

Wishing you a Happy and Healthy New Year!

**If you did not renew your
membership in the IPA, this will be your last newsletter.**

IPA President's Message

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Both Chanukah and Christmas are holidays that celebrate miracles. Chanukah, the Festival of Lights, celebrates victory from Greek religious persecution. The Jewish victory was led by a group of soldiers, the Macabees, in the year 167 B.C. Upon returning to the destroyed Holy Temple (the Second Temple) in Jerusalem, to rededicate it and relight the Menorah (candelabra), the Macabees found only one small flask of oil, enough to light the Menorah for just one day. However, the flask of oil miraculously lasted eight days and that was long enough for the Hebrews to press new oil for renewed lighting of the candelabra. Christmas, of course, celebrates the miraculous immaculate birth of Christ, the son of God.

In the work of the psychologist, there is also a performing of "miracles." We can teach people how to work through the most knotty of marital conflicts, family anguish, deep depression, the sequelae of childhood sexual abuse and serious medical illness, and much more. How do we do it?

As the literature so bountifully tells us, one of the most important ways in which we perform "miracles" is by establishing a significant

therapeutic relationship with our clients. In this relationship, our clients soon learn that we understand who they are; that we "like" them; and that we can help them "like" themselves. When clients present with self-destructive behavioral patterns in their intimate relationships, for example, we, alone, are able to weather their efforts to push us away by interpreting for them their behaviors and nudging them along to break down defensive and offensive barriers while creating new, pro-social behaviors that can lead them to more satisfying intimacy.



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Charles Gelso has written, in his 2011 article, "Emerging and Continuing Trends in Psychotherapy: Views from an Editor's Eye," in the journal, *Psychotherapy*, "The newest neurobiological evidence not only demonstrates how neurobiology affects intrapsychic events and behavior, but how experiences, including the *psychotherapy relationship*, affect and change the structure of the brain." (p. 186)

Gelso quotes Sidney Yalom, in this same article, "... The truly instrumental factor is *process*—the nature of the therapeutic relationship...The intellectual task of psychotherapy is primarily a procedure that keeps therapist and patient locked together in some mutually relevant and interesting task while the real healing force, the therapeutic relationship, is percolating and gaining strength." (p. 186)

Several years ago, when I was working in Tallahassee, Florida, I had the opportunity to work with a young woman who had rapid cycling bipolar disorder along with a narcissistic personality disorder. She often drank to excess and would drive along the highways of north central Florida with a bag of pills in her car. Inevitably, she would call me from the car to tell me what she was doing. I would respond by calling the police who would find her and take her to the hospital. After two or three

episodes of this behavior, I was able to place her in an intensive outpatient program and, then, I was able to find a wonderful psychiatrist who effectively stabilized her mood disorder. I worked with this young woman for over 15 years. She became transformed from a highly self-destructive, labile person, who was unable to hold a job and unable to sustain meaningful relationships with her closest family members, to a productive and highly effective counselor who developed a capacity to forge a close alliance with several of her sisters and become a nurturing aunt to one of her youngest nieces. Over the years, one of the most important components of her recovery was the relationship with me and the trust in me that enabled her to take some chances with new behaviors and to shed the old, destructive behaviors. We endured many trials and tribulations in our relationship but, ultimately, the sustenance of the relationship allowed her to emerge from her chrysalis to become a more fully formed and capable woman.

May this new year bring joy and light and peace throughout the world and may we continue to perform "miracles" with our clients and within our own families. ■