Instant serenity for life and work

An introduction to Sophrology

by Florence Parot
To my children for their everyday love and support

To my students, past, present and future, you are my inspiration
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PREFACE
When Florence Parot asked me to write the preface for her book, I was really touched. As I am when I see her infectious enthusiasm and energy for sharing sophrology.

Florence, who trained at my friend Dr Luc Audouin’s school in Paris, opened the first training school for Sophrologists in the UK in 2010. It makes sense, therefore, that she should be the first one to offer the British public a book on sophrology.

To describe sophrology in a simple and practical way is no mean feat. Yet, Florence has taken up the challenge. She gets straight to the point, in a very pragmatic way that makes her book both appealing and accessible.

I recognise in her approach to Sophrology the personal touch of Dr Luc Audouin, in an everyday context. It is essential indeed to give simple and practical tools that will enable the reader to personally feel the purpose of this original method.

Sophrology was born more than 50 years ago in an old provincial hospital in Madrid, Spain. It was in October 1960, when he was still a young doctor, that Alfonso Caycedo decided to initiate a new science of the consciousness and to give it a new name.

It all started with a question, linked to a feeling of inadequacy when working with patients suffering from severe psychiatric disorders and confronted with their sufferings in post-war Spain, with no efficient therapeutic means. This deep, radical question still has not found a definitive answer for the founder of Sophrology. It was: “how could I know human consciousness?” To attempt answering this radical question, Sophrology has studied “voluntarily modified states of consciousness” through methods such as clinical hypnosis, relaxation, Yoga, Zen, etc. But its aim was and still is the study and the conquest of the harmony of being, of existential plenitude.

As you will soon discover, as you read along, the method has now very much left its initial therapeutic context and even though the ambitious project of caycedian sophrology still lives on, many of its uses are more modest, more immediate, they adapt more easily to the ups and downs of our everyday existence and enable us to live a more serene life.

Nevertheless, it would be a pity to content yourself with reading the various suggestions in the book. For us, Sophrology is before all a practice, an experience and we invite you to take advantage of this guide to start on your own path of discovery.

If those discoveries, those initiations, make you feel like you would like to go further, having sessions with a qualified practitioner will be necessary.

I wish you an enjoyable reading and practice of some of the exercises suggested in this beautiful book.

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Introduction
HOW I CAME TO DISCOVER SOPHROLOGY

I was studying for my two-year Master’s Degree in Conference Interpreting at Paris University and my brain was working non-stop. From age 15, I had focused on becoming a Conference Interpreter and all my energy had been on that one goal. I had lived and studied abroad for years, sometimes studying for two qualifications at the same time, in order to be prepared for the final degree. Day after day, for hours on end my fellow students and I were listening to hours of international speeches and interpreting them in another language; our brains having the difficult task of understanding in one language and expressing the same ideas in another one without any time to think about it. That is not counting the constant updating of international politics, economics, law... we had to do. For the first time in my life, I could feel my brain like a muscle, I could feel it ache and overwork. But did I listen to it? Of course not! What do you think, I was no wimp and I knew I was going to be successful. Of the 40 selected students, several had to drop off the course during the 1st year, one by one. We would see them leave, go into therapy, become unwell... After my brain, my digestive system started to show signs of wear and tear. The intense efforts had affected it and I was experiencing stomach pain and discomfort, feeling even slightly dizzy sometimes, so slightly I sometimes thought I was imagining it... There again, I discarded all of it and I just started working harder. The first year ended and the summer holidays arrived. A bit of rest? No sir! Off we went to other countries to work on our languages. I spent most of my summer at Madrid University studying hard under the blazing sun. Autumn was with us and we were preparing for our 2nd and (last) year entry exam, working harder than ever. After all, I was young and healthy and my life was interesting and exciting. Success was at hand! When you love what you do, you can find the energy for it, can’t you?

Except that one morning, a few days before the exam, I burnt out... I got up from bed only to fall in a heap on the floor unable to stand up again. An ambulance was called and I was whisked off to A&E. I spent two weeks in hospital with doctors at a loss about my condition. When I came back home, I was so weak I was finding it hard even to get up. I was then diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and extreme fatigue. I would wake up at night screaming with pain and anxiety. I took the exam later and failed; my brain and body completely unable to function. For a whole year, my life was at a standstill...

Fortunately, after a couple of months of medication, my French GP recommended sophrology. I had no idea what that was at the time but I was prepared to try anything. I loved it. It basically saved me. I looked around, asked questions (no internet search at that time!) and ended up finding group sessions near me. Once a week, for one hour, I would join in a sophrology group session with about 20 others. The sophrologist running the session was a lovely lady, with a soothing voice and great presence. I felt I was in the right place. For about
half an hour, we would do small movements and breathe deeply and then we would lie on mats and listen to her voice guiding us in a relaxation exercise. Then we would discuss what we had felt during the exercises, according to what we wanted to share that day. It felt very peaceful. My brain was learning to rest, I was learning how to control my anxieties; my body was calming down, my whole self felt more at ease, serene and energetic at the same time.

I went along to the sessions for several months. After a while, I was able to use many exercises on my own and just went on integrating them here and there in my life according to my needs. I was able to manage the pain from IBS and eventually I was able to get rid of the symptoms and crises and to do without the medication. I was able to function again properly in life. Step by step, I was becoming me again, regaining my confidence and letting my inner light shine once more. I went back to see a sophrologist several times in the coming years, when times were a bit rough and also for prenatal sophrology, both times I was pregnant. I felt able to face life in better way, stronger, empowered.

In case you were wondering, I never became a Conference Interpreter but I started working in international business with the most amazing people, Managers, Chairmen (and women!) who taught me a lot. I used the techniques I had acquired to manage my stress and know myself and my limits and I was able to stay calm and focused among the ups and downs of corporate life.

The day came when I realised it was my turn to give back what I have been given, I retrained to become a sophrologist and started working from a clinic in Paris. Most of my clients are very busy business people under pressure, experiencing stress or insomnia. Some have experienced burnout, many are on the verge of it and all of them have realised how some very simple exercises have turned their lives around and helped them manage their lives and work at full speed while remaining serene and sane. I moved to the UK in 2009 and I am now dedicating my time spreading sophrology there, seeing clients and training sophrologists. This book is intended to give you some idea of what sophrology is and how it can help you find inner peace in a very simple, modern, quick and easy way.
GUIDELINES TO THIS BOOK

This book is meant both as an introduction to sophrology and as a practical guide for life and work. You will therefore find a sample of exercises that you can use when you feel the need. These are simple exercises to help you in your everyday life. Pick and choose, mix and match what feels right for you when you need it and enjoy.

Some sophrology exercises are performed standing up and some sitting down, either sitting back or with an upright back. If you cannot stand or are too ill to even sit up, you can lie down. Always do whatever feels more comfortable for you.

Some exercises in this book are for “instant serenity”, they are short and simple and you can incorporate them in your daily routine. Others are longer and will need you to take a 15-20 minute break. For these exercises, it is easier to be guided. You can either record yourself or download our exercises online (www.sophroacademy.co.uk).

Do the exercises at your own pace – always be very gentle with yourself and do what feels possible – we have a variety of different tools so start with what feels right for you, the idea is to try different ways and see what works for you, we are all different! Remember, if you need more help, do consult a sophrologist who will be able to guide you in more depth.