

Awareness Integration Therapy

“Dr Foojan Zeine has written an exceptional book elucidating her unique therapeutic approach for deep healing of the past and creative living into the future. Her approach is thorough, practical and visionary. It takes the best from cutting-edge psychological approaches and integrates and extends it in really great ways. I highly recommend the book!”

Stephen Gilligan, PhD

Psychologist; Author, *The Courage to Love*

“Dr Foojan Zeine has written one of the most comprehensive, innovative psychotherapy books to be published in several years. This book will systematically increase your awareness and most importantly Dr Zeine’s principles will allow you to resolve the past and redirect the energy saved to your present and future life. Highly recommended.”

Arthur P. Ciaramicoli, EdD, PhD

Author, *America Reunited, The Soulful Leader, and The Triumph of Diversity*

“Dr Zeine’s latest book, Awareness Integration Therapy, ambitiously, sensitively, and meticulously details key ideas and effective methods for nurturing the growth of the self and one’s relationships. AIT is grounded in, and consistent with, the work of the best theoreticians and clinicians of our times, and is rife with Dr Zeine’s own innovative, insightful, and compassionate thinking. Her book is a comprehensive plan for personal growth that promises enriching fulfillments to all those willing to take on the promising challenges of AIT. As a practicing psychologist of forty years, I am informed by Dr Zeine’s work and strongly recommend it to professionals, and non-professionals alike.”

Robert Johansen, PhD

Author, *Need Management Therapy*

Awareness Integration Therapy:

*Clear the Past, Create a New
Future, and Live a Fulfilled
Life Now*

By

Foojan Zeine

Foreword by Jeffery Zeig, Ph.D.

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Awareness Integration Therapy:
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By Foojan Zeine

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FOREWORD

We talk about our past as if it no longer exists – as if it is behind us and can no longer hurt us. But the past is really present in the sense that experienced trauma creates shackles, patterns that unwittingly dictate what we do in our present life. Unfortunately, our past can eclipse both the glow of current moment and the light of the future, unless we do the work needed to change and create autonomy.

We must be able to identify influences before we can change. Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) is a comprehensive model for detecting habitual patterns that are no longer useful or adaptive but understandably affect our lives. AIT combines essential principles of major schools of therapy with current neuroscience research, offering a practical road map for reclaiming our autonomy and our sparkle. AIT is a beacon that shines light on a path toward a more productive life free of the shackles of the past. It makes the past the past and the present something to fully embrace, so the future is something to which we can look forward.

Written by my esteemed colleague, Foojan Zeine, this meticulously organized and easy-to-read book is practical and useful for both therapist and layperson. Carefully follow the steps outlined in this book as if your happiness depends on it. After all, that may be the case.

Jeffrey K. Zeig, Ph.D
The Milton Erickson Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) model and guidebook for therapists. AIT is the culmination of my 30 years of experience as a therapist and as a human being learning and teaching others how to effectively dismantle the core beliefs that are holding them back—and for good.

It started with a desire to better understand myself, and later my own core beliefs. I remember the first time I attended therapy; I was 28 years old. I expressed remembering that I had promised myself, when I was 16, that by age 30 I would be married, own my home, and have my own business. Well, by age 28 I did, but I was not happy with any of it. I wanted to get a divorce, the business was not satisfying, and I could not figure out who I was or what I wanted anymore.

My experience was amazing when, for the first time in my life, a man sat and listened to me, was curious about who I was, and kindly accepted me for who I was. I was not raised with a father, was abused by men from ages three through eight, and had migrated at age 12—alone—to the U.S., where I practically raised myself. Because of my past, I did not trust men, nor my own boundaries or capabilities. All I knew was how to survive.

I was chronically depressed and practically numb when my first therapist taught me self-reflection. I learned ways to observe myself, accept myself, see my strengths, set boundaries, appreciate myself and others, and communicate what I needed and wanted.

After attending individual and group therapy for many years, and then self-progress seminars, I found my passion: figuring out human beings. I guess *that* is what I needed to feel safe among them. I went to graduate school to become a therapist, and since I came from a divorced family and had not done a great job with my own relationships, I chose to learn about relationships, which motivated me to become a licensed marriage and family therapist.

My first supervisor, Rhoda Rand Codner, was “the goddess” in my eyes. I was in awe of what she created with clients. (She even did personality

reconstruction with clients without speaking their language.) She taught me how to create a therapeutic bond, sit in pure silence with love and acceptance, be curious, scan the psyche of the person, and, slice by slice and in the most in-depth way, explore all that lied inside. From a psychodynamic perspective, she bonded and created healthy attachments with clients and even with me, as her student. I heard her voice inside my head, guiding me for many years. In fact, whenever I did not know what to do in a session, I asked Rhoda to come to me and take over the session; she usually rescued me well. I am forever grateful to her.

A big turning point for me was when I attended the Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference. All the masters of the field were speaking, and I remember feeling elated with joy as I devoured every word and enjoyed learning from everyone. No theory or intervention were missed. I even bought the audio and videos of all the presentations, so I could listen to all the lectures, including some I had missed. And I listened to them again and again for years.

When I met Dr. Jeff Zeig, who was the founder and the organizer of these conferences and shared my utmost gratitude for his brilliant idea—and all the effort it takes—to bring the greatest minds together under the same roof for all of us therapists to learn from. I was living my passion among all the masters who are living theirs.

As I listened and learned from the greatest of minds, I realized that I had not heard from anyone about how to dismantle core beliefs for good. That became the missing piece of the puzzle for me to strive to find.

In 2005, I wrote to many masters in the field asking them to read a book I was co-authoring with Kathleene Derrig-Palumbo called *Online Therapy: A Therapist's Guide to Expanding Your Practice* (Norton Professional Books, 2005) and to write an endorsement for it. Many declined, since I was a novice and, in 2005, online therapy was considered ridiculous. But, when I wrote Dr. Albert Ellis to ask if he would write an endorsement for our book, his beautiful wife, Dr. Debbie Joffe Ellis, responded with: “Al wants to write the foreword.” I opened the email, screamed with joy and disbelief, and cried with joy. Debbie invited us to New York City to meet with him. We sat around while Dr. Ellis talked about new inventions, and how to be an effective therapist without being in the same room with your clients. What I learned most of all from him was about going beyond boundaries.

Later that evening he worked with clients. For the first time in my life, I witnessed highly effective therapy (including full on profanity at times) occurring in minutes. In fact, Dr. Ellis gave each client only 15 minutes per session. That night, I learned how to give a client full control, so they could learn to monitor their thoughts, regulate their emotions, and become responsible for their behaviors—and in 15 minutes. *Wow!*

In 2007, when I was formulating the AIT model, I had read every book that Dr. Irvin Yalom wrote word by word. I felt every word, and I experienced every word. I brought his words and wisdom into my sessions. I emailed him, because I wanted to hear his views on the model. He graciously invited me to his home in San Francisco. I was elated, shaking in my body, as if I was in the presence of my hero. I shared what I knew of what I wanted to create. He listened carefully and said: “You have an idea, which is in the clouds, and not on earth yet. You don’t have a model. You have jumbled ideas.” I left his home feeling dizzy, and so disappointed for wasting his time. I sat in my car for an hour, and then decided to land it on earth.

We began implementing and formulating a step-by-step application of the AIT model at the organization, Personal Growth Institute (PGI), which I founded. Here, we had over 30 multi-cultural and multi-lingual psychotherapists, working with diverse populations. The journey had begun to test what I had envisioned, with our team beginning to utilize the model with clients, colleagues, and each other. We logged and monitored audio- and video-taped sessions, extensively analyzing the data coming from each phase.

Concurrently, I continued learning from the best in the field. I remember the 100 hours of hypnosis training from Dr. Michael Yapko, as he taught us the profound way of distinguishing and discriminating thought patterns. His training changed my way of questioning and creating distinctions forever. I even supported a client undergoing dental surgery in an oral surgeon’s office, using hypnosis. I was in utter disbelief as the oral surgeon performed the procedure with no anesthesia, and my client experienced no pain. This is when I truly experienced how the human mind and body can choose and create.

When I took EMDR training, I thought I had learned a magical intervention, which worked quickly to release clients’ suffering. Beyond the bilateral stimulation, there was a way of distinguishing the thought, emotion, and the body experiences, which were important keys to accessing the trauma, so it could be released.

I followed Dr. David Burns, Dr. Donald Meichenbaum, and Dr. Christine Padesky in the hallways of conferences and interviewed them, asking detailed questions about Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. I interviewed Dr. Leslie Greenberg (after learning Emotionally Focused Therapy), Dr. Daniel Siegal, Dr. Antonio Damasio, Dr. Phillip Zimbardo, Dr. Peter Levine, Dr. Robert Dilts, Dr. Stephen Gilligan, Dr. Scott Miller, Bill O'Hanlon, and many more masters to learn all that I could. I love learning and seeing how each one of these experts views the human being thinking, feeling, and behaving from a particular angle, and how I could bring what I had learned from each and every one of them to the model.

The missing link that was needed to dismantle a core belief was revealed to me, and as we began implementing this new insight and seeing great results in our clients at PGI.

Since 2000, I have attended all of the Evolution of Psychotherapy conferences as well as Brief Therapy conferences, where I attended most of the lectures by Dr. Jeff Zeig. His finesse and brilliance in the way he formulates sessions and communication patterns are extraordinary. After formulating and researching the AIT model for many years, I asked Dr. Jeff Zeig if I could present my model in one of the conferences. The Brief Therapy conference in 2013 was the first conference where I presented the AIT model to my colleagues. Subsequently, I published *Life Reset: The Awareness Integration Path to the Life You Want* in 2017 as a self-help book. I wanted to give the model to people to try at home on their own, after which they could come to therapy to deepen their experience. As I lectured nationally in conferences, and I created a certification program for therapists to learn how to work with clients, more and more therapists asked for a more complete manual to use to work with clients. Hence this book was born.

When Dr. Zeig agreed to write the forward for this book, I was filled with gratitude, since he was a source of guiding light and a pathway for me to create and express all that I have learned from all the great masters, my colleagues, and my clients.

This has been my humble journey so far, and I hope that you enjoy this book and the Awareness Integration Therapy model as much as I have enjoyed, with every fiber of my being, learning from everyone in the field of psychology and every client that I have worked with.

CHAPTER ONE

AWARENESS INTEGRATION THERAPY: A FRAMEWORK FOR SELF-AWARENESS

Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) is an efficient, open-structured model that encompasses all aspects of the human experience. Through suggested awareness skills, a therapist helps her client assess and understand the correlation between the way he perceives the world and how he relates and behaves towards others. As the client enhances his ability to incorporate a new understanding of how he sees the world, he is able to make better decisions about his self—his personal identity. AIT delves deeply into both the conscious and subconscious processes, simultaneously facilitating the restructuring of irrational thoughts and emotions, while assisting the client with developing and constructing effective life skills.

This process is done by first supporting a person in becoming aware of their present moment thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relation to people and the world around them. Then, through a deep integrative process, the person becomes aware of the subconscious thought formulas and schemas established in early years, which are still operating in the background. After the integration process, the person can freely reinvent and construct an intentional way of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

There are many paths to mastering the art of awareness. This includes many meditation and spiritual paths that teach the skills of becoming intentionally focused on our five senses, bodily signals, mental activities, and relatedness to objects and people around us. They are all useful and impactful in people's lives, just not enough for healing and recreating life. In this book, I have shown where to hold the attention, so that the client becomes aware of their own dualities. These dualities can be between different parts of their psyche, between thoughts and feelings, between thoughts and actions, between intention and results, or between one set of belief systems versus another.

The skill of self-awareness does not deny the impact of past negative experiences, which for some clients were egregiously distressing, akin to physical and/or psychological torment. AIT allows the client to attend to traumatic and compartmentalized parts of one's identity, nurture these with compassion, and integrate useful skills designed to help the client to be a powerful survivor. It does this by employing cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and body/mind techniques to inculcate a significantly greater self-awareness into clients' lives and their patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving towards the self and others.¹

The Importance of Self-awareness

The conscious awareness of one's own thoughts, intentions, emotions, desires, motives, strengths, and vulnerabilities, and the ability to act from this awareness, are unique human capabilities. Further, being aware and acting from this awareness are both crucially important to individuals seeking emotional and mental health. This allows a person to navigate, distinguish, and choose among all that shows up in their world as an automatic thought pattern: It allows a person to live a conscious life versus an automatic one. These capacities are what therapists, coaches, and counselors worldwide rely upon as they share a common goal of assisting their clients in overcoming the root causes of their current and painful extreme anxiety, depression, obsessions, addictions, or other maladaptive behaviors, precluding clients from leading fulfilling lives.

Despite the great importance of self-awareness and the capacity to act from this awareness, many people have not learned the skill of being aware of themselves in their natural environments. They are not systematically taught the skills of conscious awareness by their parents, the school system, or society, and therefore live a lifetime with a poorly-developed sense of self. This is particularly troubling, because self-awareness is a vital and attainable skill that provides a person with the ability to become accountable and responsible for who they are and how they lead their lives. Once a person gains greater self-awareness and works with the blocks that hold them back from being who they want to be, they will naturally start making healthier choices. I've never come across anyone who would choose negative intentions or destructive values when given the freedom to access greater choice.²

Although mindfulness is recently becoming more mainstream, and some schools are creating a daily practice of it, it is still only being utilized as a passive, ten-minute, quieting-the-mind technique as opposed to an active,

correlational view of how our ways of thinking, rationalizing, feeling, and behaving create our relationships and our world. The term mindfulness, as Dr. Daniel Siegel states in his book *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence*, can be summarized as being aware of what is happening as it happens without being swept up by pre-established mental activities like judgments or ideas, memories, or emotions, but with a sense of open presence with compassion. The awareness of the present moment and the allowance of monitoring what shows up is a great skill, which will allow the person to also become aware of the patterns that have developed, the formulas that have been created, and the maps of generalization and categorizations that have been established when creating a sense of self.

AIT teaches that when a person becomes more aware—meaning that they observe, experience, and examine identity-created beliefs, meanings, behaviors, and emotional patterns in different areas of life—their experiences and interactions can be objectively examined for effectiveness, based on the person's desired intention and outcome. Subsequently, the client can become responsible and accountable to the impact of their way of thinking, feeling, and acting in relationships with people around them. If, based on this observation, a person does not like the created result, they have the opportunity to choose, recreate, and operate from an intentional and desired identity. This new frame of thinking, feeling, and acting is different than the automatic one that was triggered based on old beliefs created during childhood or earlier in life. The ability to take full responsibility and accountability for the approach of thinking, feeling, and behaving, creates a powerful stance toward owning the result that is created. If the result is what was intended, then the person feels powerful and confident. If the result is not what was intended, then the person has the ability to reevaluate and shift their thinking, feeling, and behavior to gain the desired result.

For many people, the accumulation of various core beliefs, positive and negative, become the foundation for their identity in different areas of life. Yet, the compartmentalization of a core belief and its network system of thought, emotion, sensations, and behaviors, limits the individual, since they react today using outdated and unworkable automatic responses, given their desired attitude and behaviors. This compartmentalization limits the person, who looks at the world through only one lens. Awareness Integration provides the opportunity to see the world anew and deal directly with what is present every moment.

Leslie's Story

When Leslie was 15, she fell in love with James in high school. James had been trying to court her for six months and had told all of his friends how attracted he was to Leslie. Finally, Leslie gave him a chance. James shared his loving gestures, loving words, and actions, and Leslie began opening up her heart to him, believing that James's love was real and everlasting. One day Leslie saw her best friend talking to James and acting differently. Leslie felt a pain in her gut, decided to monitor their communication, and soon found out that they had been talking together behind her back and had developed a sexual relationship. Leslie confronted both separately. At first James denied and minimized it, and then finally said that he was seduced by her friend. Leslie's friend said that James came on to her, and she responded to him. Leslie felt devastated, broken, lost, betrayed, angry, and sad. She said to herself: "I don't matter, and I can't trust anyone's love." Leslie made a decision about herself and the rest of the world, maximized it, generalized it, and cemented it into her psyche. From that point of view, her relationship with friends and lovers became transactional. They each fulfilled some need for each other until they were no longer needed. This way of being appeared to be safe and made life have less drama, but she felt lonely and not connected to herself or others.

I met Leslie when she was 32 and was in a great relationship with Robert. Robert had asked her to marry him. Leslie was very anxious, and although she could not pinpoint what was wrong with the relationship, she knew in her heart that she could not trust Robert's love and dedication. She was always waiting for the other shoe to drop—to find out that his professed love was not really a commitment to her—even though she could not state what Robert had done to deserve this non-trusting accusation.

Leslie was able to become aware, responsible, and accountable that she was a 32-year-old who was letting a 15-year-old lead her romantic relationship and run with her thought processes, emotions, behaviors, and physical sensations, even though the 15-year-old's perceptions were not consistent with her present moment information and experiences. Allowing James to not be a part of her relationship with Robert, healing her own wound by dismantling the decision she had made years ago about herself and others, and becoming present to who she is today and what she offers in a relationship—and who Robert is and what he brings to the relationship—means committing to a new set of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that will create a healthy union. Ultimately, she was able to say yes to Robert's proposal of marriage.

Dismantling Negative Core Beliefs

I have assisted clients in discovering past events that contributed to or caused their problematic thoughts and behaviors, like Leslie. I was also able to bring clients back to the point at which a crisis occurred. In addition, I helped them identify their original emotional triggers, so that they could learn to avoid these triggers. But these intense emotions did not abate, and they were still sabotaging my clients from fully recovering. It seemed to me that there had to be a better way of handling the past rather than constantly revisiting painful memories, going through the pain, having a cathartic reaction, and coming back to the present with no apparent shift in what the client believed about themselves or the external world. So, I continued to look for a way to not merely identify problems, but to identify and then dismantle them so that they no longer had the high emotional charge.

Awareness Integration Therapy is unique in that, unlike past models, it concentrates on the dismantling of negative core beliefs rather than merely challenging them, replacing them with positive ones by the therapist, or teaching the clients ways to cope with them. When the client is able to realize how they have created the negative core belief at a particular instant based on their feeling of powerlessness, fear, and vulnerability; become aware of how they have stamped themselves with such a core belief; and then integrate that part of them with who they are today; they are able to have a new opening about who they really are today and allow themselves to let go of an old unworkable belief. The younger the person was when forming a negative belief about the self or the world, the more opportunity the person has had to weave this negative belief into different experiences at different ages and in different areas of their life. Therefore, dismantling the negative core belief from each area of life and opening the hold of the grip that this type of belief has had on the person's life experience is crucial. This feature of the model allows clients to clean up the past, while envisioning their future from a fresh perspective with their new belief system, and to identify and liberate themselves from their past restrictions and limitations. We will go through step by step intervention in Phase Four of the model.

Through the process of AIT, the therapist, coach, or counselor uses a specific set of questions that are developed as a comprehensive and systematic plan to promote awareness toward one's own beliefs, thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and behaviors in key areas of their life—such as career, finances, spirituality, sexuality, death, and relationships—including those with strangers, friends, parents, and lovers. My clinical experience working with

clients reveals that most clients have never been asked these questions in a systematic way or about all the major areas of their life before. Yet, their responses to such questions can be enormously revealing in how they have set in stone certain beliefs and patterns of behaviors that lead them subconsciously in day-to-day decisions and behaviors, ultimately creating their life's circumstances. This allows a novice therapist to follow a direct and clear guideline designed to maximize effectiveness and create enduring results, while also allowing a seasoned therapist to add their own unique style and orientation to the model.³

The primary goal of Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) is to foster awareness as well as an integration of all the split parts of the self from the past into the present. This is achieved by utilizing the following interventions:

1. Exploring one's thought patterns, feelings, behaviors, and the impact of that attitude on every realm of life;
2. Exploring the assumptions that one lives by about others and the corresponding actions and reactions arising from these assumptions;
3. Identifying negative and/or irrational core beliefs that are creating limitations in the client's life;
4. Dismantling negative core beliefs into neutral/positive and functional beliefs and attitudes in every area of life;
5. Integrating the separated parts into the system as a whole;
6. Choosing workable and healthy values and ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving in all areas of life;
7. Envisioning tangible goals and systematic action plans for each area of life based on the chosen values;
8. Establishing external feedback systems to ensure sustainment of healthy values, thought patterns, emotional regulation, and behaviors.

AIT Is Uniquely Helpful

Throughout the history of psychology, from Sigmund Freud to Milton Erickson, to Albert Ellis, to Aaron Beck, to Les Greenberg, and to Francine Shapiro and beyond, new models of psychotherapy have been developed, and each has generated further significant breakthroughs for clients. Likewise, when developing the Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT), I drew upon the information and techniques that were created from proven past therapies, including Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), existential as well as person-centered

therapies, emotion-focused therapy, attachment theories, EMDR, hypnosis, solution-focused therapy, and theories about the body-mind connection.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is based on a cognitive model that says the way that individuals perceive a situation is more closely connected to their reaction than the situation itself. The cognitive model describes how people's perceptions of, or spontaneous thoughts about, situations influence their emotional, behavioral, and often physiological reactions.⁴ CBT understands psychological disorders in terms of mechanisms of learning and information processing.⁵ The goal of CBT is to achieve change by means of new learning experiences that overpower prior maladaptive learning and information processing.⁶ Schemas, or networks of information that dictate how people think about things and interpret the world, form in childhood and adolescence and can activate later in life.⁷ Awareness Integration Therapy makes use of this theory of behavioral schemas to explain how people create patterns of maladaptive coping mechanisms out of perceptions.

AIT operates with the intention of challenging clients' beliefs and behaviors based on an understanding of how the client has developed schemas.⁸ These principles are embedded in the first three phases of the model.

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT)

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) helps clients understand their role in shaping and controlling their emotions, thereby empowering them to lead a happier and more fulfilling life.⁹ People do not merely upset themselves because of unfortunate adversities that occur in their lives, but also with beliefs, feelings, and behaviors, which they add to these adversities creating their consequences, after distinguishing rational with irrational beliefs, they can form effective new philosophies, such as unconditional self-acceptance (USA), unconditional other-acceptance (UOA), and unconditional life-acceptance (ULA).¹⁰

AIT utilizes this essence of our innate ability to intensify or calm emotions, be in control, understand one's own rationale, and to set up a system of behavior to change existing patterns.¹¹ These principles are embedded in Phases One through Four of the AIT model.

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) suggests that emotions have an innately adaptive potential, which, when activated, can help clients reclaim unwanted experiences and change problematic emotional states and interactions. EFT views the individual as fundamentally affective in nature, where emotions drive the main mode of processing.^{12,13} An emotion-focused therapist works toward providing an empathic relationship to promote healing, explores the client's emotional experience, including the origin and dynamics of these emotions, and encourages their client to allow and accept emotions for the information that they provide rather than just attempting to release them. It also focuses on interruptive processes that interfere with the client's ability to access emotion or new emotions and to use these emotions to create new narratives.¹⁴

AIT insists that the client distinguish and honor emotions by using both emotional and cognitive schemata to access source memories for non-functioning coping mechanisms, allowing clients to release and then integrate the blocked memory.¹⁵ AIT also insists that the client becomes fully aware, responsible, and accountable for their feelings, experiencing, and expressing their emotions.

Humanistic Therapy

The goal of Humanistic Therapy is to help clients achieve self-actualization by developing a stronger and healthier sense of self.¹⁶ Accordingly, human beings are aware and are aware of being aware: Human beings are conscious beings.¹⁷

AIT draws from this proactive view of humans, and understands people as intentional, responsible, future-oriented creatures who supersede the sum of their parts. Additionally, the goal of AIT in fostering awareness in clients stems from the humanistic perspective.¹⁸ Self-actualization, the essence of Humanistic Therapy, is one of the core AIT principles.

Existential Therapy

The philosophy of Existential Therapy is that, although humans are inevitably alone and separate from the rest of the world, they still desire to be connected with others.¹⁹ Norcross explains that there are eight themes in existential therapies: ontology, intentionality, freedom, choice/responsibility, phenomenology, individuality, authenticity, and potentiality.²⁰ The following

principles underlie the process of existential psychotherapy: Active participation of the person-in-therapy in determining the focus, meaning, and essence of therapy process; recognition of the significance of the inner world of the experiencing person expressed; understanding of the meanings that the person attaches to experiences and relationships; a therapeutic relationship that is attuned to uniqueness and communal connections, within the flow and interrelation of past, present and future; in a climate that encourages expressions of honesty, trust, and love; commitment to an anticipatory caring, a human presence and responsiveness that supports the individual's ability-to-be and responsibility for decision making; accentuation of moments in therapy that contribute to unity of self, time, and relations with others.²¹

AIT adopts this standpoint and explores these themes across the client's life.²²

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)

Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) focuses on solutions rather than problem solving and explores current resources and future hopes rather than present problems and past.²³ The therapy often involves observing how clients respond to a set of predetermined questions.²⁴ SFBT focuses on identifying a solution to the client's problem and developing the skills or discovering the resources to achieve that solution.

AIT draws from the pragmatic aspects of this model of setting up a specific action plan to achieve one's goals in Phase Five of the model: developing the skills needed to lead a fulfilling life.²⁵

Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a relaxed, hyper-suggestible state, which allows the client to be more responsive to suggestions. It is a process of clinical intervention that can be described as a series of communications between clinician and client designed to influence the client so they feel or behave differently when in distress—and in a way that is considered more adaptive or beneficial.²⁶ Hypnotic techniques encourage one's ability to intensely focus on a particular thought, emotion, physical sensation, location in the body, and memories.²⁷

In AIT, this process is utilized to locate original memories that have been a source of negative core beliefs and to process memories toward a reintegration within the system as a whole.²⁸

Transactional Analysis

Transactional Analysis understands the psyche as composed of different parts that have ongoing inner dialogues as one moves through life, and that the ability to consciously identify these dialogues is suppressed early in one's childhood.²⁹

In AIT, going back to original memories linked to negative core beliefs is pivotal. When healing those memories, one needs to connect the accountable part of one's identity to the emotionally charged memories through the inner dialogue as a healing and integration model.³⁰

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

The model underlying EMDR hypothesizes that the symptoms of PTSD are caused by disturbing information stored in the nervous system. This information is stored in the same form in which it was initially experienced, because the information processing system has, for some reason, been blocked. The information is frozen in time, isolated in its own neural network, and stored in its originally disturbing state-specific form. Because its biological/chemical/electrical receptors are unable to appropriately facilitate transmission between neural structures, the neural network in which the old information is stored is effectively isolated. No new learning can take place, because subsequent therapeutic information cannot link associatively with it.

AIT has utilized EMDR's hypothesis of the PTSD Symptoms to create the integrative approach of its intervention.

Accelerated Information Processing

The Accelerated Information Processing model suggests that the moment of insight and integration comes when the two internetworks link up with each other. When the information-processing system is activated and maintained in dynamic form, the appropriate connections between the two networks can be made.³¹

AIT uses the same model of neural networking (core belief, emotion, body) to access original memories and move toward linking the internetwork for the purpose of integration.³²

Key Elements

The advantage of Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) over other psychotherapeutic models rests on the fact that it is a comprehensive model encompassing cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral components, while supporting the client in dealing with the past, present, and the future toward the creation of one's fulfillment in life. The majority of existing therapeutic models only incorporate one or two of the above components. Until now, the theories and interventions that have worked with negative core beliefs have, at best, been able to challenge the beliefs and refocus the client on healthier coping mechanisms. AIT seeks to dismantle negative core beliefs, so that they do not become a source of subconscious sabotage or a constant burden on daily, automatic thoughts that ignite intense displaced emotions.³³

The Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) has been successful because it distinguishes the process of the mind and its impact, takes therapy to a new level, is adaptable by psychotherapists from multiple disciplines, is systematically life-encompassing, and includes developing a new working plan for life. Here is how AIT incorporates these key elements.

The Mind and its Impact

Many people go through life not tuned in, not aware, or having an incomplete understanding of the differences between their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and the impact that their attitude has on their life. So first, the Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT) begins with teaching clients to differentiate these elements, because they are all closely interrelated. This skill is crucial in assessing where the strengths, the obstacles, and the vulnerabilities are, and what might need to be transformed, revised, or relearned in order to create healthy and fulfilling relationships with self and others. At times faulty or irrational beliefs can limit us or create unhealthy emotions. For example, emotions such as anxiety, shame, or anger that surface constantly as default emotions create a life filled with drama. Behaviors can be habitual and automatic which will lead to some unhealthy results. It is important to have the ability to look at the result that we have in our life and assess to see which strong belief or

action created the desired outcome as well as the undesired outcome so that we can go to the source and change the particular thought, belief, emotion, or action in order to create a desired result.

According to my clinical and research experience, many clients have a poor awareness and comprehension of how their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors impact others in the world. Instead, most people interpret other people's actions by making lots of assumptions about the other's thoughts, emotions, and intentions. Many don't even see the correlation between their own attitude and actions and the result in their life, so they remain a victim of other people's actions.

A designed-in part of the AIT helps realize one's mental images, beliefs, rationalizations, emotions, and consequently behavior may cause often-predictable reactions from others. A key component of AIT is addressing the mind, thoughts, feelings, body, behavior, and impact of established core beliefs.

Mind

The mind is defined by the Webster dictionary as “the element of a person that enables them to be aware of the world and their experiences, to think, and to feel; the faculty of consciousness and thought.” Daniel Siegel in his book *Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence: The Groundbreaking Meditation Practice* (TarcherPerigee, 2018) describes the mind as “all that relates to our subjective felt experience of being alive, from feelings to thoughts, from intellectual ideas to inner sensory immersions before and beneath words, to our felt connections to other people and our planet.”³⁴ Damasio described the essential adaptive function of the brain as: “the overall function of the brain is to be well informed about what goes on in the rest of the body, the body proper; about what goes on in itself; and about the environment surrounding the organism, so that suitable survivable accommodation can be achieved between the organism and the environment.”³⁵

Steven Pinker in his book *How the Mind Works*, talks about the conscious mind having four obvious features: “First, we are aware, to varying degrees, of a rich field of sensation: the colors and shapes of the world in front of us, the sounds and smells we are bathed in, the pressures and aches of our skin, bone, and muscles. Second, portions of this information can fall under the spotlight of attention, get rotated into and out of short-term memory, and feed our deliberative cogitation. Third, sensations and thoughts come with an emotional flavoring: pleasant or unpleasant, interesting or repellent,

exciting or soothing. Finally, an executive, the 'I,' appears to make choices and pull the levers of behavior. Each of these features discards some information in the nervous system, defining the highways of access-consciousness. And each has a clear role in the adaptive organization of thought and perception to serve rational decision."³⁶

Our mind is designed to have automatic processes to make sure that we will remain alive. Becoming more conscious of the automatic process will help us to live a more fulfilled life versus a biologically-surviving life. So, the subjective experience of living is what we can have a say so on. Antonio Damasio states, "All mind is made of images, from the representation of objects and events to their corresponding concepts and verbal translations. Images are the universal token of mind."³⁷ He states that the separate images streams can be integrated to produce richer accounts of external and internal realities. It can render an object from multiple sensory perspectives, and it can also string together objects and events as they interrelate in time and space and produce the sorts of meaningful sequences, we call narratives.

Thoughts

When distinguishing thought, and by this I mean becoming aware, paying attention to the words that hover in our head commenting constantly about every bit of information that our sensory systems pick up, generalizations, categorizations, the If-Then formulas, the beliefs that create a narrative about our own identity, and relatedness to all other people or objects around, analyzations, rationalizations, justifications, opinions, reasonings, motivations, perceptions, intentions, and meanings that are assigned to information coming in. In other words, becoming aware of the narratives and the story line that is constantly being created, or the narrative that has been fixated as a general rule by experience of generalization such as stereotypes (ex. men are this way, women are _____, Whites are _____, Blacks are _____, Jews are _____, Muslims are _____), or fed by cultural myths. Antonio Damasio in his book *The Strange Order of Things* describes thoughts as "the basic unit for minds is the image, the image of a thing or of what a thing does, or what the thing causes you to feel; or the image of what you think of the thing; or the images of the words that translate any and all of the above." Francine Shapiro in her book *Getting Past Your Past* states "every experience we've had in our lives has become a building block in our inner world, governing our reactions to everything and every person we encounter. When we learn something, the experience is physically stored within networks of brain cells called neurons. These networks actually form our unconscious mind, determining how our brain interprets the world around us and governing

how we feel from moment to moment.”³⁸ The constructive way of living involves consciously creating results by becoming aware of these patterns.

Feelings

When distinguishing feelings, I ask clients to be aware, pay attention, and name the emotion and the feeling that is felt in the body. According to Antonio Damasio the immediate causes of feelings as the background flow of life processes are experienced as spontaneous feelings; the emotive responses triggered by processing myriad sensory stimuli such as tastes, smells, tactile, auditory, and visual stimuli; the emotive responses resulting from action oriented drives like hunger or thirst and motivations like lust or play; spontaneous emotions including joy, sadness, fear, anger, envy, jealousy, contempt, compassion, and admiration which arises from the primary homeostatic flow; the emotions triggered by processing of the images generate provoked feelings; affect is a wide tent under which all possible spontaneous emotions, provoked feelings, the situation or mechanisms responsible for producing the actions whose experience become feelings.³⁹

Damasio also distinguishes in his book *the feeling of what happens* during three stages of processing. “A state of emotion, which can be triggered and executed non-consciously; a state of feeling, which can be represented non-consciously; and a state of feeling made conscious, known to the organism having both emotion and feeling.”⁴⁰ He suggests the term *feeling* to be used for the private, mental experience of an *emotion*, and the term emotion to be used for responses that are publicly observable. Emotion occurs in a setting of consciousness, which can be felt constantly, and we know that we feel them since the fabric of mind and our behavior is woven around the continuous cycles of emotions followed by feeling.⁴¹

Body

When focusing on the body, I request that the instrument that houses the self and its interactions should be observed and nurtured. Peter Levine states: “Physical sensations are the very foundation of human consciousness. As the biological creatures that we are, our bodies are designed to respond in an ever-changing, challenging, and often dangerous world.”⁴² He further states that consciousness unfolds through the development of body awareness, of learning to understand the meaning of our internal physical sensations, and emotions.

In day-to-day living, physical sensations and the emotions we feel act as signals to promote action towards safety, comfort, or pleasure. The body initiates a message, the mind processes the message, and then the body carries out the intended action to reach a particular goal. However, many people who come to therapy or seek help have been traumatized. Some have been traumatized by actual life-threatening traumas and some by the perception of being threatened. In case of trauma, Peter Levine states: "One's sensations can become signals not for effective action, but, rather for fearful paralysis, helplessness, or misdirected rage."⁴³ Levine continues to say that when a person constantly experiences fear, helplessness, rage, and defeat, they tend to avoid feeling their emotions. This comes at a cost: Losing the capacity to appreciate the subtle physical shifts of comfort and pleasure or real danger. Helping clients contain and regulate the capacity of tolerating extreme sensations with awareness and acceptance allows healing.

According to Peter Levine, there are four receptors in sensation channels. The kinesthetic receptors signal the state of tension in our muscles due to excess nerve impulses coming from muscles in the shoulder, neck, jaw, or pelvic area as well as an overactive mind. The proprioceptive receptors give a positional information about body joints. The vestibular receptors send signals from the microscopic hairs embedded in the inner ear canals, letting us know our position with respect to gravity and change in velocity. The visceral receptors send information from the blood vessels to our brain and our organs.

In my experience with clients, major and minor traumas are stored in the body and reoccur as intense reactions to current life events. For example, many clients do not realize that in their childhood, when Mom walked out while Dad ranted, followed by Dad berating or even attacking the child client, this experience produced intense feelings, which were felt and stored in her throat, heart, stomach, or elsewhere in the body. Due to the physical pain and discomfort that a person experiences from their feelings, they dissociate from their body to minimize the pain. As a defense mechanism, they continue to not relate to their body and numb their bodies in order not to feel the painful feelings. In most therapeutic work, even if the therapists ask about the feeling, they rarely ask about the location of the body that the feeling was and being felt in. The release of these stored feelings from the body, allows the reframing of the meaning that the person has given to the traumatic event. This type of deep work is essential to the healing and integration of the past trauma, and it is also a very essential topic that I thoroughly explain in this book. It is also Phase Four of the Awareness Integration Therapy (AIT).

Behavior

Across the years of clinical and research practices, I have become aware that behavior is the only tangible element that one can observe and the key access to our relationship with the external world. Thoughts can be subjective explanations of the behavior. Many people automatically act, and when asked, try to come up with some reasoning or justifications for their actions. This can be seen with addicts or perpetrators of sexual abuse or violence. People who are preoccupied with their own narratives don't realize how their body language, the words they use, the tonality, and their action shows others what is going on in their internal world. Behavior is also the only channel that therapists or healers can directly observe to see if a shift or healing is occurring.

Peter Levine differentiates levels of awareness, ranging from the most conscious voluntary movements to the unconscious involuntary patterns. Gestures such as hand and arm movements, emotions showing up in facial expressions; postures being the platforms from which intrinsic movement is initiated; autonomic signals, such as visible behaviors including respiratory and cardiovascular signposts, include rapid breathing, raised heart rate by visible pulsation in the neck, and changes in skin color; visceral behavior by an observable motility of the gastrointestinal tract and gurgling sound; or archetypal behavior such as grand hand and body movements, which are closer to cultural gestures.⁴⁴

Actions toward others, such as a greeting, by saying hello or a handshake; a caring and loving act, as in giving service; expressions of emotions, like hugging, kissing, and cuddling; expressions of anger, such as yelling, cursing, hitting, pushing, killing; withholding an action that was expected of you or promised by you; and strategized plan of action in relationships and business, are all external representation of the internal process.

Actions are what the world holds us accountable to because they are tangible. The process of the mind is internal, so when it expresses itself in the form of action—a behavior—one can be held accountable to the created results. I suggest particular attention toward behavior for the sake of having a sense of responsibility and accountability for the process of the mind as well as the behavior and its impact on our life and others.

Impact

Exploring and noticing the impact that our way of thinking, analyzing, formulating, feeling, and behaving has on our lives is essential to living a conscious life. We all live in relationships—in relation to self, objects, life situations, people we know, people we don't know, nature and universe, God, and death. What we offer a relationship and what we allow to receive from a relationship creates the manageability and the fulfillment of our lives. When we don't notice how we impact these relationships, we tend to live in a reactive and victimized model of our life. With this view we live in internal pain and feel powerless to act upon a new way of behaving to create a new impact.

Takes Therapy to a New Level

The questions utilized in Awareness Integration Therapy concentrate on major life areas and are structured to elicit an enhanced self-awareness and initiate a sense of ownership, responsibility, and accountability toward one's own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and impact. In using the model with clients, I found that not only did clients learn to differentiate their emotions, thoughts, and body responses, they also found that the process to be liberating and helpful in healing the damage caused by past experiences and perceptions. I found that in many cases, ten to twelve sessions could resolve longstanding issues for many clients. I also noticed that they were able to use the techniques anywhere, anytime, and felt independent in owning the skill.

In one of the most challenging cases, I worked with a client who was severely physically and emotionally abused as a child and continued to be abused for 20 years by her father and sisters. I didn't think 12 sessions would be sufficient for her, and it wasn't. Thirty sessions after we started, my client was a markedly different woman from the vulnerable, emotionally damaged, and highly confused individual who talked incoherently, sobbed constantly, and berated herself continually. In the first few sessions, she talked in run-on sentences, which were extremely hard to follow or make sense of. At the completion of session 30, she had metamorphosed into a self-assured woman who was excited about her present and her future. But would this transformation persist over time? Four years later, my former client came to see me, and it was apparent that the therapy had "stuck," because she was still the same self-confident and self-aware young woman I had assisted in her last session with me. She said that all the core beliefs that we had worked

on had never resurfaced, and she was back in therapy to learn new skills in dealing with owning a new business.

Adaptable by Psychotherapists from Multiple Disciplines

Awareness Integration Therapy is an in-depth, short-term therapy that can be used by therapists who come from virtually any psychological orientation. AIT is a multi-modal model that enhances self-awareness, releases past traumas and psychological blocks, and promotes clarity and a positive attitude to facilitate learning and implementing new skills to create an effective, productive, and more successful life. This model integrates and incorporates cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and body-mind techniques to create more awareness into a person's life patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving toward oneself and others. The interventions and the structure can be utilized within any psychological or educational framework. Therapists or counselors can also use their particular intervention or skill within the phases of the AIT. In other words, make it your own—bring *you* to the model.

Systematically Life-Encompassing

For the past 30 years I have seen clients who have come to my office with one presenting problem. As we explored what they were seeing as problems, we also saw that the cause could have been from an experience in childhood, or how one of their parents had treated them, and that it affected many aspects of their life, such as their career, intimate relationships, or parenthood.

When an event happens to cause a child to create a negative core belief about the self, this belief is brought with him through the different stages of development. This self-belief is carried into his relationships with peers at school, then into his intimate relationships, then to his job and career, then to his parenting role, and then to his relationship with his community, which only serves to strengthen the core belief. In therapy, we can see how the domino effect can also create a feedback loop that reinforces the self-belief, since it is being reflected back to him in every area of his life, making it appear real. Clearing the irrational and negative self-belief from all areas becomes crucial for the client to have a fulfilling life.

Each area of life is explored systematically in the first five phases of the AIT model. This promotes awareness of the integration process as relevant to the age, development stage, phase of life stage, and condition of the client. These include: