

## The Bowen Technique

### Panic attacks

by Janie Godfrey

Most of us are well aware of the intricate and deeply linked connections between the mind, body and spirit in the human being. Each of our 'systems' supports and expresses issues and events that are happening in the other – for good and for ill. But when we feel waves of delight or excitement in relation to something wonderful happening in our lives, we don't feel we need to seek therapeutic intervention for it! This of course is not the case when we are struggling with the upsetting, alarming and seemingly inexplicable symptoms of panic that are the body/mind's response to a trauma of some sort.

The Bowen Technique is thought of as a mainly as a therapy that deal with the aches, pains and injuries of the body, but it also has a remarkable ability to deal with the emotional level in its gentle non intrusive way.

Just recently 16-year-old Annie was brought for Bowen treatment because of a history of panic attacks that were now impacting on her life very significantly. The first signs of any panic responses from her began 10 years previously when, as a little girl of 6 she had broken her arm at the elbow and was in hospital for six days immediately after the break and then for two further days later to remove a plate. For about a year after those experiences, she 'woke' screaming with night terrors and began sleepwalking. (Night terrors can occur in children usually between the ages of 3 years and 8 years and they seem to be caused by unresolved psychological conflicts, traumatic events or fatigue. They are characterized by episodes of abrupt awakening, usually with a panicky scream, and accompanied by intense anxiety, confusion, agitation, disorientation, unresponsiveness, marked motor movements, and total amnesia concerning the event.)

Annie's recent history (last few years) was of frequent panic attacks, characterized by heart rate increase and a feeling of terror rising up from stomach to head. She was also suffering from a number of phobias, such as the dark, crowded places and claustrophobia. She was having trouble staying at school for more than a few hours at a time without at least a small panic attack and when she had major ones (at least once a week) she would have to be picked up and taken home. In addition, her sleep was constantly disturbed and she had trouble dropping off to sleep.

She had, of course, been taken to her doctor a few years earlier and her mother told me that the doctor had said that the NHS couldn't do anything for Annie until she turned 18, so "go away"! Hard to believe, but that is what was reported. In the meantime, Annie had connected with a counselor and had been seeing him once a fortnight for some months before her first Bowen treatment.

Other interesting things to note: Annie reported that she virtually never drank any water if she could avoid it, as she disliked it. She was also eating up to 4 packets of crisps per day and used artificial sweetener for anything she wanted to sweeten.

After her first treatment (in late September), the most noticeable response to Bowen was that Annie's aversion to water changed dramatically: she was immediately very thirsty and drinking tons of water completely off her own bat. Her sleeping patterns also changed quickly and she was going to bed earlier and sleeping well. She had some small panic attacks in the week after her first Bowen and a longer lasting one was not as intense.

After treatment number two, she was definitely seeing a big change with many more panic free days and being able to do more with friends and family outside the house and was remaining in school more. This pattern of good improvement carried on week by week with only a few regressive wobbles that were not too serious.

Annie had seven treatments between late September and the very end of November and will now only return if she has any relapses or feels the need to ward any shaky feelings off. And Annie is a changed girl: she is staying at school all day with no problem, is a regular at band practice, is able to go out to shops and to lunch with friends, and is still voluntarily drinking plenty of water, sleeping well and hasn't touched crisps in weeks!

Annie's experience provides a good example of how Bowen can work at energetic and emotional levels. A great many of the moves in Bowen do go over acupuncture points on meridian lines and seems to be able to break some of the distressing mind/body links that result in such things as panic attacks and other emotional disturbances such as phobias. Also, we know that Bowen often makes people thirsty when they are not drinking enough, and this was a big feature of Annie's response. Some dehydration was likely involved with her lack of well-being, in addition to the chemicals and salt that came with her diet of crisps.

When she first came for Bowen, Annie asked me not to shut the treatment room door during her Bowen sessions (even though her mother was always in the room throughout the treatments). At the final Bowen appointment, she didn't even notice that, out of habit, I had closed the door.

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