

IN SHORT

Private Notes of a Psychoanalyst

Salman Akhtar



KARNAC

firing the mind

First published in 2024 by
Karnac Books Limited
62 Bucknell Road
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 2DS

Copyright © 2024 by Salman Akhtar

The right of Salman Akhtar to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with §§ 77 and 78 of the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-1-80013-246-7

Typeset by Medlar Publishing Solutions Pvt Ltd, India



www.firingthemind.com

To

My wise, creative, and good-hearted daughter

NISHAT AKHTAR

Contents

Introduction *xv*

Part I: Preparation

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. Reading Freud | 3 |
| 2. Three ‘must read’ papers by Ferenczi | 5 |
| 3. Children, animals, and poetry | 6 |
| 4. Alternate professions | 7 |
| 5. Lifestyle requirements | 8 |
| 6. Silent sacrifices | 9 |
| 7. Seeking diverse supervision | 10 |
| 8. Setting up an office | 11 |

9. A mysterious rug	12
10. Entering a world of ambiguity	14
11. Reading, reading, and reading	15
12. Borrowed faith	16

Part II: Principles

13. Mental health vs. mental illness	19
14. A mentally healthy person	20
15. Half-sane, half-insane	21
16. Happy and unhappy children	22
17. Peek-a-boo	23
18. Hunger, vision, and the rhythms of nature	24
19. Learning from children	25
20. The non-human envelope	26
21. Toy shops are not for kids	27
22. Religion vs. spirituality	28
23. Sex–aggression–sex	29
24. Metapsychology	30
25. Two major updates on metapsychology	32
26. ‘Bad’ death instinct, ‘good’ death instinct	34

27. Six misunderstandings about death	36
28. Three reactions to separation	38
29. Two griefs that last a lifetime	39
30. What happens to the deceased's possessions?	40
31. A crowded preconscious	42
32. Receiving vs. taking	43
33. Reaction formation and undoing	44
34. Even Unabomber ...	45
35. Double bind	46
36. The unknown, the unmet, and the unlive	47
37. Where does an aborted childhood go?	48
38. Being emotional vs. being sentimental	50
39. Feeling 'at home'	51
40. Who should change?	52
41. Toxic nobility	53
42. Basic trust, earned trust, and mutual trust	54
43. Good-enough revenge	55
44. Where the ego was ...	56
45. Two 'great crimes'	57
46. Detachment theory	59

Part III: Practice

47. The day and time for the first appointment	63
48. Abstinence	64
49. The sacred nature of the clinical space	65
50. Restroom	66
51. Where is Rome?	67
52. Hearing is essential for listening	69
53. Floating couch	70
54. Does the analyst's gender matter?	71
55. No 'correct' way of laying on the couch	72
56. Handling patients' questions	73
57. Doodling etc.	74
58. Addressing the analyst by his or her title	75
59. Not asking about actual sex	76
60. Before and after	77
61. About defecation and feces	78
62. Diminishing frequency of sessions	79
63. Chronic lateness	81
64. The use of a deliberately wrong interpretation	82
65. Small gifts given by immigrant patients	83

66. Refusing to listen to certain kinds of material	84
67. Being special	86
68. Pleasure and mental illness	87
69. 'Insane chemistry'	88
70. Demystification	90
71. Imaginary interlocutors	92
72. When not to give the bill to a patient?	93
73. Humility	95
74. Which form of racism is worse?	96
75. Masochistic funnel	97
76. The novelist and the poet	98
77. Analyst's boredom	99
78. Analyst's financial status	100
79. Where does the analyst look?	101
80. Insight addiction	102
81. Three different outcomes	103
82. Why not this at the end?	104
83. The fate of the analyst's bills	106
84. Uttering an adult patient's first name	107
85. Procrastination and nail-biting	108

86. Stillness	109
87. Cats, not dogs	110
88. Countertransference sublimation	112
89. Financial extremes	113
90. The analyst's dog	114
Part IV: Profession	
91. The second beard	117
92. Psychiatry and psychoanalysis	118
93. Do we need a prefix to 'psychoanalysis'?	120
94. Jewish psychoanalysis, Christian psychoanalysis	121
95. Pauses	122
96. Writers and non-writers	124
97. Analysts' memoirs	125
98. Was Bion Hindu?	126
99. PEP vetting	128
100. Age-specific writing	129
101. The 'domestication' of analysis	130
102. Childless child analysts	131
103. Three tips for supervisors	132

104. Non-analyst friends	133
105. The future of psychoanalysis	134
106. Blood killing	135
107. Un-associated and un-affiliated	136
108. Analysts turned gurus	137
109. Taboos	138
110. The analyst's funeral	139
111. Alternate pathways	140
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	141
<i>About the author</i>	143
<i>Name index</i>	145

Introduction

Brevity has a link with passing time, hence with mortality, and, as Shakespeare famously declared, it is ‘the soul of wit.’ This unexpected coupling imparts a certain wry and definitive quality to that which is stated briefly. A sweet irony of this very sort suffuses the short pieces contained in the pages of this book. Denuded of jargon, bibliographic citations, and footnotes, these proto-essays seek to highlight one omission, underscore one tension, and challenge one assumption at a time. The hope integral to this approach is that the reader would be persuaded to think, concur, refute,

and refine the proposals offered here and by such effort join the author in furthering the cause and message of our much loved field: psychoanalysis.

Part I

Preparation

‘The repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious.’

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

2

Three ‘must read’ papers by Ferenczi

Long before the contemporary contributions of Jody Messler Davies and Bessel van der Kolk, the great Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi had laid down the groundwork for understanding and ameliorating childhood psychic trauma. From his extensive publications on this topic, three truly outstanding papers are (a) *on rejection and neglect*: ‘The unwelcome child and his death instinct,’ (b) *on sexual abuse*: ‘Confusion of tongues between adults and the child,’ and (c) *on addressing the injured core* of traumatized adults: ‘Child analysis in the analysis of adults.’ Together this triumvirate constitutes the best psychoanalysis has to offer vis-à-vis childhood psychic trauma. It must be read and re-read by all those who aspire to enter the field.

6

Silent sacrifices

Those who seek to spend their lives practicing psychoanalysis or intensive psychotherapy must know that helping professions often necessitate what David Sachs has termed 'silent sacrifices.' These acts of quiet renunciations (e.g., not attending a dinner in order to take care of a clinical emergency) and unannounced altruism (e.g., reducing fees for a patient in economic downfall) also characterize the practice of psychoanalysis. The dictates of an archaic professional superego (e.g., What would 'they' say?) or emotionally charged intrusions of theory (e.g., Am I being masochistic here?) must not be allowed to preclude such gestures of human decency and care.