

A pathway to transformation

Sabnum Dharamsi



I promised last time that I'd share why I chose *Walking lightly* as the title for my column. It comes from the Qur'anic verse – 'For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace' (Qur'an 25:63). The words communicate an inner practice of humility that is also embodied outwardly in the way we move in the world, the words we speak, as well as our relationship with the planet and its people.

Humility

I chose this title because these themes – of inner and outer congruence, and humility at an individual but also planetary level – are critical to our therapeutic training and practice. 'Walking lightly' resounds in my mind and heart when I train students. I want us to hold humility when working with the unknowable and the vulnerable.¹ For example, novice students' go-to response with difficulty in client work is often a triumphant cry of 'Take it to supervision!', but I notice that their engagement with the client's distress is sometimes superficial. And, although supervision is essential, for it to be useful, there must first be the willingness to be open, even when it feels uncomfortable or is *emotionally* demanding – times when we ourselves are perhaps depleted or overwhelmed.

It is difficult to be open. Clients' trauma, anger, pain and destructive patterns may unleash our own unhealed trauma. Students *and* experienced practitioners can hide behind walls of expertise, distanced from the rawness of the clients' or our own process. 'Walking lightly' is an invitation to tread gently on planet earth but also on our earthly constitutions, the clay parts of ourselves that hurt, and to foster a gentler relationship to self and others.

A gentle openness

'Walking lightly' invites a more gracious acceptance of our shadow sides and of

the work that needs to be done, but it can also be transformational. Perhaps with this gentle openness, we may be able to hear more subtle messages from the soul, the divine light within. When we look at shadow aspects, we are also connecting to the developmental process that comes from them: places of survival, defensiveness and transactional relationships. Perhaps we can then listen within for concepts such as love, compassion, forgiveness, hope and justice, and discover the truth of them in our own lives. And, by doing this, we also begin to internalise and reflect these qualities in the way we engage relationally. As Hubl notes in his visionary book *Attuned: Practicing Interdependence to Heal Our Trauma – and Our World*: 'When we bring consciousness to bear on this process (witness), we discover still higher evolutionary capacities that aid repair. In particular, we awaken the soul's ability to help heal others.'²

This process becomes part of wisdom because we discovered and worked with what was blocking us. We've experienced an embodied healing process and perhaps even engaged with the more beautiful qualities of existence. In Islam, these qualities, in their absolute limitlessness, are some of the many names of God: Compassion (*Ar Rahman*), Forgiveness (*Al Afuw*), Justice (*Al Adl*) – configurations of the divine essence. Sufi poetry, in particular, speaks of how human beings long to be captivated by these loves of the soul, if we can but be true to our best selves.

The courage to be accountable

'Walking lightly', though it communicates gentleness, does not mean avoidance or a lack of courage in the personal, relational, social or political. It also invites a modest approach in what we take from the world. I echo the sentiments of the Cameroonian writer Achille Mbembe, who writes about developing a planetary consciousness; a recognition that we are all united in the air that we breathe, and

that our future depends on not devouring mineral resources and exploiting people for the sake of a few individuals.³ Life is precious and sacred. To me, holding that in our hearts – deeply, dearly, humbly, courageously – is the work of a therapist, and a signifier of someone who can be trusted. To 'walk lightly' is not to bypass spiritually or to seclude ourselves in the intimacy of the therapy room, thereby forgetting our responsibilities to other human beings who have systemically been denied access to the privilege of therapeutic healing. It is to remember that the therapy room is also in the planet we share with flora and fauna, with its ancient rock formations and ocean tides. I guess if I was to say one prayer here and now, it would be a call for humility, which includes the courage to be accountable. For people to see that having a role, be it that of therapist, doesn't excuse us from fulfilling our role as a citizen of the earth, and to speak out about injustices, especially ones that impact marginalised groups, or extract and destroy planetary resources that only serve the interests of powerful corporate giants. ●

The beginning of April marked the end of Ramadhan and the beginning of Eid – best wishes to all readers!

Biography

Sabnum Dharamsi is co-founder of the first accredited (by CPCAB) Islamic counselling training in the UK. In addition to teaching, supervising and client work, she has run numerous workshops, presented at conferences both nationally and internationally, and is a published author. She is currently working on a book for Cambridge University Press.

References

- 1 Dharamsi S, Liberatore G. 'Our therapeutic direction is towards Light': transcendence and a non-secular politics of difference in Islamic counselling training. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2024; 30 (2): 417–435.
- 2 Hubl T. *Attuned: practicing interdependence to heal our trauma – and our world*. Canada: Sounds True Inc; 2023.
- 3 Noema Magazine. How to develop a planetary consciousness. <https://tinyurl.com/3y8knmfp> (accessed 2 February 2025)