

*The Delicate Balance between Naming and Bearing,
Giving and Receiving, Rejection and Return to the Other:
A Levinasian Exploration of Holding Pain*

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How does the dance between naming our pain and bearing it unfold in the therapeutic encounter? How does the therapist confront her own psychological work in order to find the Other in always evolving newness rather than mere reflections of the Same? Each of us holds psychological and physical pain in a certain way, in particular bodily comportment, in a situated style that allows us to cope and continue living. As therapists, we are typically the patient's first pass in allowing an opportunity for our pain to be named. Yet, this pain is neither easily named nor born. Patients seek help exactly when their pain has become too great to bear alone, and even then, it is not easily named. Often, as therapists we are rejected in our deeply reassuring and compassionate gaze because the pain that we look upon (and even feel within ourselves) is too great for the patient (and, at times, the therapist) to bear. There is a fine and delicate balance between what we may want to give as therapists and what the patient is capable of receiving at any given time. In this paper, I will explore this delicate therapeutic balance in the stories of how I have lived this and how my patients have told me they have experienced it. I will also explore how Levinas' words and philosophy have tethered me to a firm belief in the ever-deepening healing possibilities for the Other.