

The Sophrology Institute

MIND & BODY IN HARMONY

CONSCIOUSNESS IN HARMONY AND CREATIVE ACTION: AN EXPLORATION OF SOPHROLOGY AND THE SILVA METHOD

A series of three workshops with Philip Carr-Gomm

SESSION ONE: SOPHROLOGY

OVERVIEW OF OUR THREE SESSIONS

Welcome to this three-session course entitled 'Consciousness in Harmony and Creative Action'. 'Consciousness in Harmony' because both of the systems we will be exploring are essentially methods that work with consciousness, and seek to promote a state of harmony within our awareness. In fact, the term sophrology is derived from the Greek: *sos* (harmonious, serene) *phren* (consciousness) and *logos* (study, science).

'Creative Action' because both of the systems we will be exploring share the goal of wanting to encourage positive, creative action in the world. They are not systems that teach, for instance, passive meditation techniques for calm or illumination, although they both teach relaxation. Instead, they both teach dynamic methods for improving your life and being a force for good in the world. Both approaches work with consciousness – teaching us how to alter our states to benefit ourselves and others, our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.

In this first workshop, I will offer you a history and overview of the central ideas and applications of Sophrology, and you will be able to experience its key method for accessing a deeper level of awareness. In the second workshop, we will work in the same way with the Silva Method. Then in the third workshop, we will compare and contrast both systems, and come to our own conclusions about the value of each, and how we might want to make use of their techniques, singly or in combination.

WHY THESE TWO SYSTEMS?

It's the 1960's. Once the collective psyche has recovered from the shock of two world wars in close succession, the changes in society and thinking that this has provoked, opens up a whole new era of exploration in the worlds of psychology and spirituality. The Human Potential Movement is born, and these two great fields of enquiry come together in a way that hasn't

occurred before. All sorts of interesting movements are born during this period of the 1960s and 70s, which include the work of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, the Esalen Institute, the Bolivian teacher Oscar Ichazo's Arica Institute, and the Californian Werner Erhard's EST, which later morphed into the Landmark Forum.

Silva Mind and Sophrology emerge during this same fertile period. We are looking at these two in particular because they both have achieved tremendous popularity in their fifty or so years of existence, both to a great extent because they are based upon a quite simple but effective induction technique that enables practitioners to access deeper levels of consciousness. And then in both cases, practitioners are taught ways in which to grow and effect change. They are sufficiently similar and yet at the same time sufficiently different in many ways to bear fruitful comparison. By looking at these questions of human potential through the two lenses of Sophrology & the Silva Method we have the chance to create greater depth of field: from monocular to binocular vision.

WHAT IS SOPHROLOGY AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Sophrology is a fusion of techniques drawn from modern western neuroscience and psychology with methods used by the ancient wisdom traditions of the east. It uses visualization, simple postures and physical movement, combined with attention to breathing and awareness, to deeply relax the body and mind, while also introducing a sense of vitality and stimulating the cognitive functions, such as memory, imagination and concentration. Inspired by Yoga, Buddhism, Zen, Neuroscience and Phenomenology, it offers a path of self-development as well as specific methods for improving the quality of life.

By using short exercises, usually ten minutes or less, you retrain your nervous system to respond differently to the world. It works thanks to Neuroplasticity and the process of somatisation. As your body starts to relax, your mind becomes clearer and you start to trust in yourself and life more and more.

In addition to its use as personal development and wellbeing method, it can also be used to address specific issues: stress, burnout, PTSD, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, to alleviate symptoms of illness (or treatment) eg cancer, phobias, goal achievement (in coaching), generalised anxiety, specific anxiety performance anxiety (in sports, the arts and business).

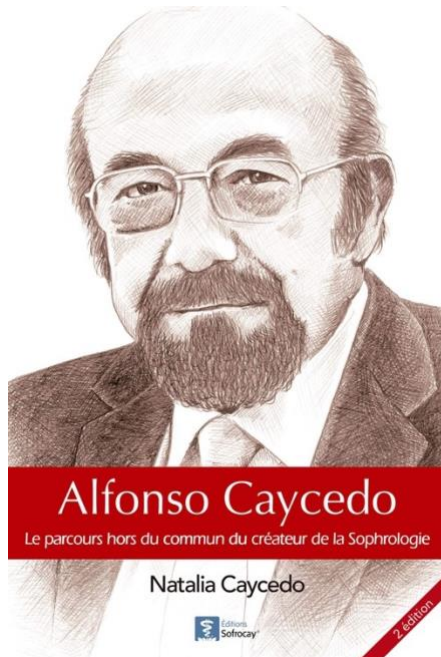
INITIAL EXERCISE

Seated comfortably, close your eyes to better concentrate on yourself. Become aware of your body seated here, breathing in and breathing out. Move your awareness to your head and neck now. Breathe out fully, and now breathe in through your nostrils slowly and deeply as you tilt your head backwards as far as it will go comfortably. Hold your breath as you sense the whole of your head, its form, its weight. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth as you return your head to its normal position. Let your breathing return to normal as you spend a few moments concentrating on your brain. Imagine it is like a wide-open sky filled with shining stars. Each star is capable of so much: thanks to these stars you are able to think, to remember, to imagine, to wonder, to dream. Now breathe in through your nostrils, slowly and fully, as you gently tip your head forward to your chest. Hold a few moments, then breathe out through your mouth, slowly and fully, as you move your head back to its normal position. Keeping your eyes closed, return to breathing normally, become aware of your whole body, and now we'll finish with an affirmation: "As I breathe in and out, I awaken within myself the capacity to have confidence and trust in myself; the capacity to harmonise every level of my being; and to create a positive future for myself, filled with happiness and wellbeing." And, feeling fully present here and now, stretch your fingers and toes and open your eyes. Just type into the chat box a few words to describe how you are feeling.

Now for a few words on the creator of this system, its history, and its key ideas, before we try another exercise again.

THE CREATOR OF SOPHROLOGY

The neuropsychiatrist Professor Alfonso Caycedo (1932-2017). Born in Bogota, Colombia, of Spanish Basque origin, Caycedo moved to Spain as a young man to study medicine at the University of Madrid. He became a doctor of medicine and surgery, and specialised in psychiatry and neurology, eventually becoming a Professor in the School of Psychiatry at the University of Barcelona's faculty of medicine.



Caycedo began his career as a psychiatrist being asked to administer electro-shock treatments and insulin-induced comas to patients. Since altering these patients' consciousness was deemed so important, why - he asked - did psychiatry not study consciousness? He had been obliged to dissect corpses for many hours during his medical training, but not one hour had been devoted to a study of consciousness itself. Concerned by the severity of the treatments he was asked to administer, and sensing that a study of consciousness could provide a key to unlock the secrets of the mind, he decided to create a new medical discipline focused on this study, and on research into methods for balancing and harmonising consciousness. He wanted to develop ways of helping his patients, often depressed or traumatised, lead happy and fulfilling lives with the minimum of drug or psychiatric interventions. He began by studying clinical hypnosis and different methods of relaxation. Combining ideas from

these studies, including Jacobson's system of progressive relaxation and Schultz's Autogenic training that includes the power of visualization to help you relax, he developed the very first methods unique to sophrology, and in December 1960 he opened the Department of Sophrology and Psychosomatic Medicine at Madrid's Santa Isabel Hospital.

Three years later he married a French yoga enthusiast, and moved to Switzerland, to study and work with the famous psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger, a colleague of Sigmund Freud, and founder of the school of phenomenological psychiatry. This approach to the human mind focuses on subjective experience, attempts to avoid imposing outside interpretations on it, and lies at the root of the more well-known person-centred and Humanistic psychotherapies. It also came to exert a major influence on the development of sophrology.

In 1965, encouraged by Binswanger, Caycedo and his wife spent the next two years visiting India and Japan. In India he met many yogis and swamis, studying with them, and interviewing them for two books which were published in India. He paid many visits to the ashram of Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, by the Ganges, getting to know Swamis Krishnananda, Sharadananda and Nadabrahmananda, amongst others. A few years later, in 1968, Rishikesh would hit the headlines when the Beatles went to the ashram there of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to learn Transcendental Meditation.

The Caycedos also travelled to many other parts of India, visiting ashrams and sacred places, all the while studying the many schools of Yoga. They met Swami Satchidananda, and at the ashram of Sri Aurobindo the psychologist Indra Sen organised talks in which Caycedo was able to explain sophrology and his interest in yogic techniques. In Dharamsala in northern India he met the Dalai Lama and studied Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices. The Caycedos then travelled to Japan, and studied Zen in several monasteries.

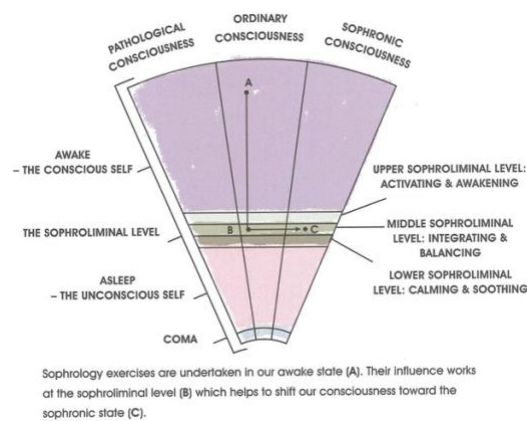
On his return, Caycedo incorporated ideas and techniques from all that he had learned, so that sophrology now became a system that he described as **‘Dynamic Relaxation’**. His genius lay in synthesizing all that he had discovered to create a simple and effective form of training. He, with the support of his fellow doctors who had also been working in sophrology since 1960, combined the discoveries of modern western medicine and psychology with tried and tested methods for healthy living drawn from the ancient wisdom traditions of the east. By October 1970 The First World Congress of Sophrology brought together 1400 specialists from 42 countries, including a Tibetan delegation which included the Dalai Lama’s doctor.

THE SOPHROLOGY JOURNEY & APPLIED SOPHROLOGY

The aim of sophrology is to help you achieve a more mindful, integrated sense of self or consciousness. It uses 6 building blocks: POSTURE - AWARENESS - MOVEMENT - BREATHING - AFFIRMATION - VISUALIZATION.

We used all six in the exercise we did at the beginning, and we’ll use these again in the next exercise. Going through a sophrology training can be seen as valuable in its own right as a one-off process - like going through a psychoanalysis or a rolfing. So after completing training, you can do nothing in relation to it, apart from appreciating its value on your journey of wellbeing and development. And anytime in the future you can come back to it and follow it through for a second time. It can be amazing how much more you benefit from the training with a second sweep through it. You can also work with any of the exercises for any duration according to your needs and preferences. Now that you have this tool-box, it’s up to you to use the tools in the way that works best for you. You build sophrology into your life in the way that works best for you, just as you would say yoga or mindfulness.

A SIMPLE MODEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND HOW SOPHROLOGY WORKS



THE KEY SOPHROLOGY METHOD

It is made up of three key techniques: a body scan, a tension release, and an energising. Undertaken standing up, then seated, or all seated. Just the first two together are often used, and we use these now in our next exercise: basking in happy memories.

HOMEWORK

Try this exercise a few times over the next week using the recording below.

To learn more about sophrology see:

The Institute of Sophrology's website: <https://sophrology.institute>

Introductory books on sophrology:

Empower Your Life with Sophrology: Quick and Simple Exercises to Reduce Stress, Boost Self-Esteem, and Help You Find Joy by Philip Carr-Gomm, CICO Books 2019

The Sophrology Method: Simple techniques for a calmer, happier, healthier you, by Florence Parot, Gaia Books 2019

The Life-Changing Power of Sophrology: Breathe and Connect with the Calm and Happy You, by Dominique Antiglio, Yellow Kite 2018

For online training in sophrology:

<https://artoflivingwell.org.uk/p/sophrologytraining>