

Extract from '*Affluenza: How to Be Successful and Stay Sane*' by Oliver James, published by Vermillion

In the last few years I have become aware of the Hoffman process and in making referrals for patients, I have come to favour it over the alternatives. It is the most systematic method I know for properly exploring the role of childhood as well as offering a motorway back from the past. In so doing, it will reduce your vulnerability to the Virus. Whilst many of the techniques it employs are not in themselves original, the specific combination used is original, as is the fact that therapy is conducted as a eight-day residential course. Four studies have demonstrated that it definitely works for the commonest ailments, such as anxiety and depression (see research at [www.hoffmaninstitute.co.uk](http://www.hoffmaninstitute.co.uk)). I have not been through the process myself, but I do know many who have, and for some of them the experience has been far more productive than years of other therapies.

Because the Hoffman process entails cutting yourself off completely from the outside world and placing yourself at the mercy of complete strangers for over a week, it rightly provokes suspicion and scepticism. However, I can assert with absolute confidence that this is not some dodgy cult –there's no donating 10 per cent of your entire wealth to a Rolls Royce-driving Maharishi. During the first half of the course, the layers of scar tissue created by past experiences are stripped away, in sessions with individual therapists and in groups of other 'students' (usually about twenty per course). Methods include visualisation, where you are asked to picture past experiences and relive them, and externalising of emotions – shouting, punching cushions, letting off steam. Students are asked to produce written accounts of their childhoods.

In the second half of the course, forgiveness of parents encouraged by methods such as holding imaginary conversations with them. The spiritual dimension is also vital at this point – nothing to do with conventional religion or any hocus pocus, just reconnection with a level of existence which we all have but which modern life distances us from. The group relationships are also very important. Revealing oneself to others and hearing their stories is cathartic but also, after the course, enduring mutual support is provided through regular get-togethers, telephone and email.

The Hoffman has only been going for ten years in this country, its originator having been (inevitably) an American, Bob Hoffman. At £2,200 it is not cheap, but then neither is psychoanalysis or cognitive behavioural therapies, and they usually take longer than eight days. Tim Laurence, the director of the UK Hoffman Institute, has written a lively self-help account of it, *You Can Change Your Life*.