents is dangerous, because as a child we are dependent on them. By covering the Lower Self however, the Mask also diminishes the energy level of every layer of personality. So per layer, the energy level can be higher or diminished. The stronger the negative intention is, the stronger the Mask has to be, and the less Higher Self energy is available.

MOVEMENT OF LIFE FORCE THROUGH LEVELS OF HUMAN BEING

created by **Lisa Loustaunau**



In Core Energetics, the aim of therapy is to remove the blocks, in order to let the energy flow as free as possible and along the Universal Life Plan. As blocks are represented in every layer, you can start the process at every layer of the personality. You can do body exercises, so that feelings become conscious, you can work with the feelings that are present and make them bigger by moving the body. You can look at the images people have and at the intention towards life. Or you can ask someone to invite his guides for

instance. But at the end every layer in the personality will be affected. It is not possible to remove a block in the body with long term effects without working in the other layers. Finally by removing blocks, we not only become more vibrant ourselves, but we also contribute to the energy flow of Universe.

The keyword in the change is consciousness. Without consciousness, no change is possible. But the consciousness has to be connected with energy and body, otherwise it is "knowing without Knowing". So images and intentions must be energized to really feel their impact and to change them, to make another choice. And body and feelings must be moved to bring to consciousness what is hidden in this manifestation of energy.

Humor related to Energy and Consciousness

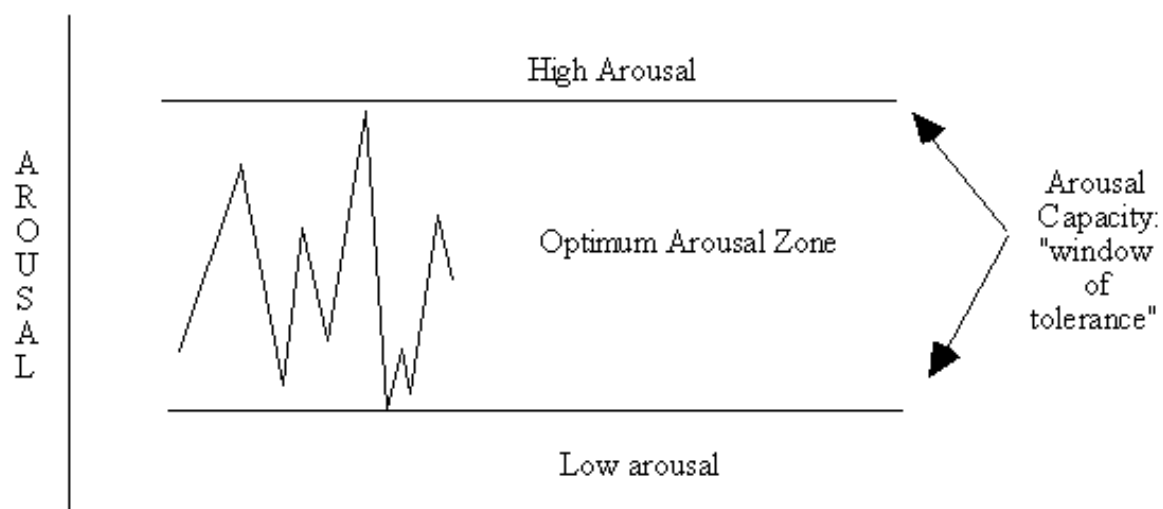
In a therapy session, we want to raise the level of energy, to meet what is hidden in the blocks. Charging brings energy running through the body. Pressure on the blocks is growing, the intensity of feelings increases. By discharging, the blocks can let go the tension of held emotions. That is how the unconscious becomes conscious. With consciousness, the client can make a new choice in how to live his life on the level of intention, thoughts, believes and images. Spirit comes in, feelings and the physical body reflect these changes.

From the insights of earlier chapters, it became clear, that humor helps to raise consciousness, in two ways. At first it helps to take a distance from the self. At second it increases the frequency of energy in the field of therapist and client. The space to face hidden feelings, images and intentions increases.

Humor and consciousness are two forces in the same spiral of energy and vibrancy up. Therapy and facing up to feelings, enhances vibrancy and the ability to look with humor to the world. And when the therapist or the client brings in humor, it facilitates facing up feelings and the own role of the client in situations. It supports the upward spiral to happen.

In the process of charging and discharging, humor has the function of discharging. By charging, you bring the energy on a higher level, on a level that is challenging for the system of the client. Humor can be used to keep it containable and take some distance again. It is however, in terms of Core Energetics, important that the discharge is not too early. Otherwise the feelings don't have the opportunity to reach consciousness. You built up, bring things to consciousness and then you can use humor as a way to discharge and take some distance again.

In this the window of tolerance of Pat Ogden sheds an extra light on the underlying processes when using humor in processing feelings. (Pat Ogden 2000, de Gruijter, 2014).



To be able to process feelings, you need to have an optimal level of arousal. If this level is too high, in the mammal brains the flight, fight or active freeze response is activated, people are overwhelmed and re-traumatized instead of healed. Then there is no intermediate space present to look at your situation from a helicopter view. If the level is too low, in the reptile brains the passive freeze or the submission reaction is activated. This means that the brains estimate that danger is so much likely that the body prepares to be severely wounded. This is like a shock, to economize energy. Also in this state of being no intermediate space is present.

Ogden states that by focusing on body sensations, together by paying attention to feelings around the trauma, the arousal stays within the window of tolerance. This is familiar to how Peter Levine (somatic experience) encounters trauma: focusing on the body and especially on strong parts in the body, people have more ability to contain negative feelings around trauma.

With humor, you take some distance from your feelings and the situation. You are "the cool actor in your own play" (Sachsse 2012), feeling strong, the leader of your situation. So it enlarges the window of tolerance, not only by bringing the frequency of energy on a higher level, but also by bringing consciousness on a higher level.

When not per se the intensity of feelings, but taboos are the cause of covered feelings, humor is a very good way to make space, to enlarge the intermediate space for suppressed feelings. Taboos make feelings unacceptable. A client needs the therapist and his acceptance to get the courage to uncover taboos and to let go the idealized self-image. Humor helps to realize that "you are just a normal human being, like all people". It helps to discover that modesty gives peace, that in modesty you are exactly taking the space that is meant for you, not more, not less and not different. In that way you are your special you, like everyone.

Playfulness related to Energy and Consciousness

In a session the therapist creates the intermediate space of Winnicott, where the client can experiment and experience. The therapist translates the inner world of the client into movement and play. The body is the concrete place for movement in the client, the room is the wider place where cushions can be mom or dad, or an old and a new job, and so on. Two meters can symbolize the distance to a new life. The client steps into the unconscious by acting. In the acting, the energy level of the inner process becomes bigger and the unconscious can become clear. The therapist is the choir that confirms the process that is unfolding. In the play, the unconscious unfolds and comes to the surface, becomes conscious.

Once aware, the client can experiment with new ways of feeling and acting, supported by the therapist, who already went in that wider field of possibilities. The client enters the zone of proximal development of Vygotsky.

Humor related to the Higher Self, Lower Self and the Mask

As humor is seen as a quality of the heart (Ruch 2012), it is a quality that belongs to the Higher Self, especially because it is connected to the lust of life, the life energy. Energy is free flowing, is expanded, the frequency is heightened. "I am happy with who I am".

With humor you can look at yourself. There is no shame or suppressed parts.

In the Lower Self, energy is more dense and suppressed, because parts of the real self have to be hidden and suppressed, originally in order to survive. It is the hate towards those parts of the self that were not desirable or even dangerous to show in earlier life. Underneath is the hate against suppressors, the ones who rejected us in our full expansive energy. But in this hidden part, there is certainly pleasure: the Negative Pleasure of revenge. This revenge can be directed to others, in this way repeating the behavior of the early suppressors. When this happens in life without consciousness, this is where hate and pain seem endless. Humor is not existent here and the play stays very serious.

But in therapy it can be the start of becoming conscious about this hidden part. After the client realizes his/her cruelty, this revenge can be directed to the suppressors

themselves, who of course are part of the client, in the form of voices or messages or norms. In the possibility to "kill" the original suppressor lays the possibility to heal. And it is here that humor can play a very important role. The humor of the therapist helps the client to cross the boundaries of taboos, to face and express cruelty. As soon as the client feels the humor, the Negative Pleasure can be lived fully. Fantasies about "how to kill or how to take revenge" are freed. Energy of the Lower Self releases and transforms into Higher Self energy.

As all parts of the Higher Self can be suppressed, also humor can. As said, our culture is Christian in its origin. The Christian view on humor is negative, like "irresponsible", "lazy" or "debaucher" (Wild 2012). The humor is for decades suppressed a lot. I think we all can feel the nervousness sitting in a serious meeting with our boss and somehow we feel funny, but don't dare to show it, because you don't want to be accused that we are not seriously enough taking the meeting.

So giving space to humor is a deed of freeing yourself, losing the squeezing ribbon of norms, for protesting the standards. Our Lower Self energy can help us to regain the freedom of being humorous.

In the Mask, people strive for their idealized self. This is hard working, most of the time with a serious mind. Mostly, people lack humor when busy with this. They don't have enough distance to look at themselves and are often harsh in their judgments about themselves and others. For instance the image of being almighty, as occurring in the psychopath structure and in little children is a way of magical thinking: that everything that happens depends on you. Humor is a way of challenging that illusion and bringing in more realistic thinking. But take care! When the client lacks humor, the humor of the therapist is easily felt as taking him not seriously. In therapy, taking the Mask seriously is the first phase in building a relationship. Only after establishing the relationship, humor around the Mask seems possible. This is however how I understand where the provocative style works with. That style exaggerates the Mask in order to unmask, in order to get the client in contact with possibilities to take responsibility again. After that, deeper motivations, of the level of the Lower Self, are challenged.

Beside that, there is a way clients can use "humor" in their mask. In that way it is an ungrounded abuse of humor in order to discharge and not to feel the pain. The energy is discharged before coming conscious. When you listen to it, you feel the uneasiness underneath, the nervousness to keep the mouth in a smile. The therapist can at the very first joint, to tune in, connect. But after that naming the pain underneath is the only thing to do. And that will not be funny at all.

Playfulness related to the Higher Self, Lower Self and the Mask

At the start the client comes in with the Mask on top. The stronger the Mask is, the smaller Winnicott's intermediate space. Things are too serious; the self-image is too much at stake.

To be able to play, experiment and learn, the client needs to develop the intermediate space in himself first. He needs to be able to imagine and to experiment with behavior, without too much fear for the consequences. The relationship with the therapist is crucial in this. On the therapist at least some authority is projected. When authority figures in the past were harsh and normative, the intermediate space in the client can be small. The first thing to do then is to widen that space, by showing permission and acceptance. Humor supports this process. This is what the client at first needs to take new steps, challenging old beliefs, taboos and behavior. The therapist actively puts boundaries, as wide as appropriate. With what can be experimented in the therapy room? What are the unconstructive taboos? But also: what is NOT possible (like hurting yourself, the other or the room). The client needs to hear that in this room he can kill "his mum" (this cushion), even having fun with it, but in order to treat her right in the outside world. Otherwise it is too dangerous for the client to come with cruelty.

So to be able to work with the Lower Self, enough intermediate space is needed. The therapist is the one who creates and holds that space first.

When the Higher Self has come, the client can feel acceptance for himself, and with that feel the freedom to have and express feelings, knowing that it won't hurt anybody.

As we can see, working with the Mask and Lower Self, increases one's intermediate space and playfulness. To support this process, the therapist actively brings in that space by acceptance and humor.

The strongest working on the intermediate space is when the client and the therapist work with transference and countertransference. Working in the relationship and discovering the therapist is still alive and loving afterwards gives an enormous boost to the ability of the client to create his own intermediate space, the freedom to feel and act according to his truth.

Conclusion

Humor contributes to Core Energetic therapy in the following ways:

- It helps to take distance from the self, feelings of strengths raise ("the cool actor" instead of the victim) and consciousness raises
- It raises the frequency of the energy
- It helps to discharge
- It helps facing and experiencing feelings that otherwise could be too heavy, keeps feelings within the window of tolerance
- It makes space for the feelings covered under taboos,
- It helps to let go the ideal self-image
- Humor is located in the Higher Self
- Humor has its denser form also in the Lower Self (cruelty, negative pleasure).
- Using humor this LS energy can come to the light more easily
- Humor can be used as an act of resistance against norms and rules that are too much internalized
- With humor the mask can be penetrated

Playfulness contributes to Core Energetic therapy in the following ways:

- It gives form to the inner experience of the client
- Within this space, the client can raise the energy and with that the consciousness by real acting on the playground of therapy
- It makes space for experiment, try new behavior, use fantasy
- The therapeutic play gives also the safety of the boundaries in time, space and harming oneself, the therapist or the room
- The "play" of the client, shown in transference and countertransference, can be played, to become conscious and transformed

5. Enhancing humor and playfulness

The more stressful a situation is, the less likely that you keep your sense of humor and your space to play. But the more you focus on humor and playfulness and exercise in not-stressed situations, the more likely you can evoke it under stress. There sure are possibilities to make the chance that you feel humor and space for play bigger. Some advices are given here. I start with humor and playfulness in the therapist, because he must be the first one, to afterwards be able to help the client with it. But of course these advices count for clients too. At the end I tell something specific in working with clients.

Leave your ideal self-image and laugh at yourself

Enhancing humor in the client is desirable, but in the therapist necessary. Life is one big contradiction, full of polarities (Kast 2012). Without humor, therapists' work is very heavy. And also therapists have their images about an ideal self, so it is important for therapist to work continuously on accepting oneself and have fun with oneself. We always say: "when you feel your countertransference and you can't deal with it, go to your supervisor". I would say: "if you feel you can't laugh at yourself in your work anymore, go to your supervisor".

Create the space

It is not easy to really describe how humor works in therapy. What is really happening? Most of the time it is a very short moment, a very small gesture, tone of the voice, that humor emerges (Kast 2012). Humor is a very personal touch in communication. What is experienced as humorous is besides very personal. That makes it difficult to say something about how to bring humor, except that it has to be your own humor, as an expression of your own heart and in connection with your client.

But we can say something about how to create space for humor and for playfulness.

State of mind

The best thing you can do is to look for the good state of mind in yourself, before your client comes in. Feel how you are, accept it and smile to it. John Pierrakos states that love, eros and sexuality are the forces, which create pleasure. Our life task is to reconnect with those forces, and as a therapist we have that responsibility extra, to be able to heal our clients. If we don't connect to these forces, how can we support our clients?

Gregg Braden (The Divine Matrix, 2007) tells about the enormous force our consciousness has. He says if you are busy with a problem, and you have all the negative feelings connected to it, you feed the energy of the problem. It will become bigger, more present. Your feelings influence the cosmic energy via the DNA. Your problem will happen and last.

If you however focus on the solution, on the ideal situation, on your longing, and you let in the feelings belonging to that situation, you influence the cosmos in the direction you want. Your positive feelings are in the here and now already, independent of the circumstances. That's the way to live the life you want.

The "only" difficulty in this way of influencing cosmic energy is that you need to be free from demands. Your longing must be purified from demands on the outcome, not attached to it. Otherwise the negative feelings, like despair, are still the base under your longing.

To me personally this difficulty seems not always so easy to pass. If your partner is ill, almost dying, I think it will be not so easy for me to feel not attached to the outcome that he will stay alive, and from that place enjoy my longing that he will stay alive. But for experiences somewhat less connected to life and death, it is possible to free yourself from a certain outcome and to focus on the idea that whatever the outcome will be, it will be the best for you, i.e. with getting a job you like, or giving a party when you are nervous that nobody comes.

I working with clients I have some more distance. Most of the time I can feel that, although my client experiences a crisis, I feel that it will pass by and bring my client in a better place in the end. With that state of mind I can support my clients in their process, although I still have empathy to their feelings. My container and my space has to be bigger then theirs to be able to give support.

Playfulness: Free thinking and -acting

There are a lot of advices and ways to work on humor and playfulness. In theatre sports, the art of improvisation, a lot of techniques are used to free the mind and increase creativity. Patricia Ryan Madson is from that world, but translated insights to the world of therapy. She writes in *Improv Wisdom* (2005) 10 rules to enhance your ability to react with an open mind, with playfulness and with all your vibrancy. She says life is like riding a bicycle: We always feel a little off-balance and insecure, but in the act of balancing we come alive. Her rules:

1. Say yes to everything that comes to you
2. Don't prepare
3. Just show up
4. Start anywhere
5. Be average (leave your ideal)
6. Pay attention
7. Face the facts
8. Stay on course
9. Wake up to the gifts
10. Make mistakes, please
11. Act now
12. Take care of each other
13. Enjoy the ride

This is all about saying yes, about not withdrawing, not hesitating but go forward, so that things will happen. It gives a light way, because you don't focus on mistakes, problems, what could go wrong, but on the happening, magic side of life. Even only reading the book gives you a free "whatever!" feeling.

The 7-Humor-Habits-Program (7HHP)

If you really want to work on sense of humor, to live in a light way and handle stress more easy, you could follow the 7HHP. I think it is the most systematic way to develop your play and humor skills. www.laughterremedy.com

Humor and playfulness in the client

Although not all forms of humor are seen as healthy, you sure can use them in therapy. If the client comes forward with aggressive humor, depreciatory humor or "masky" humor, it immediately shows patterns and unconscious material. It is a way to repeat his patterns in your office and in this way very useful. Say yes to this too! Come along; step for a short while into the pattern, but without losing your own consciousness and chose the point where you can confront the client with his play.

The humor you want to enhance in the client is the humor that helps the client to recognize his defense and to come in contact with the pain underneath. It is the humor that gives space to play in an experience that can be a trauma and/or very painful. In that way humor helps to take just enough distance to be able to approach the pain. Little by little the distance can become less, until the pain can be felt totally. The humor is not used to abreact the energy, to put the energy away from consciousness (ego), but to bring it into consciousness in the little steps that are tolerable by the client and is ability to contain and to ground.

The other humor you want to enhance is the humor that broadens the vision on situations and on possibilities to react. Playfulness can be a way to free patterns, to enhance vibrancy and joy.

What you in the end want to reach is that the client can look to his life an infinite play with lots of challenges or problems all the time! You want the client to be curious to life instead of risk avoiding. To leave patterns where they obstruct liveliness and growing. "Are you happy? Happily not!" (Jules Deelder)

6. The risks of humor in therapy

I only mention the risks of humor, and not of playfulness. Playfulness is always to be enhanced, although of course clients not always are able to make and take playfulness themselves. But that is why they come to you.

Of course there are some moments that humor is not appropriate. The first is when the relationship is not established yet enough (Kast 2012). The great risk then is, that the client feels not taken seriously. This counts for humor around topics of the client. The humor around other topics (i.e. the weather, news in the paper, etc.) can be used always to create a feeling of togetherness.

When is the relationship enough established to be able to use humor? That is when you as a therapist has the feeling "I know this person on a certain level, I trust the strengths of this person and I feel warmhearted to this person." This is not a time issue as you see. This is an attitude of the therapist. Humor has to come from a loving and accepting attitude (the Higher Self), not from a cold and punitive attitude (the Lower Self). It has to be laughing with, not laughing at. We don't want to elicit shame..

Together with that, the client must be able to receive the trust and the warm-heartedness of the therapist. The client must be able to feel the love and acceptance, and not project the cold and punitive on the therapist. That is what the therapist has to be able to see from his profession.

Second, humor can be very painful and harming when the client is still too much connected to his problems, when the secondary perspective is not yet attainable. Humor helps to switch, but the timing is important. When the client is not able yet to recognize his own conflicts and narcissistic limitations, humor will not land and will harm the relationship. Shameful and guilty feelings can also better not be approached by humor. But in this, you can teach the client during the therapy.

Third, some clients cannot handle laughing and happiness (yet). For them it can be too much connected with guilt and fear. Sometimes people get unpleasant physical symptoms, like tendency to urinate, coughing, rash.

Fourth, humor is harmful when it comes from the therapists aggression, or Lower Self. When you feel your sneaky revenge tendency, don't use humor. Better go to your supervisor. The only way you can use your Lower Self humor is to empathize and support the client to come forward with his Lower Self, to join the client for a short moment in this. This is possible when you are totally conscious around your own Lower Self.

The same is for Masky humor. You can sometimes use it to make the first connection with the client. Mirroring his Masky humor brings the first feelings of safety. It gives the client the feeling "you know my type", that the therapist understands his way of looking to the world.

Fifth, masky humor of the client gives information about patterns and resistance, but it must not take too long, otherwise feelings and thoughts are discharged in an unconscious way, to hide (also Steenkiste, 2015). Also shame can easily be hidden by humor (Kast 2012).

Clients often are laughed at when as a child their vulnerability was clear, i.e. when an adult scared a child "for a joke", or when a child cried for something the adult didn't understand. A lot of clients even experienced that sadism and cruelty was sold as fun, play and humor. For the child often the only way out was telling to himself that it was a joke, by that defending against the painful side of it (Sachsse 2012).

With masky humor the feeling underneath has to be mentioned again. Humor can then be talked about like "when do you leave yourself with humor, and when it really helps you to overcome difficult situations."

Psychiatric diseases

People with some psychiatric diseases are not reachable with humor.

People with a psychotic disorder have a distortion in cognitive functioning. They can understand nonsense or slapstick humor. This helps them to diminish psychopathology and enhances their social skills. But they do not understand humor in language, the use of words, like Sachsse concluded by clients with schizophrenia (2012). So in therapy you cannot use humor in that way. They also have difficulty in distinguish between reality and fantasy. So even the playfulness is not possible to work with. The only space you can make is the space to ground, express and calm down.

Also people with autism, or dementia, have distortions in information processing. Humor can be not understood in the way other people could.

People with too much fear, cannot benefit from humor. Their cognitive space is too much filled with fear to enjoy a joke. Humor of the therapist can be experienced as not taking seriously.

Severe depressed clients don't have humor. When the therapist feels humor, or a humorous impulse, he'd better be aware of staying grounded. Also clients who feel very guilty and shameful are not attainable with humor. The first step is to bring in the intermediate space, playfulness.

Of course:

Bringing humor is also about taking a risk and this is your intermediate space as a therapist, although of course you have responsibility to estimate if the client can handle it and benefits from it. Is the client able to choose the accepting side, or does he feel shame and punishment? Or does the client feel not taken seriously? The most important for the therapist is to use these interventions only from the heart.

Afterword

Humor is the fun, the light in which heavy things become bearable. Playfulness is the magic. The space where things can happen that otherwise would stay covered and where the innovation takes place. Writing this paper, I learnt to work with these concepts much more conscious than before. I love it, it really feels as an expression of my core.

Writing a paper about these topics was not always light and magic, but sometimes it really was, and that is why I do this. I often lost my humor, but even often I felt inspired. I switched between high inspiration and deep despair, between highly focused and totally chaotic. I think I can conclude that with these extremes I have a huge playground! I'd better enjoy it.

Of course I want to thank people.

I want to thank Jan-Willem de Goeij, my advisor, who really encouraged me to go my own way and with whom I feel very connected in this topic (and more). He gave a lot of ideas and names to read.

I want to thank my stepfather who was a serious and proud professional but with enough love and humor to be human. (With him I had a lot of dirty jokes about shit and piss when I was a little child.) The older he became, the less he took himself seriously. I'm not that far yet! (...but I am still alive so that fits).

I thank my love Harrie and my children and stepchildren, that they still love me, although I worked a lot on this paper.

Last but not least I want to thank Anna, who first learnt me a lot and then challenged me to write a paper. Every challenge is space too; the tension of the vacuum that needs to be filled. As long as it was only in my computer, it was intermediate space, now it is ready I have space for other things to do: my endless play, bringing it to the world.

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Archangel Gabriel: The quality of love, known as humor, June 20, 2013

Beloved Ones,

I wish to have discourse on the quality of love known as humor. This quality is indispensable in keeping the lightness of being within the hearts of individuals and groups. With this quality manifesting within and expressed outwardly, whatever challenges or obstacles a person is facing become that much smaller and more manageable, for humor tends to lighten the load. Having this quality within gives a person a wonderful tool to use to bring balance into any situations that can take them off center. As long as a person has this quality, life can be lived with zest, enthusiasm and courage. The ability to persevere in the face of all seeming obstacles of unhappy nature can be withstood for another day.

The foremost reason that many people can get off balance is that they devote too much mental and emotional energy focusing on the challenges that are before them and so they lose sight of the larger perspective of their life. When this quality is manifested and regularly applied in any situation that is stressful and rather heavy to deal with, it engenders the seeing of new perspectives that can change the situation in the most wondrous of ways. This facet of love brings healing and release from the seriousness of the focus that a person is holding and as laughter wells up from within them, they find that somehow the situation no longer seems as heavy and their spirit is thereby lightened considerably.

With this wonderful quality that employs the element of joy in it, people can go through their daily lives looking forward to a better day and situation when they awaken from their sleep the next day. Somehow, this quality has an element of magic in it and so one becomes an alchemical magician when one uses this quality in one's life. The quality of humor can brighten many a person's day as they find that life is much more meaningful and enjoyable when they experience the laughter that is a by-product of the use of this facet of love. Those who try to bring joy and laughter through this quality also show compassion and empathy towards others in times where they most need it. The expression of this quality is an act of love on behalf of those for whom it is intended. When this quality is practiced on a regular basis, it is a way for a person to communicate great affection and esteem upon the recipient of it. As long as this quality is not overused by overdoing, it can become a literal life saver for many others, for laughter brings joy and joy brings an automatic increase in vibrational frequency. When a person's frequency is uplifted to a higher level they are then able to deal with whatever was troubling them in a more positive and philosophical manner. This quality, then, can truly lighten people up and put them in a much better place from whence to see with greater clarity that their lives are on track and all is well.

Become a magician who employs this quality whenever the opportunity to do so arises and you will be most gratified with the results. You will see your beloved family members and friends with delighted smiles on their faces become empowered and uplifted so that their problems seem to melt away. This is a quality of love that can be used with joyous abandon, as you dispense it liberally and plant your seeds of love everywhere. Be an agent of humor and brighten the world one person or group of people at a time. The world needs more of this quality in huge doses to counteract the changes and events taking place.

I leave you now to contemplate how you can become the change in the world by planting your seeds of love.

I AM Archangel Gabriel

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