Westside Notes

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

Reflections on AGPA's 2014 Annual Meeting
Schuyler Ha, M.A.

I had heard about the AGPA (American Group Psychotherapy Association) Annual Meeting for years, and this year I made the decision to attend -- and I'm thankful that I did. In February I went to Boston with the belief that I would return with new knowledge and skills that would assist me in my professional work as a clinician and instructor. However, I underestimated the impact it would have on me personally, as well.

The two-day institute led to intimate sharing amongst participants that was the genesis of newfound friendships. I attended some exciting workshops including ones where the realness of my engagement in role play and improvisational work underscored how we can draw from our own vulnerabilities to further our empathic connection with clients.

In addition to knowledge gained, the conference provided time and opportunity to cultivate and deepen relationships with fellow GPALA (Group Psychotherapy Association of Los Angeles) members as well as become quickly acquainted with AGPA members from across the country and around the world. Everywhere I turned, there was a community within a community. There was a dinner for first time attendees, special interest group gatherings, a dance social, a luncheon; abundant opportunities to meet and be supported by others in the meaningful work that we do.

In my work with clients, we often speak about intimacy and what it means to have a meaningful relationship. At the AGPA conference, I met substantive people with whom I connected and could easily be authentic and transparent. The reciprocity of this contact was transformative.

My experience still remains with me. It has been channeled into my willingness and ability to engage differently and more impactfully with friends, family, students and, especially, clients. The ability to connect can bring about a revitalization of the human spirit, for both client and therapist.