



Reflections *in the* Therapy Room

*Stories of Healing,
Resilience, and
Emotional Growth*

PAULO CESAR T. RIBEIRO



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Note to the Reader

This book gathers reflections developed throughout my career as a humanistic and existential psychologist and psychotherapist. Each chapter was conceived as an independent essay, dedicated to various themes that traverse the emotional, relational, and existential experiences of adults seeking, in one way or another, to better understand themselves and their inner journeys.

As this is a collection of interconnected texts, readers may notice, at times, the recurrence of certain ideas, values, or core concepts — such as the importance of self-knowledge, emotional acceptance, building healthy self-esteem, and the search for meaning in life. These echoes are intentional and reflect the conviction that certain fundamentals of existence are so profound and universal they deserve to be revisited from different angles and contexts.

Thus, far from being accidental repetitions, these recurrences serve as a silent guiding thread, interweaving topics and allowing each chapter, though autonomous, to subtly converse with the others.

The reader may therefore choose to navigate through the chapters in any order they prefer, guided by their own

curiosity and inner needs, embracing each reflection as a unique invitation to delve into their own emotional history.

I hope that, with every page, you may feel accompanied, respected, and inspired to build new meanings for your personal journey.

May this reading, born from the continuous practice of listening, observation, and faith in human potential, also become a small step in your own transformative journey.

Happy reading!

Preface

Dear readers, I invite you to immerse yourselves in the rewarding experience of a true humanistic psychologist.

Humanistic psychology emerged in the 1960s as an alternative to the two dominant approaches of the time: psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Its mission was to consider the human person in their entirety, prioritizing consciousness and understanding behavior as the result of a complete existential perception of human beings. After decades of scientific research, it granted psychologists the legal practice of psychotherapy as a proven method for personality change.

As one would expect from a humanistic psychologist, the texts in this book are grounded in clinical "experience," drawn from situations lived with patients.

It is a broad experience, a rich clinical practice that Paulo Cesar demonstrates with simplicity and sensitivity, addressing technical topics in a way that is accessible to all readers.

Reading the book, we witness a horizontal therapist-patient relationship, where what is spoken and heard reveals the person fully as they are — with their fears, guilt, and idealizations — and where naming and awareness bring the security and self-acceptance necessary for self-knowledge

and self-realization as a human being. "It is about making space for subjective truth, which does not impose itself but reveals itself." This truth is not fixed, but dynamic – it changes as we mature, relate to others, experience suffering, and learn."

Moreover, Paulo addresses topics comprehensively, considering all involved aspects and acknowledging the importance of integrating emotions, intuition, our shadow side, and our flaws, because "there is no growth without traversing discomfort."

Similarly, the author does not shy away from tackling delicate and seldom discussed issues like narcissism, manipulation, prejudices, and even the relationship between psychology and spirituality, for, as he himself says, "there is no real spiritual growth without descending into the psychic underworld." "True spirituality does not eliminate pain but gives it new meaning."

Finally, **Reflections in the Therapy Room - Stories of Healing, Resilience and Emotional Growth**, results in an insightful guide for fellow psychologists by presenting fundamental clinical issues, not only in the awareness necessary for change but also in the patient's burden, since every change must make sense to them, must come from within, requires flexibility, and above all, time — each person's own time — and "the ethical attitude of embracing the patient as they are."

Therefore, whoever you may be, dear reader, this book aims to enrich and deepen your experience as a human being.

Luiz Ariston Dantas, clinical psychologist, poet, and songwriter, author of *Reflections of Ch'an – Brazilian Buddhist Poetry*.

Introduction

Dear readers,

We live in an increasingly noisy world — external clamor competing with internal noise, both demanding attention, understanding, and silence. Amid this daily chaos, there is a place where speech becomes seed and silence, fertile soil: the psychotherapeutic space. It is from this soil that this book was born. Throughout my journey, I've had the privilege of witnessing the resilience and capacity for transformation inherent in every individual. Each session was a deep dive into the unique universe of my patients — an encounter with their stories, fears, hopes, and dreams.

The volume **"Reflections in the Therapy Room - Stories of Healing, Resilience and Emotional Growth"**, is not a theoretical compendium, nor a manual of ready-made formulas. It is, above all, a living collection of reflections inspired by real stories — those that populate therapy rooms, hearts, and the crossroads of human existence. These writings emerged from the practice of attentive, respectful listening to the pain, doubts, hopes, and transformations of those who sought in psychotherapy a gentler mirror for themselves.

Within these pages, readers will encounter common dilemmas, treated with the depth and responsibility they deserve: the fear of not being enough, relationship conflicts,

the weight of expectations, loneliness even amid others, aging, jealousy, aggression, guilt, stress, self-esteem, grief, sexuality, anxiety. All these profound human emotions are met here with a receptive, ethical, and caring gaze — not merely technical but above all humane. Here, life, with its pains, joys, dilemmas, and challenges, finds a voice and reveals itself in all its complexity and beauty.

"Reflections in the Therapy Room - Stories of Healing, Resilience and Emotional Growth" does not aim to offer magical solutions to life's dilemmas. On the contrary, it invites the reader to a deep reflection on everyday challenges, from the most complex existential questions to the small obstacles that shape our routines. As you flip through its pages, you will find stories of overcoming, love and loss, reflections on the search for meaning and purpose, and an invitation to embrace impermanence and the vulnerability that make us human.

This book is born from the truth that psychology can (and should) be accessible, understandable, and useful in daily life — not merely in moments of crisis, but as a tool for ongoing self-discovery and maturation. I believe psychology, stripped of jargon and complex theories, can be a powerful tool for human beings. Between the lines, readers will realize they are not alone, and that their pains are not signs of weakness but invitations to growth. They will see that there is beauty even in navigating difficult emotions when faced with courage and honesty.

It is with this conviction that I share these writings with you — born from attentive listening and deep admiration for the human capacity to reinvent and flourish. May this book reach you where needed most. May it serve as a companion, a provocation, and a solace. And as you turn each page, may you feel there is also space for your story — with all its imperfections, beauty, and profound humanity.

The Author

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PART I: FOUNDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS



The Humanistic-Existential Perspective

"The present is the only real time. The past is memory, the future is imagination", Alan Watts.

It is common for many psychotherapists, when introducing themselves, to mention their therapeutic approaches: cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychoanalysis, *Gestalt* therapy, Jungian analysis, among others. As a humanistic-existential psychologist, I present



myself acknowledging the strong influence of Carl Jung's Analytical Psychology, along with a deep resonance with the principles of Buddhist Psychology.

I consider it essential to clarify, from the outset, what it means to practice this approach. More than a technical framework, it is an ethical and existential commitment to the human being in their wholeness. This psychotherapy stems from the principle that each individual is unique, irreplaceable, and worthy of being understood in depth — not just by their symptoms, but by their living history, their desires, their silences, and their unseen gestures.

Humanistic-existential practice offers a space where authenticity is not only permitted but encouraged. Guided by values like empathy, unconditional acceptance, and mindful presence, the therapist cultivates a genuine relationship with the patient, where attentive listening and the honoring of subjectivity lie at the heart of the encounter. In this safe environment, the patient is encouraged to explore their desires, anxieties, fears, and hopes, free from expectations of judgment or ready-made solutions. The focus rests on the here and now: the moment shared between therapist and patient becomes fertile ground for the blossoming of new perceptions and existential choices.

This approach recognizes that within each person lies a silent wisdom in need of space to emerge. In this context, the therapist's role is not to dictate paths, but to facilitate a reunion with oneself, honoring one's history, limitations, and possibilities. Inspired by Carl Rogers, Buddhist psychology, and existential thought, this approach suggests that true transformation arises from deep acceptance of one's inner reality — rather than from the effort to conform to external molds.

Being with the patient in this approach goes beyond listening — it means sharing a living presence. The therapist does not hide behind techniques but instead presents themselves wholly, congruently, thus becoming a trustworthy mirror. There is no hierarchical relationship here. There are two

human beings in contact — one seeking meaning, the other offering clarity, attentive listening, and companionship.

I remember a patient whom, for this book, I will call Ana. In our first session, she hesitated to speak, as if fearing judgment with each word. Over the weeks, as she found a space free of judgment, her words became freer, her gestures less tense, her eyes more alive. Ana didn't need ready-made answers — she needed someone who believed that her own answers already dwelled within her, waiting only for the right conditions to flourish.

Buddhist psychology reinforces this view, teaching us that human suffering often arises from resisting what is. We don't seek to eliminate pain but to change our relationship with it: to listen to it, understand it, and ultimately, integrate it into the experience of being. This perspective demands serene listening, deep respect for each person's internal timetable, and trust in the impermanence of pain — and of joy as well.

I deeply value the attitude of "not knowing." It may seem paradoxical, but when the therapist allows themselves not to have all the answers, a more authentic and fertile ground for shared exploration opens up. Sometimes, the most transformative moment in a session doesn't arise from the therapist's words, but from their silent listening, their willingness to remain present before the mystery that is each human being.

This form of psychotherapy, then, doesn't impose answers — it invites questioning. It provides no shortcuts, only steady guidance. It doesn't define happiness — it helps each person find a personal meaning for it. It's a process that demands courage, because looking honestly at oneself can be uncomfortable — yet it's in that discomfort that the seed of change begins to grow.

I often say the therapeutic relationship is, for many, the first authentic experience of being truly welcomed that they've ever had. And that is revolutionary. When someone feels genuinely listened to — not interrupted, corrected, or judged — their self-awareness unfolds in new ways. Feeling worthy of attention, they begin to recognize their worthiness to exist fully.

This is not, therefore, a psychotherapy that "*fixes*" someone, but a practice that enables them to become who they truly are — more lucidly, integrated, and aware. Suffering, then, isn't treated as a mistake but as an invitation to transformation.

In the therapeutic encounters I've witnessed over the years, I've observed something: even the most wounded patients carry within them a spark of hope and an ability to flourish. Sometimes, this spark is nearly extinguished, smothered by fear, guilt, or abandonment. But when nurtured with presence, listening, and respect, it begins to glow again. And

when that happens, their inner world restructures — the person doesn't just improve — they rediscover themselves.

Ultimately, this approach doesn't seek to mold individuals into an idealized standard of mental health. Instead, it seeks to help them reclaim their freedom, responsibility, and dignity. It seeks to accompany them in the process of becoming who they truly are.

In the end, humanistic existential psychotherapy reminds us that to be human is to be in process — to be always in motion between pain and joy, between loss and reunion. And in this movement, we are not alone: a welcoming gaze, an attentive ear, and a silent presence can make all the difference. Because, at its core, growing is precisely this — learning to flourish, even with roots that once knew darkness.

