

**Philosophy of accepting as it is (ARUGAMAMA) in  
Japanese psychotherapy, Morita therapy**

**ISHIKAWA Yuichi**

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## summary

Morita therapy, which has originated in Japan, is an unique approach to psychological problems. When we face uncomfortable emotion or thought, this method teaches us to release the contrivance (hakarai) to change or getting rid of these feeling and accept them as it is (arugamama), then to make practical actions in reality. Morita therapy is tries to bring home to patients the attitude of accepting as it is (arugamama), and this method is recognized as an effective treatment to neurosis. The founder Masatake Morita considered that our intellectual mind leads to emotional attachment because it attempts to controle our emotion and thoughts as we want them to be. This mind makes the problem complex, and finally form the neurotic symptom (reciprocal effect of mind : seisin-kōgo-sayō). This method considers that we can release the self-centerdness and also develop our personality by giving up our attempts to eliminate our mental discomfort and can live the discomfort as it is. As a result, the symptom stops appearing as a problem which gives patient anxiety.

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**Key Words** : Morita therapy, ARUGAMAMA attitude, strategic inattention FUMON,  
comparison with western psychotherapy, inclusive positivity

## 1. Overview of Morita Therapy

Morita therapy is a Japanese psychotherapy which was founded by Masatake Morita (1874-1938) around 1919. In this distinctive Japanese psychotherapy, unique instruction is done to neurotics suffering from conflict of their mind.

Morita therapy is practiced in many countries today, Japan, China, Taiwan, France, Germany, USA, Canada and Australia.

It takes form of inpatient psychotherapy, outpatient psychotherapy, work therapy, home

like therapy, diary guidance, reading therapy, awakening therapy, psychoeducational lectures, natural therapy, Self-Help Group, meaning life therapy and so on. Morita therapy has been applied to neurotics with certain inborn temperament called Morita temperament (Morita-Kishitsu). In today's clinical practice, many researches reports that it is effective therapy to phobias (especially anthorophobia : taijin-kyōfu), obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder and so on.

Furthermore, the Morita therapy is applied to personality disorder, eating disorder, people

with incurable cancer, and general people with various distresses these days. There is also many self help groups based on the philosophy of Morita therapy, and they are making great result.

## **2. The essence of Morita therapy is ARUGAMAMA attitude**

The essence of Morita therapy is ARUGAMAMA attitude. ARUGAMAMA is Japanese word that literally means "As it is". In Morita Therapy, this term is used frequently to describe the attitude of "leaving symptoms as they are and appreciate human nature as it is. Morita therapy encourages client to detach the contrivances to escape from their uncomfortable emotions or negative thoughts such as fear or anxiety that they are experiencing. Morita said, Accept these sufferings and fears as it is, and lead a constructive life. Then the sufferings will be resolved gradually your neurosis will be cured completely. In Morita therapy, neurotics are instructed to stop obsessively trying to eliminate the symptoms and fears and to make a reality-based actions. Morita often said to patients "Fact is truth".

For example, a child who is unwilling to go to school can never go to school if he waits to until he become willing to go to school. If he has to go to school, it is better that he just acts according to what he has to do. Diving into the fear provoking situation, he may feel bad when he leaves home, but then his feeling changes while walking, and finally he may feel good when he arrives to school. Positive acceptance of terror and to live in the present moment fully is very important.

## **3. The conflict between ideals and reality (shisō no mujyun)**

Next essence of Morita therapy is the theory of the conflict between ideal and reality. Morita

often said that "Dogmatic thinking about how things should be is still illusion. Being as it is, this is a truth"

If we try to control our emotions and actions according to some unrealistic logic, doctrine, or contrivance such as "I should always feel good" or "I should love everybody", things get more complex and the symptom will be worse. This is the theory on psychict interaction. When we face something, natural sense such as interest or question will arise. All we have to do is go along the sense and use our intellect, brush up and continue our action. Morita repeatedly warned that if we try to fit the reality into the given intellect, we would be caught into the conflict between the ideal and reality. It is Dogmatic thinking, Shouldism, Contrivance, Persistence, -ism, HAKARAI that makes agony and neurosis. Morita said repeatedly"

Now I would like to present another Episode. One day Morita has instructed to an inpatient to water the garden trees every day. The patients thought that his neurosis will be resolved if he follows Dr. Morita, and he watered trees everyday. However he watered trees even in the rainy day!

This is the mental enslavement. It seems that we can not just laugh at him. Sometimes we are emotionally attached to the concept of "this should be, and habitually continue making unsuitable actions.

Morita preferred referring a Zen axioms "The mind turns in accordance with all the changes occurring in the universe. If you go along the flow and know the spirit, there is no pleasure or suffering"

Living in such way of not being attaching to thoughts, use intellect adequately, accepting the reality and living with ARUGAMAMA, or leaving as it is, is the essence of the Morita therapy. Just like we can not stop the rain even we may feel uncomfortable, we can not stop uncomfortable emotions or thoughts right away. If you try to

stop them, the suffering will be deeper because of psychic interaction.

#### **4. Therapy of strategic inattention (FUMON)**

There is one more important characteristic in Morita Therapy. Morita -therapeutic approach takes strategically inattentive attitude to the symptom, because Morita considers that excess attachment to the symptom is the cause of the neurosis and agony. This seems to be contradictory to the western psychotherapies which try to seek the cause in the past or control and transform the actions, putting importance in symptom, feeling, thoughts, cognition, and image. Morita therapy does not focus on the symptom or distress, but tells that symptom will be resolved naturally when you practically act as a response to reality. We can find the deep understanding of neurosis from this concept.

This method of Strategic inattention seems to share with the tradition of Zen Buddhism. This tradition takes the attitude of not reacting to anything during practice of Zen Meditation, even when there is many thoughts and feeling, images.

#### **5. The therapeutic process**

Patient might experience doubt and anxiety many times during the therapy because they can not trust in that moment. However, they begin to raise their awareness through experiencing various events in their daily life. From this process, they gradually learn to be ARUGAMAMA, the attitude of leaving as it is, and their cure and progress is achieved. During this period, the words of Morita deeply move the heart of clients and help them. I would like to quote some of them. "A great doubt leads to a great enlightenment" "Right or wrong judged in bewilderment are both wrong", and "Respect and obey human nature

with pure heart".

From the fact that Morita therapy is applied to dying people and various kinds of human care program such as Self-Help Group, Meaning Life Therapy, we can say that it is more than treatment to neurosis. Morita Therapy includes universal viewpoint about human being.

#### **6. The therapeutic theory**

Morita Therapy does not make dichotomizations such as pleasure versus discomfort, good versus bad, and positive versus negative. In Morita Therapy, we observe whatever comes up to our mind, accept and stop attempting to manipulate them. The method instructs us to learn releasing persistence in controlling our emotions and thoughts as we want them to be, looking at things as it is, and adequately respond to the reality that we are facing.

By doing this, we can resolve not only from attachment to the symptom, but also from our various thoughts and emotions, and as a result we can be liberated from suffering. We transcend from suffer by accepting suffer as suffer, not attempting to escape from suffer, and live along with the desire to live fully. We transcend suffer not by resolving suffer but by receiving suffer as it is. Then the patient becomes aware that his suffer is what he himself has created.

Morita therapy is oriented to healing and growth in a larger context rather than problem solving. That is, the therapy aims to develop the way of being, rather than looking at symptom as a target and focus on the resolving them.

This shows that Morita therapy does not take dualistic point of view but takes holistic viewpoint which considers that problem is generated from holistic context and its interactions. Japanese people have deeply unconscious habit of looking at relations and apprehending things in holistic way rather than simply dissecting things

out and analyze them. One can find this way of thinking in other Japanese psychotherapies such as Naikan therapy and Clinical Dohsa therapy.

We can point out that this holistic view seems to have something to do with oriental ancient philosophy that is Zen, Mahayana Buddhism, Yoga Practice School, old Upanishad, Shankhara's Advaita philosophy.

## **7. The western thoughts similar to Morita**

We can find out common ground or analogy between Morita philosophy and the western psychology.

The psychologist C.G. Jung (1938) calls the dark aspect of personality as shadow, and says that one must find the way that enables the conscious personality and the shadow can co-exist. He is not treating the shadow as a bad existence. He says that shadow has primitive and childlike quality that makes human existence vital and beautiful. He also considers that trying to oppress the shadow is clinically meaningless, just like cutting the head in order to treat headache. Jung states that integration of the seemingly bad and inferior aspect into the conscious self is essential process of individualization.

A. Maslow (Maslow 1954, 1962, 1971), the central actor of foundation of humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology, refers to the resolution of dichotomization as a characteristic of individuals with self-actualization. For example, they look at imposition is pleasure, work as play, they are childish while matured, wild while ethical, kind while ruthless, having carnal desire while having love. Integration of these contradicting opposite is said to be a characteristic of self-actualization.

V. E. Frankl, the founder of Existential Analysis, says the more we intentionally aspire to become happy, the more we will lose our happiness

because the intention itself becomes our obstacle. The happiness is the result of our right actions responding to what you have to do rather than our objective. He called this as the paradox of the life. Frankl recognized that the hyper-reflection and hyper-intention is the cause of neurosis (Frankl, 1960). Morita seems to talk about similar paradox of life. He said that neurosis will be cured by doing what you have to do, instead of trying to cure the neurosis.

B.A. Brennan, who is former research worker of physics in NASA, counselor and today's globally well-known healer, says that discomfort is the best Guru (teacher). She says that you become balanced when you listen carefully to messages from inside of you which take form of discomfort, and become more careful about your personal physical desire. Then you will go back to health (Brennan 1987). It says that healing of self happens when we listen to the discomfort as the voice from inside and connect with inner wisdom that leads you.

## **8. Inclusive positivity**

As we have seen, that the western psychology partially has the same thoughts as Morita Philosophy. By accepting what appears to be negative as it is, we extend and integrate our identity, and we will grow up.

The philosophy of Morita Therapy has an eastern thought as an origin, and has universality which accord with western psychology. It does not eliminate what appears to be negative, but includes it as a part of self positively, and is willing to go ahead as a restored whole.

The philosophy of Morita Therapy, accepting everything as it is, ARUGAMAMA, is proven through clinical practices. I propose it as Inclusive positivity.

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