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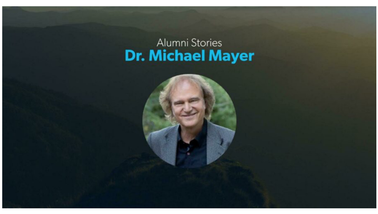

DR. MICHAEL MAYER: A JOURNEY OF MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT

By Saybrook

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Retraction notice: We have retracted the previous version of this article, which you may have received. The article contained factual errors and was not vetted by the subject before publication. We deeply regret this error. If you have a copy of this past article, please delete it.

American author and educator Joseph Campbell outlines the first step of the hero's journey as a call to adventure where the hero is lured, carried away, or voluntarily proceeds. For nearly five decades, Saybrook University graduate Michael Mayer, Ph.D., has proceeded on his own journey: to become a pioneer in weaving sacred wisdom traditions and holistic approaches into modern psychotherapy, developing his own method called Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy. To this day, Dr. Mayer's passion continues to drive him forward, and his journey is far from over.

A Child in the Woods

The son of a prominent attorney, Dr. Mayer grew up in West Orange, New Jersey. In his youth, he spent much of his time in the woods, exploring and looking in awe at the ecosystem that surrounded him, the ecosystem of which he himself was a part. Dr. Mayer's website describes these early experiences in nature as fundamental to his continued exploration of balancing both ancient and modern considerations of health.

These early experiences motivated Dr. Mayer to earn his master's in psychology from The New School for Social Research in New York City, where he trained to become a psychotherapist. However, he quickly found the limitations of modern psychology rooted in its entomological definition of the study of the mind. It wasn't long before his yearning to explore a more expansive understanding of psychotherapy sent him across the country.

A Revolution of Consciousness

Many people are familiar with the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, but fewer are familiar with the consciousness revolution, a person-centered movement that reexamined the connection between the mind and body and emphasized human potential. This revolution brought Dr. Mayer to the West Coast.

"I came to the West Coast to find a school that could be better at allowing innovative research," Dr. Mayer says. "At Saybrook you could combine East and West in your doctoral studies and study what was called the consciousness revolution."

During this time, the founders of Saybrook University were on their own journey, one that would challenge the existing psychology establishment. The Humanistic Psychology Institute was born.

"[At the time] Saybrook was the Humanistic Psychology Institute," Dr. Mayer says. "The beautiful thing about Saybrook at the time was, basically, you could study whatever you wanted to study. I was able to study various forms of what I call ancient wisdom traditions, including Greek mythology, astrological symbolism, tai chi and qigong, and many other things."

Saybrook's approach of encouraging self-discovery ultimately led Dr. Mayer to embark on a 40-night vision quest alone in the woods. Just as he did during his youth, he explored and allowed the elements of nature to inspire him. "My vision quest set the groundwork for my life's work," Dr. Mayer says. When he emerged, he penned his doctoral dissertation on ancient traditions of personality description.

Among the first graduates of Saybrook University, Dr. Mayer graduated with his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in 1977.

An Integral Approach to Integrative Medicine

A licensed and practicing psychologist, Dr. Mayer employs an integral approach to psychotherapy, considering a range of perspectives into healing. "I co-founded an integrated medical clinic where I worked for 10 years," Dr. Mayer says. "[There I worked] with a whole team of healers, Western medical doctors, chiropractors, acupuncturists, etc."

Utilizing his experiences as a psychologist, Dr. Mayer seamlessly integrates tai chi, qigong, and many other traditional and nontraditional techniques into his practice. "I take the essence of those traditions and bring them into my psychotherapy practice, making it grounded for those who may be averse to the esoteric dimension of it," Dr. Mayer says. "I've taken my education at Saybrook and apply it to many things I do nowadays over 40 years later, for example having a humanistic connection with all of my patients."

Dr. Mayer was a co-founding faculty member at John F. Kennedy University's Transpersonal Psychology Program where he trained psychotherapists for more than a decade. He pioneered the integration of qigong and psychotherapy, being the first person to train doctoral psychology students in this integration at an accredited graduate school, the California Institute of Integral Studies.

A New Approach: Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy

Inspired by Ken Dychtwald's classic book, "Bodymind," Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy continues the consciousness revolution that brought Dr. Mayer to the West Coast and ultimately to study at Saybrook. Specializing in incorporating ancient techniques and wisdom into modern therapeutic techniques, the Bodymind Healing Center offers courses, workshops, certificate programs, literature, sessions, and other resources for those interested in applying traditional forms of healing into practice. Dr. Mayer offers tai chi and qigong classes, which transmit a broader view of cross-cultural, age-old practices, following the Saybrook idea of expanding traditions into a pluralistic endeavor. "After the class, we spend a half hour talking about any topics of interest," Dr. Mayer says. "They include psycho-spirituality, politics, and even dissertations. Saybrook students are welcome to come to the first class for free."

Currently, Dr. Mayer is exploring utilizing Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy as an integral approach to working with patients with Parkinson's disease and other movement disorders. "My brother has Parkinson's," Dr. Mayer says. "Whenever something deep and personal is happening in my life, or in those around me, I try to utilize it as an opportunity to further my knowledge of healing."

To bring others along on his journey, Dr. Mayer is author of more than 20 publications, including peer-reviewed articles, six books, and various audio/video products integrating Western Bodymind Healing methods with ancient wisdom traditions, including his Ben Franklin award-winning autobiography, The Path of a Reluctant Metaphysician: Stories and Practices for Troubled Times. He teaches his integral approach to healing at hospitals, universities, and workshops nationally and internationally.

Dr. Mayer has also spoken extensively at conferences, and continues sharing his integral method to psychotherapy with those entering the field. "I'm grateful that my doctoral years at Saybrook seeded my interest to research a broader dimension of psychology than I would have received at a traditional school," Dr. Mayer says. "My interest in integrating ancient wisdom traditions with modern psychology continues to this day."

Additional resources for Bodymind Healing Psychotherapy:

- Bodymind Healing in Psychotherapy on-demand, self-paced course (with CEUs)
- Tai Chi Chuan: Four Dimensions of Purpose (a 19-week, on-demand training)
- Classes in Bodymind Healing Qigong & Tai Chi Chuan for Troubled Times (every Saturday morning)
- Additional training opportunities

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