
The poetry of therapy

Creating effectiveness after Erickson

Robert McNeilly



AN ENHANCED EBOOK

Dedication

*This book is offered as a humble gesture of appreciation of the continuation of
Milton Erickson's heritage into the future.*

RM

Introduction

Not another book about therapy!!!

Scott Miller & friends wrote about effectiveness in therapy and quote Lambert [1999] attributing 40% to client factors, and Wampold [2001] claims 87% is down to client factors!

In learning to be effective in our work, the emphasis has been on technique [Lambert says 15%, Wampold says 0 – 1 %], placebo [Lambert says 15%, Wampold says 6%] and the therapeutic relationship [Lambert says 30%, Wampold says 6%].

We say “What about these client factors that

Lambert quantifies as 40% and Wampold as 87%?”.

The idea of client factors isn’t new. Following Erickson’s approach, we assume that we have problems when we become disconnected from some resource, facility, experience, and that we can move towards being OK when we can reconnect or learn this resource, facility, experience.

Plato challenged us – “Dare to be yourself!”. Shakespeare’s Polonius in Hamlet says “To thine own self be true, then it shall follow like night follows day, that thou can’st then be false to no man”. So much of Lao Tzu’s writing point to trusting ourself, the universe, the way things are [Tao]. Erickson spoke recurrently about trusting our unconscious and gave as an example the idea that it’s a pleasure to approach something that you think you’re going to fail at, and succeed, and it’s just as much a pleasure to approach something that you think you can succeed at and fail thoroughly, because it’s in our failures that we can access our unconscious abilities – the ones that everyone has.

Lao Tzu writes in chapter 1: "... Ever desireless, one can see the mystery. Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations. ...” and as we explore the “manifestations” together, we are also wanting to “manifestations” together, we are also wanting to honour the “mystery”. None of what follows is of any importance other than to be steps towards something - steps that after they are taken are best forgotten, like any learning progression.

The context of this exploration invites a shift from what can we do to fix clients, to how can we learn to be, to assist each individual client to reconnect with their own innate resourcefulness and learn; what sensitivities can we develop? What observations, ways of being can we learn to be more sensitive to?

For the therapist

The gentle art of listening

Listening is recognised as an essential part of effective counselling, but what is listening? What are we doing when we are listening? What is effective listening? Rafael Echeverria claims that we usually think of speaking as the primary component of language, with listening taking a secondary role, whereas when we listen, speaking can follow seamlessly. He claims that listening is primary, with speaking following.

Martin Heidegger spoke of us humans as “The always, already listening that we are.”

I take this to be an observation that we all have an automatic place we observe [listen] from, and often this is transparent to us just as the air we breathe is transparent, and the water a fish swims in is transparent.

This automatic, transparent experience allows us to move easily through our living without needing to attend to our context, leaving us free to explore and play.

As long as our living is functioning well, the transparency is best left outside our awareness. However, if

there is an interruption, or a block to the smooth running of our living, then attending to this transparency can open additional options and possibilities for us.

It is with this concern in the background that I offer my observations about our transparent experience of listening so we can increase our options as therapists, and assist our clients to increase their options.

Some clients will tell their story and go away cured. What was missing for them was to have an opportunity to relate their story. But it's more than them just making noise, or they could have spoken their story to the wind.

Whether it is recognised or not, a major factor is the client's experience of being “heard” or what we might prefer to call “listened”. If they experience us as bored, or judgmental, they are less likely to be helped than if they feel we are genuinely interested, accepting, and appreciated.

Our listening can be a healing gift for them.

Other clients want something more or different. And the only way we can be useful is to explore, with them, just what they are wanting. This exploration will happen from our listening.

These are just two ways that listening can be a crucial contributing to our healing art.

Even after listening is recognised as an essential part of effective counselling, communicating, relating we are left with some questions:

What is listening?

What are we doing when we are listening?

What is different when our listening is effective or ineffective?

Rafael Echeverria of Newfield Consulting claims that we usually think of speaking as the primary component of language, with listening taking a secondary role, whereas when we listen, speaking can follow seamlessly. He claims that listening is primary, with speaking following.

When we listen, we also build a story about the future.

This is taken care of by addressing the question about the speaker's concerns. What is at stake here is the way the listener listens to those actions as affecting his/her future.

As therapists and human beings, how can we put ourselves aside so the other has an opportunity to appear and be heard [listened]?

how can we listen ... ?

how can we
listen ... ?
we can listen
all too well
to our own thoughts-self
all too easily loud
to our own self-aware
how can we
listen ... ?

how can we
listen ... ?
through our deafening
head-machinations
through our half-remembered
half forgotten petty-worries
how can we
listen ... ?

how can we
listen ... ?
to the silent screams
through others teeth-clenched
to the silent smile
through others' mouth corners-u-turned
to the silent laugh
of others' eyes corner-smiling
to their soul moth-flapping
against our mumbled ears
how can we
listen ... ?

What is needed for listening to happen?

Here are some observations ...

Acceptance that others are different from ourselves.

Acceptance of the other as a legitimate other.

We share a common way of being [human being].

We have the same being, but different selves.

Dismissing the other, questioning their legitimacy, claiming superiority, claim privileged access to the Truth, will restrict our listening

Walt Whitman pointed to this when he said "I am large, I contain multitudes." We contain the possibilities of any other human being. The Roman, Terence once wrote: "Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto" ("I am a man: nothing human is alien to me").

Observations for developing effective listening include context, mood, personal background, trust - sincerity, competence, reliability, always from the historical background in which we live which is usually transparent.

Rafael Echeverria wrote "Listening is not a simple phenomenon. Many factors intervene in the way we listen and in the way we are listened to. However, from our old understanding of language it is difficult to grasp what listening is really about. We claim that in a world with the diversity of ours, listening has become a major issue in ensuring effective communication. Today we must learn to listen better to be able to live together in harmony. This is necessary when we relate as couples, in communities, at work, in the marketplace, etc. It is valuable to develop a new understanding of what listening is about. This will open for us the possibility of competence in effective listening."

Listening TO / FOR / FROM

Listening TO:

We usually think of listening as related to hearing, a function of tuning in to sounds or noises and making sense of them. We think of listening as an action of listening TO someone or something.

We can listen to

Ourselves - our self talk, thoughts, judgements, reactions,

The client - what they are saying, not saying, feeling, not feeling, doing, not doing.

Their concerns, who the ARE.

Listening FOR:

If we attend to our experience when we are listening, we can notice that we are also always listening FOR something.

A car mechanic will listen TO a car engine, listening FOR particular noises, FROM his embodied experience so he can fix a problem.

In a problem solving approach, we will ask “What’s wrong?”

And will then listen for

Information, understanding, pathology

To construct a diagnosis

So we can fix / treat

A clients language - words, phrases.

In a solution approach, we will ask “What’s missing?”

and we are then more interested to listen for

Resources, strengths, times when the problem is less intrusive or even absent

Ways to reconnect the person with this missing resource

so they can get on with their lives.

Whatever approach we use, we will always be listening FOR something.

Listening FROM:

Heidegger spoke of us humans as “The always, already listening that we are.”

We are always listening FROM our selves

our structure,

our past, present, future,

our culture,

our beliefs.

In a metaphoric sense we can also say that we are listening FROM different parts of our body.

We can listen FROM

our head [with our intellect],

our heart [with our emotions],

our gut [with our intuition],

our totality [with our soul].

So we can now say that we are always listening To something, FOR something, and FROM somewhere,

and seeing this opens an area of observation and learning. Since we humans have the capacity reflect, we can listen to our listening. We can listen to what we are listening to, for, and from and learn.

Openness: the fundamental posture of listening - repeating ...

What is needed for listening to happen?

Acceptance that others are different from ourselves.

Acceptance of the other as a legitimate other

We share a common way of being [human being]

Same being, different selves

Dismissing the other, questioning their legitimacy, claiming superiority, claim privileged access to the Truth, will restrict our listening

Creating expectancy ...

Bill O'Hanlon commented that Erickson's approach was like "Rogers with a twist". But what is the twist? It has been summarised as "accept and utilise", and Erickson is quoted in Haley's *Advanced Techniques* - "In the process of living, the price of survival is eternal vigilance and the willingness to learn. The sooner one becomes aware of realities and the sooner one adjusts to them, the quicker is the process of adjustment and the happier the experience of living." But what do we learn and how? And how can we adjust?

Exploring the clearing and the space of nothingness can be a way of creating the experience of unconditional positive regard, of accepting, of how to be vigilant, but what about the "twist", the "utilise", the "learning and adjusting"? Werner Erhard commented "The

truth is obviously what's so, but not so obvious, it's also so what?"

It can be too easy to catch a client's mood of resignation, which is always present in any problem. We have all had the experience of a session where the client is not helped and we feel worse! It can be equally easy for a client to catch our mood of expectancy, which is always present in moving towards a solution. We have all had the experience of a session where the client was helped and we feel the benefit also!

I am using the word "expectancy" to point to a mood of openness to a possibility, different from "hope" which I am using to point to a mood of passive wishing, close to "hopeless", like a pregnant schoolgirl rubbing her stomach with vanishing cream, or a lovesick schoolboy trying to have a girl fall for him by buying her an ice cream. The expectations of hope foster disappointment.

"Expectancy", then, is an active readiness, a lively attentiveness to the smallest sign of that possibility, without expectations. A child can have a mood of expectancy that Santa Clause will bring a gift at Christmas and hope it will be a red bicycle. The greater the expectations, the greater the disappointment. Seneca advised that happiness happens by lowering our expecta-

tions, perhaps like Erickson writing of becoming aware of realities [see above].

When we are expectant, in a mood of expectancy, without expectations, what is happening? What are we doing, thinking? I notice that there is a peaceful anticipation, which is colored by impatience only when expectations are there - a readiness to respond to the possibility, eyes wide open, raised eyebrows, soft face, slightly open mouth, shoulders back, spine straight.

We can, of course, experience expectancy in a limiting way also, and this can also be useful to explore – the same process, with different direction or focus. Paranoia is a mood of expectancy that something bad will happen, while “psychotic optimism”, which Bill O’Hanlon says he lives in, assumes that at any moment the universe will get us in some delightful way.

Not knowing and curiosity?

As human beings we all like to know what's happening, what's predictable, what we can rely on. Without these we could hardly function in our daily lives. They form the foundations of our existence both individually and socially; their transparency is essential. And at the same time, these certainties limit us.

When we know something, we close any possibility of discovering anything new. If we can recognise that there may be some things that we don't know, then learning becomes possible. Hence "In a beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in an expert's mind very few." If we can cultivate our beginner's mind, we can avoid some blindness – the blindness that is created when we don't see that we don't see, or we don't know that we don't know.

Lao Tzu writes that the words that can be written are not the eternal words, and those that lecture do not know; those that know do not lecture. Maturana reminds us that everything that has been said has been said by someone.

So how does this relate to us as human beings, as therapists? How is the relevant to our clients? If we were to always look for what we have been overlooking, always being self aware, life would be tedious, dry, deadly, but in any problem situation – life or clinical – we can look, discover, disclose, create some limiting certainty that we had been blind to, and by recognising this allow for new options to appear.

As long as we persist with the position that we know, then these will be alienated, negated, and closed to us. When we begin from this place of "I don't know", we can ask, observe, learn, be curious, and in that experience there is the possibility of the other options appearing for the first time. As soon as we recognize that we don't know, then there is a space in our perception, a space in our experience for other possibilities to appear, perhaps for the first time.

Simply by being curious, new possibilities can be created, perhaps without us even needing to know what they are ... or even ... know that they are.

Julio Olalla made the following observations about the 3 related emotions of confusion, perplexity, and wonder.

In confusion, we don't know what's happening and we don't like it.

In perplexity, we don't know what's happening, and we're not sure if we like it or not.

In wonder, we don't know what's happening, and we like it.

We can also notice subtle differences between curiosity, exploration, wonderment and play.

In curiosity, we look AT; there is movement; it's about something.

In exploration, we look FOR; there is movement.

In wonderment, we look AS PART OF; there is stillness.

In play, we are enjoying with no purpose; there is movement.

Significance! and triviality

“Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher. Vanity of vanities - all is vanity.” Ecclesiastes I:2.

Julio Olalla spoke in a coaching programme I did based in USA in 1994 of how a mood of **significance** or self-importance can limit us, and easily flip into **triviality**. “Important” people can trivialise their rivals as a way of maintaining their own status, or trivialise any criticisms to avoid dealing with them. Fundamentalism is close by, as is Thanatos, the spirit of death, as well as Prometheus, the embodiment of noble suffering, in a mood of heaviness.

Rafael Echeverria in the same programme contrasted this with being **serious** and **playful**, which can bring a mood of lightness, flexibility, and accompanied by Eros, the spirit of life, and Dionysus, the embodiment

of fertility and expansiveness. He also said that “Life is too serious to be taken heavily”.

Fernando Flores even defines passion AS **serious play**, which is a delightful invitation.

Respect and the relationship will be an essential elements here, so that if they are in place, a mood of lightness can be brought into circumstances which might seem unlikely, including life threatening illness, severe suffering. I have been recurrently impressed with the usefulness for clients when serious play is introduced as a background mood.

Erickson commented that clients have enough grimness in their problem without having grim therapy as well, and his joy in living with his awful pain demonstrated this daily. “Why don’t people have more fun in life?” was a recurrent question.

For the relationship

Core assessments & strengths

Since we always bring ourselves to our therapeutic conversations, we can look to see how we can enhance our capacity to be a space for therapy to occur in as well as acquiring and extending our therapeutic skills. We already know from our training that we are characteristically the last to know of our limitations because of our biological blindness to the obvious - a dog can't smell his own smell. Our limitations can be transparent to us while being very obvious to others. The same applies to our strengths, what we have conserved throughout our experiences.

I invite us to look, together, at core assessments that have limited us, core strengths that have sustained us, personal prejudices that are limiting as well as those that we are unwilling to give up, at taboos and personal

passions, at moods and their embodiment, whether helpful or not to enhance our effectiveness in our work.

Core Assessments and Strengths

Assessments are judgments we make to find our way round the territory of our life. They are essential for our life, and provide a possibility of consistency and predictability in an ever increasingly complex world. Maturana says that everything said is said by someone, and when we make an assessment, it is we who make the assessment. One of the dilemmas and delights of our linguistic nature is the way we can so easily forget, and so easily be reminded that our assessments are ours, and often say at least as much about the assessor as that being assessed. But how can we see our seeing? How can we grasp our right hand with our right hand?

Often we carry an assessment given to us when young as an uninvited offering by an authority figure. They can also be social eg the question "When does life begin?". In our western culture we define life's beginning as either conception or breathing air, but in one South American culture, life begins when a baby suckles the mother's breast. This allows the parent to "kill" a twin

without guilt, since the child was not alive, having not suckled the mother's breast. The power of assessments is that we can then live that assessment as if it were the truth about us.

A teacher tell us that we are lazy or intelligent, and we live the rest of our lives as if laziness or intelligence were a personal characteristic that shapes our very existence. "Life is tough", "no pain, no gain", "I'm OK" - there is a litany of them and they live as clichés in the background of our conversations and either erode or enhance our peace and personal satisfaction. They can be either a source of deep suffering and can drastically limit our effectiveness, or a source of strength, so they warrant our serious attention.

Assessments about our strengths can be in the background in a valued way, and by articulating them, we can give even more attention to them. If we notice that being respectful, flexible, loving, accepting, straight, slow ... is important to us as an individual, we can explore the possibility of developing these to a greater degree and make even more effective use of them.

Assessments are closely related to moods and so if we have an unhelpful mood which limits our effectiveness, working with the assessment can help to shift that mood to a preferable one. If we can identify a strength,

we can identify a helpful mood which can add to our effectiveness, and allow that preferred mood to be learnt.

Personal Prejudices

We all have them, and we are determined to keep some of them, and what human being wouldn't? There are some however, that we have and don't know how to shift them and others which we don't know we have, that we would gladly shift.

I am embarrassed now to recall that throughout my graduate days I had a prejudice against Asians. At the time, it seemed totally appropriate, and it was only after getting to know an Asian colleague personally that the prejudice dissolved. I was later shocked to discover that I had a prejudice against homosexuals. The discovery was sufficient to disperse the prejudice. I am sure I have many more, but those had the potential to be so limiting in my work had they not been resolved.

It is the unwanted or transparent prejudices we are concerned with here, so that by making them apparent, we can put any shame or guilt aside, and have the opportunity to learn.

The wanted, and often equally transparent useful prejudices can also be articulated, learnt, and serve to legitimise our very being.

Taboos

All societies have them. They serve useful social functions, but we want to make sure that we don't limit the opportunities we offer our client by our own, or our adopted societal taboos.

Topics such as sex, money, power, death, disabilities, helplessness, suffering, physical pain have a rich potential to limit our conversations. If a client has an issue to be dealt with in any of these or related areas, we will be most useful to them if we attend to the client's experience here. Ours can be dealt with in supervision.

This obviously does not demand that we transcend or include them, although that is one possibility, but at the least, it will be helpful for us to define them, own them, and be willing to state them to a client if relevant.

Moods

Humberto Maturana speaks of moods and emotions as domains of action and pre-dispositions to action. Julio Olalla speaks of emotions as the surface activity and moods as the deep currents of our emotional life. Fernando Flores speaks of emotions as being personal and moods being social. They are areas we have some skill in observing, but as we see from our work in hypnosis, that we can have some influence here - an opportunity to explore designing.

We can ask a client, and hence ourselves or colleague what moods may be limiting their or our fullest expression of ourselves. We can also speculate about what moods would serve us better, and we can gain access to these desired moods, learn them, and make use of them.

The Body

Emotions which persist can transform into moods, and moods and emotions can become embodied. Rafael Echeverria says that how we stand is how we stand in life, and how we move is how we move in life. It can be a delightful exploration to wonder what moods we may have embodied, so that by observing that, we have

some freedom, and there is also an opportunity to design.

As with moods, we can define unwanted embodied conversations, and also define, access, learn and utilize more desirable body movements, some new steps or rhythms in the dance of life, as an example.

Trust me ... mmm?

Trust is a fundamental human social emotion. Trust creates the context for us living together peacefully and satisfyingly. We all know this, but how can we “do” trust? How can we trust, apart from blindly hoping?

Fernando Flores spoke of three aspects of trust – sincerity, competence and reliability. All are, he claims, assessments that we make for the sake of coordinating future actions.

Sincerity, he says, is an assessment that we make of another that **at the time of speaking** what someone is saying is coherent with what they are thinking. Their private talk fits with their public talk. If we assess insincerity, we are likely to think of the other as a liar.

Competence is an assessment we make about the ability or capacity of another to perform a task – “Can they do it?”.

Reliability is yet another assessment that we make about another’s ability to dance with their promises. It’s an assessment that helps us to predict whether the other will keep their promises, or if they find they are unable to, will let us know as soon as possible.

Importantly, if someone is unreliable, we can ask for guarantees; if they are incompetent, they can learn; but if we assess that the other is insincere [lying], we usually find it impossible to relate to this person. We don’t know what’s happening; we don’t know where they’re coming from.

Just as important is our tendency to assume that whenever aspect of trust is in question, that sincerity is the aspect that is in question, and frequently this is not so.

By exploring the aspect of trust that may be missing or wanting in any specific experience, we can more accu-

rately and usefully assess and take care of the situation.

We have an automatic responses to trusting.

Some people are automatically trusting, without questioning, and wonder why they are repeatedly hurt and betrayed. Naiveté is the result and naiveté demands betrayal. Others are automatically distrusting and wonder why their life is so small and empty of intimacy, resulting in paranoia.

Prudence offers a middle way, beginning with distrust built on solid past evidence, and importantly allows a window of trust, so that the possibility of future trust can emerge. The end of The Cold War is a powerful and dramatic example of prudence in action.

Fernando Flores in his important book with Solomon, "Building Trust" speaks of Simple trust as the kind of trust that a child has, and distinguishes Adult trust as a way of living into the future which recognizes that betrayal is a possibility, but nevertheless continues - with this awareness. He invites us to shift our focus from our trustworthiness to purposely generating trust in our relationships with others. Because trust can be thought of as a mood, when we generate trust in ourselves, we

are more likely [but not certain] to evoke trust in the other.

This willingness requires a risk on our part, and at the same time, it is very familiar to us in our use of presuppositional questions with clients in which we assume competence [generating self trust] at times when the client has doubts [lack of self trust]. We can assist them to move beyond any cynicism which Flores defines as a refusal to trust and create the possibility of trusting.

If you're interested, you could have a conversation with someone and allow yourself to risk trusting them to be able to resolve their dilemma. How did you create the mood of trust in yourself? How did you maintain that? How did you recognize the beginnings of the enhancement of self-trust in the other?

Closer ... but not too close

Creating intimacy ...

We humans are intimate creatures. We crave it, we need it, if we don't have it we suffer on many levels, and yet because of the openness that is such an integral aspect of intimacy, it has the potential to hurt us. Intimacy is fraught and we humans can take a whole lifetime to even begin to be able negotiate the complex and rewarding tangle that intimacy is.

And what is intimacy? What are we experiencing when we say we are experiencing intimacy? What are we thinking, doing? What is happening with our body?

Mostly people speak of connection, openness, vulnerability, dissolving of personal boundaries, and comment that it keeps company with a cluster of emotions

including trust, communicating, genuineness, respect, humility. There is often a softening around the eyes, and face generally, which may extend to the body as a whole.

In a therapeutic relationship, we can begin with our own mood of vulnerability and trusting uncertainty, genuinely curious about what the client can discover and make more use of.

We can help to generate a mood of intimacy by intentionally coordinating our body posture, eye blinking, breathing with a client consistent with Maturana's claim that communication IS coordination of action.

By attending to another's experience, focusing on them, allowing our own self-awareness to be in the background, we can begin to be in the other's "clearing", to use Heidegger's idea.

We can soften our face, focusing in particular around our eyes. We can soften our shoulders, chest muscles, stomach, legs and hands. Tilting the head can add a subtle shift towards tenderness on occasions.

None of these are in any way universal rules, merely guides to increase our ability to observe, become sensitive, and learn.

Restoring our boundaries

Sometimes after a client leaves, we are left with a regret that there was too much connection, or that we didn't like the connection, or even experience it as an intrusion. On other occasions, they seem to have left something behind, like a bad smell or a bad feeling.

It can be helpful then to reconnect with our own space, our own sensations, by attending to our own breathing, the sensations in our feet, to notice our breathing.

These actions can assist in re-establishing our own boundaries, our own integrity after it has been diminished or even temporarily lost.

Rituals can also be helpful – brushing ourself down, shaking our arms or feet, to “shake the person off”, having a cup of tea, go for a walk, remove the chair the client was sitting on.

CHAPTER 4

For everyone

I believe - you're wrong!

What are beliefs? When we say “I believe ...” what are we saying? What are we experiencing?

Beliefs usually appear in religious situations or as a way of expressing an opinion; “I believe in God” or “I believe it is going to rain today”. So beliefs appear when we don't or can't have proof; when facts or evidence are not available. “Are you going to do your homework?” can lead to “I believe so” as a way of expressing uncertainty.

Yet, “I believe” can lead to “Can you prove it?” in arguments.

The word “belief” has its origin in ancient English from the root “lief” which the word “love” shares, and means “to hold dear”. It follows that when we believe some-

thing, we are holding it as dear to us, important to us, as an activity with which we concern ourselves [a translation of the German word Heidegger uses – “besorgen”]. Looking for facts, for evidence, for proof becomes irrelevant.

It is then legitimate to answer the question “Why do you believe ...?” with “Because I do” or “Because it's important to me” or simply “Because”? It is then also ridiculous to tell someone that they *should* believe something. How can we tell someone else what *should* be dear or important to them?! Faith can be one defence against the contemporary scientific imperative to find an explanation, but faith then is a truism – an explanation we use when we don't have an explanation and want to seem as if we do.

Beliefs then, instead of generating conflict, can appear in conversations that evoke emotions of respect of differences, of honoring something or someone, of humility in the presence of mystery, of standing under some experience greater than us [as contrasted with wanting to understand it]. Beliefs are personal, personally experienced, personally important. They are a deep aspect of our human beingness. They come from our past, they are always present, and ... they shape our future.

Beliefs are a core aspect of who we are as an individual human being, in our personal and work relationships and in our interactions with society. Beliefs are more than position statements and opinions. They shape our actions and interactions. Murderers and conservationists murder and conserve out of their beliefs.

But where do beliefs come from? Do we inherit them? Are we inculcated with them? Do we make them up?

I notice they are

- social, not personal;
- declared, not factual;
- transparent, living in self-reinforcing stories;
- can be either limiting or enhancing;
- enhancing if they assist connecting or experiencing.

When you have a wanted or unwanted reaction to an experience, what belief might be driving this reaction?

What happens when you recognise the belief as a belief?

What actions, or learning could you take to consolidate or dissolve this belief?

Learning?

Learning is a topic that's very dear to me. I realise that for as long as I can remember, learning has been a thread that's run through my life and has interested me. One of the frustrations that I had in my medical training was that I had to learn facts. It was more like training and I didn't learn very much that was useful in my university days. My medical learning started after that.

Learning about hypnosis, I was instructed to do this, memorise this, repeat this, follow this; as if there were some set procedure to follow, and it took me two years to learn how scary hypnosis was.

When I first met Erickson, my experience was very different. He created a whole different mood. He spoke about problems as being learnt, so that if we have a

problem, we have the opportunity to unlearn whatever was problematic, or to learn something new or more useful. He said "All of our life we are learning" and he lived that. When I was with him in 1980, I said goodbye on the Friday and he was dead 10 days later. In that week when I was with him he was still very alert and very interactive; I would say he was learning. Here's this old cripple with about 1½ muscles left in his body, nearly dead, and he was still learning and still lively!

It seems to me that there's a very close link between learning and liveliness. If you want to kill someone you train them. If you want to kill someone or let them develop Alzheimer's, then put them in a place where they're not learning anything. But as long as we're learning, its like aerobics for the soul, it is enlivening.

So when we speak about learning, what are we actually alluding to? We learn to walk, to talk, and to do many complex tasks, but how do we do this? What is happening when we say we are learning? A traditional notion has been that learning involves the transmission of information from someone more learned [a teacher] to someone less learned [a student]. Maturana points out that our human biology doesn't include "holes" in our central nervous system for information to "get in", so what is happening?

Recently teacher training has shifted the emphasis from techniques for teaching to exploration of learning, and with this comes the shift from theories of teaching to individual learning styles – a shift of focus from teacher to student; from teaching to learning. This is an honoring of the best of “education” [from the Latin “educare” – to **draw out**] nothing to do with putting in!

Maturana further says that learning is an emotion and begins when the student takes the hand of the teacher. It includes trust, respect, and an opportunity to explore experiences without fear of punishment for making “mistakes”.

This emotional space is dear to me, and one that I cherish.

In our work, problem solving gives way to solution creating through learning. We can approach any problem or stuckness as an invitation to learn. In our personal or professional experiences, this can open a delightful mood of wondering, with each individual circumstance, about what learning is missing, how we can assist this, how we have learnt previously, what might be some small beginning towards learning that might be relevant ... and in all this wondering, to explore with a willingness to discover at any moment ... *“Ten years*

searching in the deep forest - Today great laughter at the edge of the lake.”

When you reflect on how you have learnt what you have learnt – in your personal or professional life – what was helpful to you? What emotion was present for you? How was your teacher with you that was helpful? When you had trouble learning, what emotion was present? What emotion would have been more useful? For your future learning, how can you create an emotional space to support your learning? Who could support that experience?

If there were some specific learning you were interested to explore for your work, what, how, who might be relevant?

“In the process of living, the price of survival is eternal vigilance and the willingness to learn. The sooner one becomes aware of realities and the sooner one adjusts to them, the quicker is the process of adjustment and the happier the experience of living.”

Milton H Erickson p442 in Haley’s Advanced Techniques.

Overview

Can it be simple and easy?

“Life would be very simple if it weren’t for man’s love of complications.” Voltaire.

When I first heard about Erickson I was intrigued ... but by what? When I saw the “Artistry” video I was enchanted ... but by what? For someone who was almost totally limited physically, he was amazingly light on his feet. He invited a dance which I see as an invitation to soften any unhelpful rigidities; he seemed to attend more to the movement of the client’s mood and thinking than to the content of what they said. It was this attention to the client’s experience, their dance, which he observed and joined in, always encouraging anything useful and messing with anything unhelpful which has disturbed many critics, who, in looking for the dance techniques, miss the movement, the music ...

Erickson’s invitation to accept what the client brings and utilise it is delightfully seductive, and when he speaks of taking what life dishes up to you and make the best of it can add to our settlement, but when he suggests to trust your unconscious mind he is perhaps being most evocative. To trust what we are not conscious of – that requires trust indeed – and highlights the mood of distrust which is so deep and transparent in our present culture, and is always a pivotal concern in transforming problems into solutions.

When I heard Lao Tzu’s two and a half thousand year old declaration that *“Knowing nothing needs to be done is the place we begin to move from”* [#64] I felt comforted and at the same time perturbed ... is this an invitation to be lazy, apathetic, and join The Lotus Eaters?

I came across one of Osho’s numerous books in which he quotes Chuang Tzu *“Easy is right. Begin right and you are easy. Continue easy and you are right, The right way to go easy is to forget the right way and forget that the going is easy.”*, and asked myself if it is acceptable to look for the easy way.

When I peel a boiled egg, I look for the easy way. When I park my car, I look for the easy way. When I shop or pay my bills, I look for the easy way. I do these

and numerous other activities, looking for and appreciating the enlivening experience of the easy way ... but in our important activities – our relationships, our work, our lives even – surely this might be a cop out!

Maturana wrote some beautiful words on page 72 in his paper on intimacy: *“Human beingness is a work of aesthetics as a life lived in loving easy coherence with the cosmos which makes such a life possible.”*, and reading this reminded me of Heidegger’s notion of “Lichtung” or “The Clearing”, where we are so connected with all that is around us that we lose ourselves, our individual identities including our petty prejudices and small personal attachments as we connect and expand our experience in this spiritual connection.

When Pearls said to lose your mind and come to your senses, was he pre-empting Flores and Solomon:- *“This book, then, is attempting to develop sensitivities, not knowledge. Once one has a sensitivity to something such as food, decency, certain kinds of beauty, or even the pleasure of hiking, one is already on the path of refining and developing that sensitivity. One sees food, decent behaviour, beauty, and hiking trails in a new light. They draw one to them in a way they did not before. As one is drawn, time and time again, one then*

continuously develops one’s skills for dealing with what one is sensitive to.” “Disclosing New Worlds” [p39]

The expansive freedom I experience when I remember to be present, connected with myself and with my surroundings, is the easiest and most satisfying way for me to lose myself in my surroundings and be grateful.

Perhaps when Werner Erhard [from EST and Landmark Forum] claimed that every moment is an opportunity to transform your life, he may have been hinting at this ...

Erickson said that the important skills for us to learn are “To observe, to observe, and to observe”, and we can explore the joy of observing, being connected through our senses, learning sensitivities through recurrent activities, so we can learn the *“loving easy coherences”* and any time we are in trouble, we can explore what *“loving easy coherences”* we may be overlooking, and by reconnecting with these, to return to our full and natural participation in a *“cosmos which makes such a life possible.”*

... or is this too easy? ... or is this so obvious?

Afterthoughts

The clearing

Heidegger spoke of “lichtung” or lightening which also brings a mood of lightness and is translated as “the clearing”. This refers to the experience of walking in a forest, and suddenly “seeing” the forest as the forest. The forest appears out of the background, where we were unaware of it. We may have been thinking about something, feeling hungry, tired, excited, but unaware of the forest with our attention elsewhere. When we “see” the forest, we connect with it in a novel and holistic way. We are in a clearing – not a clearing like an absence of trees, but rather seeing that all the trees are there as part of the forest and seeing the forest as a totality – and there is something sacred about this experience, the sacredness of connecting with something greater or beyond ourselves. We could also call this a spiritual experience.

In “The Clearing” we disappear as an observer, and there is nothing between us and the forest. It is as if we, as observers, are not there. We are so present that we become part of the forest, and it doesn’t make sense to speak of us or the forest – we and the forest become “We-in-the-forest” to follow Heidegger. We become transparent.

Each clearing brings with it a unique set of assumptions, emotions, distinctions and observations, as well as its blindness, and there are as many clearings as there are observers. A group of people could enter a room, and the one room would show up very differently. An electrician might notice the lights, switches, power points. A decorator might notice the colour scheme, the style of the furniture, the ambience. A musician might notice the room’s acoustic properties, while a building inspector might be more interested in R.S.J.’s and position of fire extinguishers. Each would bring a coherent set of observations and look within that set, often unaware that they are observing from within that set, or there are other sets of observations or distinctions. They would usually be unaware of the particular observer that they happen to be, i.e. the par-

ticular clearing that that individual is standing in. In any clearing, the assumptions are given, obvious, unquestioned and so, transparent.

We are always in some sort of clearing, attending to some cluster of concerns, taking care of some collection of issues. Recognising this allows us to observe the clearing we happen to be in, and influence this by settling into it if it is a helpful clearing, or shifting to another, preferred clearing, by designing the shifting process and becoming more familiar with the desired clearing as well as the shifting process itself.

Because clearings are sets of distinctions in which we will be oriented towards taking care of certain concerns, predisposed to take certain clusters of actions, all of which will be related, consistent and coherent, clearings are related to emotions. “The Clearing’ can usefully be placed in the domain of language since is concerned with coordination of future action [Maturana’s definition of language] and just as usefully placed in the emotional domain since it evokes corresponding predispositions for action [Maturana’s definition of emotions]. To add to the texture, we could also place it in the body domain, since different clearings will call forth different bodihoods from the individual. More important

than placing it in one or other classification is to appreciate the richness of the notion.

A Learning Clearing

Learning can be a clearing in itself. In a learning clearing, that is to say when learning is happening as a transparent phenomenon, a whole variety of assumptions is operating in the background, usually unquestioned. To learn, we are already assuming that we don’t know something, and are willing to learn. We give authority to the teacher, putting our trust in the teacher, we put aside any prejudices we may have about the subject, our abilities, what we already know. We give ourselves permission to be a beginner; to make mistakes, to be corrected, to make the same mistakes as many times as it takes for us to adapt and learn. This provide for the opportunity for a new observer to emerge as a result of the learning, as an expression of that learning.

How can we Design a Clearing?

Just as we can put ourselves in a situation where we are more likely to feel this way or that, we can put our-

selves in our habitual therapy clearing and allow the ongoing interactions to happen spontaneously.

Such an experience might begin by allowing ourselves to become more attentive to external experiences – sights, sounds, smells – and at the same time less aware of internal experiences – we don't need to notice our feet on the floor, our increasing comfort, the easy rhythm of our breathing.

We could then recall the way we first began to learn to walk, or write, or ride a bicycle when we were able to give less and less attention to the mechanics of the process, and begin to allow the walking, etc., to become a more automatic function as we attended more fully to where we were walking, what we were writing, the journey as we rode the bicycle. This allowing of the awareness of the actions to drift into the background is mirrored in Erickson's comments about a learning "Dropping into your unconscious". We let go of the attention on the self and are freed to respond more fully to our surroundings – the ground, chairs, doors, bumps in the road, nuances of meaning ...

I have noticed that when I first began as a therapist, that it was easy to lose track of the client. I was so intent on getting it right, sticking to the theory, that I could even forget that the client was there, although such cli-

ents were well aware of my absence. As the learning settled in, or as I settled into the learning, the way of speaking just happens and I don't need to plan my sentences, the session – it begins to flow. It begins to flow just as our walking or writing flow.

A professional violinist was contemplating giving up his career because of increasing tension in his shoulders. He was comforted to be reminded that he had been playing that music for long enough to learn it thoroughly, so the next time he played publicly, he could tuck the violin under his chin and *let the violin play the music*. He could enjoy listening to the result, without any effort. A professional golfer overcame his putting problem by imagining that there was a groove in the green and the ball could easily roll along that groove into the hole. Perhaps he wouldn't even need to hit the ball, the ball might somehow get the club to hit it. Several years later, he was able to extend this learning and hit two holes in one at the one tournament.

When I was a discussant at the first International Ericksonian Congress, the third speaker began his presentation by announcing that although he had prepared a paper, he was not going to talk about it. This threw me into a panic since my prepared comments suddenly became irrelevant. When he sat down, and I stood facing

a sea of 2000 faces of world expert and had nothing to say, I could only open my mouth and listen to the words that emerged. Several people complimented me afterwards about the helpfulness of my comments.

We are, after all, all connected – all part of this universe. We all contain the common elements from the big bang all those eons ago, so it make perfect sense to see the connection between the fluttering of a butterfly's wings in the Amazon valley and a storm off the coast of Northern Scotland.

We can then wonder about how we can let go into this wonder, allow ourselves to trust ourselves to make the mistakes we can learn from, and explore the infinite possibilities our experience offers us in the process of being in each individual client's clearing.

Conclusion

One way of approaching the complex issues of working with people is to create a clearing which is ethical, respectful, human and matristic so we can share the process of enhancing our clients' experiences so that we are also nurtured.

The space of nothingness

Visiting “The Clearing” is one way of connecting. In visiting “The Space of Nothingness” we can explore a place for us to let go of any personal attitudes which might limit the client’s potential for learning.

Creating requires that we begin with nothing - anything else is mere rearrangement. We can only create a new house if we first clear the block or we are renovating. We can only create a new document if we begin with a blank page, otherwise we are editing.

One of the key characteristics of any form of effective learning is creativity – to get past any preconceptions of how we *should* be, change, respond, learn, and be open to them as they are. One option is to begin with some formulation, diagnostic schema, or pre-planned therapy format and apply it – a rearrangement of the cli-

ent. Even if this is their benefit, it assumes the wisdom and power of the therapist. Erickson invited us into another approach - to give the client as much opportunity as possible to explore their own experience, their own resources, their own learning goals and methods. This process is creative and requires that we remove anything in the way, so there is then *nothing* in our way of assisting the client to achieve their experience of having *nothing* preventing them from learning what they need, becoming how they wish, or perhaps really are.

Lao Tzu wrote 2 thousand five hundred years ago in Chapter 11 of his Tao Te Ching:

*“Thirty spokes share the wheel’s hub;
It is the centre hole that makes it useful.
Shape clay into a vessel;
It is the space within that makes it useful.
Cut doors and windows for a room;
It is the holes which make it useful.
Therefore profit comes from what is there;
Usefulness from what is not there.”*

We recurrently acknowledge the prime importance of listening and yet, knowing this, we still get distracted by our own thoughts, plans, knowing ... knowing that these relate to us and not the client is insufficient to

stop them. Finding some way to let go of our prejudices, our hopes, our wishes, will allow room for the client's to emerge and take shape. As one way of taking care of this continuing concern will be to visit "The Space of Nothingness", letting go of anything of us in the client's way will be an area of learning.

We can appreciate this, so why is it so difficult, or even near to impossible at times? A colleague reported feeling uncomfortable, saying she felt I was "teaching *at* her" in a conversation. Her comments had the effect of quieting my thoughts about what *should* be happening, and the resulting space, or *nothing*, opened my seeing of her so she actually appeared out of the blurred perception of her that I had unwittingly created. In getting to *nothing* I could put aside my projections, so we could begin to create a useful and relevant learning interaction together.

How often do our clients tolerate us not listening, hoping that one day, someone, anyone, **ANYONE** might see them, hear them, help them?

This brings the question "How can we listen to a client, when we are attuned to listening to our own thoughts about the client?" and invites exploration of quieting, if

not silencing our thoughts, or perhaps loosening our attachment to them. How can we get to visit this "Space of Nothingness"?

When I read Lao Tzu, chapter 56 of Tao Te Ching: "*Those that know do not talk. Those that talk do not know*" I was perplexed. Did that mean that any time I said something I was placing myself in the company of those who didn't know? It seemed to be a bind. The relief came when I remembered Erickson's invitation to "observe, observe, observe". This willingness to listen without the need to say anything, can allow us to say what is there to say, without trying to force the issue from a position of the expert. Listening allows for the sensitive response to the environment, the client's environment, so that our response related to the client, is relevant to the client, is a function of the client, not of our own expertise. How can we actually achieve this? How can ensure that our thinking and speaking doesn't interfere with our listening to our client? Perhaps sometimes silence ...?

Various writers have commented about this issue. The entry for January 14th 2001 in The Dalai Lama's Book of Daily meditations is: "Sometimes one creates a dynamic impression by saying something. And sometimes one creates as significant an impression by re-

maintaining silent.” Wittgenstein’s words “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one should pass in silence”, while they invite silence, also hint, to me, at a respectful listening without trying to explain, and in a mood of wonder and acceptance. Lao Tzu again points to this in chapter 64 of Tao Te Ching: “Knowing nothing needs to be done is the place we begin to move from” and this doesn’t necessarily mean we should sit paralysed, but rather to avoid pushing the river, and merely be part of the river’s natural tendency to remove any obstacles in its path so there is then *nothing* in the way of the natural flow. From Lao Tzu again in chapter 32, “Tao in the world is like a river flowing home to the sea.”

In “The Clearing” we can find ways to connect, blend, meld, merge with the other [person, forest, experience], allowing us to have the experience of *nothing* separating us - no boundaries, and permits an immediate gateway into a sacred realm. For me, this is the place to listen from, a place where listening becomes possible.

But there’s always *something*. This has even become a cliché. If it’s not the gas bill, it’s the car registration. If it’s not the cleaning, it’s the painting. If it’s not the lawn, it’s the garden – always *something* in the way of the *nothing* that we seek.

Also we humans are so intriguingly ambivalent. We can hang out for a holiday, and when it happens, we get bored. We are desperate for THE relationship, only to find ourselves singing the line from Peggy Lee – “Is that all there is? ...”

We know the bliss of *nothing* but seem to fall into filling that *nothing* with *something*, even *anything*. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, human nature abhors the experience of *nothing*. So there is an area for learning, for exploration, for wondering that emerges from this dilemma – how can we get past the *something*, the *anything*, and experience *nothing* so that what we are seeking has at least the possibility of appearing?

A person can sit, and even though there can be sensations, there isn’t really any need to attend to those sensations that don’t require attention. They can be there, somewhere in the background, but they can be ignored. Even though they are there, it can be as if they aren’t there at all.

A person can be reading, attending to the experience, having their own thought, making their own connections, creating their own learning, and at the same time, there is no need to count the words, recognise individual letters. They can disappear into the general experience of attending to the images, and even though

there are many potential diversions, these diversions seem to disappear and the texture, the experience of the story itself can be where the attention simply finds itself.

The same person can listen to music, to the sounds of nature, to the silence of a sunset, and even though there may be other sounds, even though there may be the sounds that are there, or the silence, all this can become background, and only the important and relevant sounds or lack of sounds can be what is attended to.

It is also possible for sensations, stories, pleasurable sounds to also begin to disappear, so then a rather delightful numbness, a sense of peace, and a silence can be there, perhaps the kind of peaceful silence that we could experience if we were in the middle of outer space, or in the middle of inner space, or in the middle of nowhere, or in the middle of somewhere, without needing or even wanting to be concerned about inner or outer, somewhere or nowhere, but simply, peacefully, completely free and immersed in the experience with nothing happening to disturb the fullness of the sense of peace and completeness.

We can look at the night sky, imagine being somewhere there, nowhere in particular, and watch the universe turn slowly and silently around that experience,

and in the experience of allowing such an experience, we can only wonder what might appear in the spaces between the planets; in the spaces between the stars, in the spaces between the spaces as we could look out into the infinite space that the universe is. To be in this experience and then return from it can be an opportunity to look with fresh eyes, listen with fresh ears, experience some event, place, person or interaction and experience it as if for the first time, with nothing in the way of that freshness, that newness, that immediacy.

As you experience whatever is happening at any moment, there is no need to attend to the experience in any particular way; no need to attend to sensations that are of no concern; no need to attend to noises that are not relevant; but simply, relaxedly, effortlessly, allow the experience that is happening to be an experience that can in some way become a space for some new appreciating, some new recognising, some new opportunities appearing, as if from nowhere, not needing to have a use that is immediately apparent, and perhaps only after, or not even then, so that in some way, there can be more room, more space, more opportunities to experience the wonder, the miraculous possibilities, the subtle and delightful experiences that are there, that we are, waiting to be experienced, whenever we take the time, create the space, allow the op-

portunity for whatever that might be to become visible, to appear out of nowhere, or somewhere, or wherever, so we have an opportunity to see them, to hear them, to experience them.

We can find ourselves sitting with a client, becoming absorbed in their experience, and allow any of our own thoughts, our own ideas, our own images, to drift into some silence, so not only can we disappear as an entity, not only can the client disappear as an entity, not only the floor, the walls, the ceiling, the furniture disappear into that same space, but there can then be an experience of total spaciousness and peace, which can then be experienced in any way that is of benefit, or value or use to the client, as they connect in their own way with their own resourcefulness – with the resourcefulness of the universe which surrounds them, and us, and contains an infinite variety of opportunities for learning, for developing, for experiencing.

And as with so many experiences, it's never necessary to fully or even partially recognise or understand the process of experiencing precisely what is needed to have that become a part of our reality, because, after all, reality belongs to the universe, and it can be such a wondrous delight to explore some small aspect of what

that might be, and how it might relate to us and to our future – individually and shared.

It is possible, then to have some awareness of this experience and have it exactly where it needs to be to be accessible, always with a sense of peace and fulfilment. And that is why I want to thank you for the opportunity to share this experience with you, and the less of me, the more of you can be available for your experience of what can be useful and relevant and satisfying for you, your future and your teaching and learning.

Conclusion

“The Clearing” is the direction of connecting with the client, and “The Space of Nothingness” is the place we begin to connect from.

A session

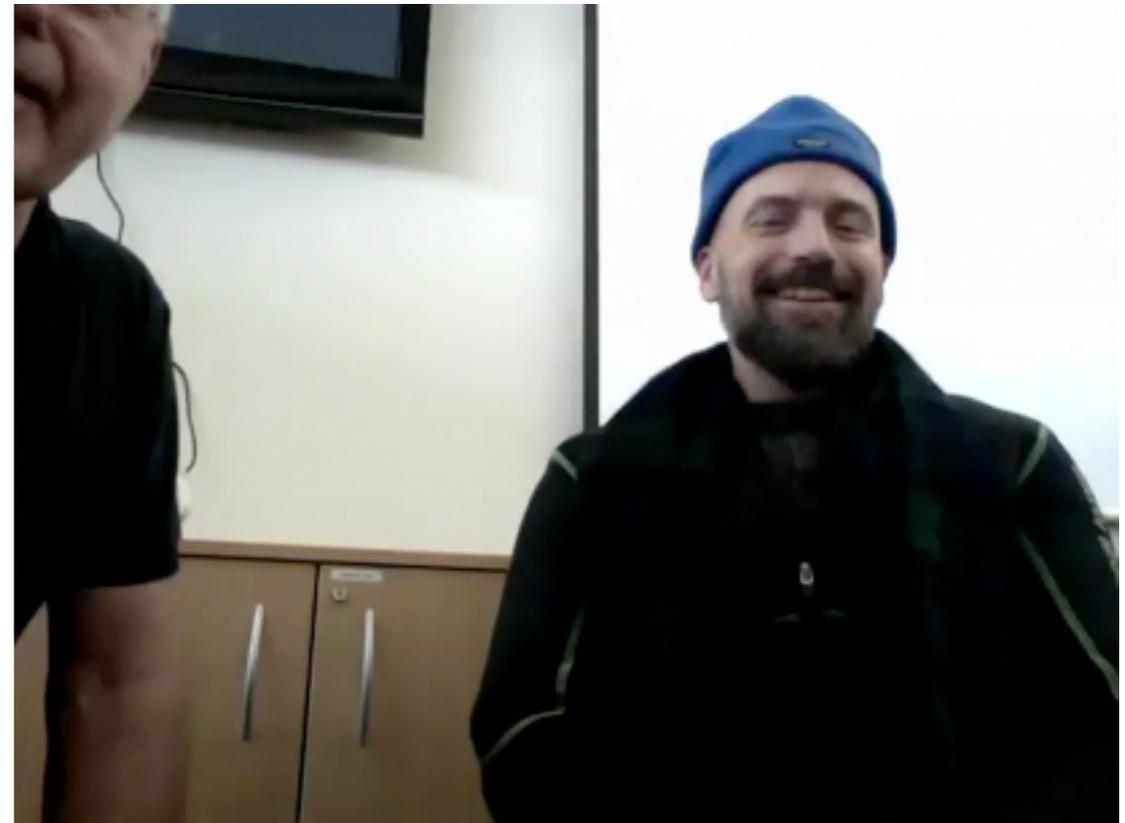
As you watch this video, it could be useful to be awake to the use of listening for resources, of creating expectancy, being curious, creating trust [self-trust in particular], and the experience of learning.

You might want to watch it several times, attending to each of these ideas in turn, or allow yourself to become more sensitive to the experience with each viewing.

The session is offered as an opportunity for you to explore in any way that is useful for you, not in any way to suggest that this is how a session **should** be created.

To watch this demonstration

[Click here](#)



A transcript:

Rob: So, Mark, thanks for being willing to play here and see whether it will be useful. And is it okay if we make a recording of this?

Mark: Yes.

Rob: For this group, is it alright if we record it for other people too?

Mark: Yes. Yes, yes, it's okay.

Rob: If you change your mind, let me know at the end of the session. That's fine too.

So what have you been up to?

Mark: Oh, lots of work. I've been enjoying getting on the bike again, riding the motorbike.

Rob: And do you notice how easy it is for you to just let yourself go into hypnosis?

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: You don't need to do that yet. You could tell me more about what you enjoy to do. It can be something about getting back on the bike again.

Mark: Yeah, that's right because I didn't ride much over winter. Well, it's still winter, but you know, in the dense of winter. And it's...

Rob: And you didn't ride much?

Mark: No.

Rob: And you hadn't been on your bike much over winter for a couple of months?

Mark: That's right, yeah.

Rob: And there are good reasons for that?

Mark: Hmm. Cold weather.

Rob: Cold weather.

Mark: Bronchitis.

Rob: But that's gone now? The bronchitis is gone?

Mark: Yeah, yeah. I'm in the clear.

Rob: You're in the clear.

Mark: I didn't even get lung cancer.

Rob: You didn't actually get lung cancer. Not yet, but you know, in maybe 60 years' time, I'll let you just enjoy the moment. But when you look back to that

bronchitis, I wonder whether there were times during that, those couple of months where you'd had at least some awareness of, you know, is this ever going to go or is this permanent? Am I stuck with this? Will I ever be able to get back on the bike again? Will I ever stop coughing?

Mark: It was dragging on.

Rob: It was dragging on. And what was the first sign that you, when you look back now, you perhaps didn't realise at the time, but if you look back now, what was the first sign that you now recognise that you didn't recognise at the time because it wasn't well enough developed to be recognised, that you were starting to get over that bronchitis.

Mark: Well I think, looking back on it, the first sign was my, well, I don't know, accepting that this was a problem.

Rob: Okay.

Mark: And that I - it was unacceptable. This was going to be dealt with and so that...

Rob: Okay. You accepted the fact that it was unacceptable and you're going to deal with it.

Mark: Yes, yes. So I went back to the doctor and I...

Rob: The old boy says that [the sage] isn't sick. It's not that he's not sick. It's that he's sick of sickness. And because he's sick of sickness, therefore he's not sick. So somehow you went back to the doctor and said this is unacceptable and you accepted the fact that it was unacceptable, which took you back to the doctor.

Mark: That's right.

Rob: That was the first step that you can now recognise looking back. And when you look back before that, was there some - what happened before you accepted the fact that it was unacceptable, when you look back now?

Mark: Well I was, I think, increasingly taking other actions like shiatsu massage and whatever. But at that point of that acceptance, I was impatient too. It was like enough already.

Rob: Aha. So you reached a certain point where enough already. And if you look back a little further than that, before you got to enough already?

Mark: It was starting to think, well, I need to actually do something more.

Rob: Need to do something more. And if you look back before that?

Mark: I was ignoring it and hoping it would go away and pressing on.

Rob: And when you were ignoring it and hoping and pressing on, things were just continuing? There was no...

Mark: Yes. Well, actually there was a point of minimising some things, but pressing on largely. The time before that was totally ignoring. So that's the two months we've just gone backwards though, I suppose?

Rob: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So when you started to run that forward again, you were ignoring it and then you started to notice it. You started to look at other options, realising that where you were was unacceptable. You started to look at other options and then somehow, something clicked and you didn't take up the other options, you went back to the doctor. Is that right?

Mark: Well I tried some of the other options.

Rob: You tried some of the other options.

Mark: And then I got [**inaudible 05:11**] it's obvious.

Rob: And so then you went to the doctor and whatever happened there? What was the first sign that you realised ah, something is improving here.

Mark: I think physically the clearing the lungs started.

Rob: And when the clearing of the lungs started, what was that like? Were you coughing less or were you...?

Mark: More.

Rob: You were coughing more? Aha. So you're actually getting into something to clear; you were doing something to clear it. Okay. So you actively were doing something or did that - did you just notice that? Were you doing something to clear your lungs or did you just notice?

Mark: Well I was taking some medication.

Rob: Taking medication.

Mark: And coughing up the phlegm.

Rob: Okay.

Mark: But as I said, you know...

Rob: But the coughing up was something that you didn't think, oh, I'm going to do something to make myself cough more. It - just, coughing up more was a consequence of taking medications. Is that right?

Mark: Yeah.

Rob: Okay. Alright. And then that progressed and you just kept coughing up more and coughing up more and when did the coughing up more start to subside? When did it start to...?

Mark: You know, probably within a week or so. There's another key part of it too, I think. Like before all that process, I'd gone to the doctor and had some treatments, but he hadn't listened to what I'd said in the first place. When I went back, I went back with a mission to get what I wanted in the first place.

Rob: Right.

Mark: And I got that and it worked.

Rob: Okay, so you knew what you wanted.

Mark: Yeah. I had a theory right at the beginning and he didn't listen to it.

Rob: Okay and you didn't have enough.

Mark: So I was going back to, yeah. So that was important. I took charge of it.

Rob: You took charge of it and you made sure that you were listened to.

Mark: Yeah.

Rob: Yeah. Okay and when you took charge and you made sure that the doctor listened to what you were saying, that's when things started to improve.

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: Okay. And I'm wondering is there any awareness at the moment in your experience of something starting to change? You know we're in a workshop about hypnosis and I'm wondering is there something that you can begin to notice that other people mightn't be aware of, but that you could begin to notice something's starting to change.

Mark: Uh-huh.

Rob: Yeah. So what is it that you wanted to work on her today?

Mark: Well, seeing you've, you know, we were looking at loss and grief and so forth, I recently, as I've told you, a week or so ago, I heard my dad's been diag-

nosed with cancer. And so that's what I thought I might talk about and my response to that. So it's sort of a - well it's not loss yet, but it's a loss of something.

Rob: Well, look, well the anticipation is that sometime in the future you'll look back and experience the loss. So you're looking to some future experience that's going to look back and look back on us.

Mark: And yeah, and it's also a loss of some plans or some things that we'd do together.

Rob: Yeah, sure.

Mark: Well, it might be. So it's a potential loss.

Rob: A potential loss, yeah. And if you were to - how can I say - be at the doctor to that experience of potential loss, what might that potential loss want you to hear so that you could respond to that so that that potential loss could take charge and initiate a process where things can start to heal? How could you be, as the doctor to that potential loss, how can you listen? What is that potential loss trying to get you if it knew what you needed, if it knew what it needed, if you were to listen, what it is telling you that it needs so that it can heal?

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: Because when you took your lungs to the doctor, you didn't let him know, your lungs didn't let him know what they wanted and what you wanted. And when you took your lungs and you took yourself and you let him know what you wanted, you heard it and things started to improve.

Years ago I went to a workshop that's called the Action Workshop. And in this workshop, the idea was put forward that language is action. It's how we speak that generates this or that kind of action. And I did that workshop in May of a particular year. Come the end of June, I sent all of my tax fees to my accountant and I said to him, I would like you to let me know, if you would, if you have time, when you can get around to it, what my tax situation is for this year.

And he said, oh, we'll do what we can. And that was on about the 1st or 2nd of July. By the end of July, I hadn't heard anything. So I rang him and I said, I'm sorry to bother you, but I wanted to find out about my tax situation. How are you doing with that? And he said, I'm sorry. We haven't got around to it. We've been a bit busy. We'll see what we can do.

At the end of August, I still hadn't heard. So I rang him and I said, you know, I've been asking about this

and haven't got anything. Yeah, well, sorry. We'll see what we can do.

A couple of weeks later, I was looking through the notes that I had made from that Action Workshop, that language. And I realised the way I had been speaking, didn't give that accountant the message that I wanted him to have. It was a pivotal moment for me.

So I rang him up. It was a Friday late morning and I said, I'm sorry that I haven't been clear with you, but I would like you to do whatever you need to do so that I can have those figures by the end of next week. And he said, well we've got a lot on our plate. I'm not sure that I can do that. And I said to him, I trust you sufficiently to know that you will do what you need to do to give me the figures by the end of next week before or 5 o'clock on Friday.

Four o'clock that Friday, I had a phone call from him. He told me exactly what I needed to know. And everything that he told me, I had in writing on Monday. And I realised that I got what I was wanting when I made it possible for him to hear what it was that I wanted. And when I did that then I got what I wanted and the situation would stop there.

So if you were to be the doctor and listen how could that potential future loss speak to you in such a way that you can hear because it knows what it wants, how can you listen to it? When you listen to it, what does it start to tell you? What do you start to hear? Not that you're working out a treatment plan or anything or prescribing anything, but what are you starting to hear? Yeah, that. What's that?

Mark: [inaudible 14:35].

Rob: Yeah. And you don't need to put it into words because we don't need to know. I can guess some of what it might be, but that will be related to my experience, not yours. I can't know what yours is. But are you starting to hear what that potential future loss is wanting you to hear? Are you starting to hear that?

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: And as you start to hear it, what do you see now that's going to be useful to take care of that? And again, you're welcome to say anything or you don't need to say anything at all. It's up to you. The important thing is that you start to notice, to recognise, like getting back on your bike again.

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: Is it starting to become clear to you what you can do?

Mark: Hmm. I don't mind talking about it. I think it's partly about - it's not either or, it's a both and. It requires a different strategy to what I've had before. My dad's had cancer a couple of times before and I've just not entertained the possibility that he wasn't going to survive it.

This time it's more serious and, whilst I don't want to psychologically, in some way, for myself, point the bone at him because I don't believe in that stuff and it goes against the grain of solution mode. I think, you know, in answer to your question earlier, what does that future loss want is the - it wants to be heard at some level, to be accept it as a potential or as a, you know - well, it's a thing anyway. It will have to listened to at some level, not just totally...

Rob: Well you're starting to accept that trying to ignore it is unacceptable.

Mark: Yeah, that's right. And that it doesn't need to be, ah, [roar]. I can't listen to it and then I can put it back on, you know.

Rob: Yes.

Mark: So I can give it short bursts of hearing without **[inaudible 17:23]**.

Rob: Like when you're on your bike sometimes you use your accelerator throttle, sometimes the brake. You know when to change gear, when to stop. You don't have to always drive in one gear. You don't have to always go full throttle. It doesn't have to be a throttle or a brake. It could be a throttle and a brake.

Sometimes there's some - and if you were to do that and listen to it in that way, as you're starting to do that, what do you notice in yourself is starting to happen for you in your body, in your emotions, in your thinking?

Mark: There's some shift in my stomach.

Rob: Yes. Towards?

Mark: Just some sensations that weren't there before.

Rob: Yes.

Mark: Well they're sort of more settling, I think.

Rob: Settling?

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: And that settling can come and go. You don't have to have it there all the time. And what else are you starting to notice that's right?

Mark: Yeah.

Rob: That's good. What started to happen now?

Mark: It's just quiet.

Rob: It's a feeling of quiet?

Mark: Hmm. Something comforting.

Rob: Comforting. Yeah, quiet, comforting. And as you are allowing yourself to be comforted by that, what happens to that future anticipation of loss? Is that also quieter?

Mark: No, saddened.

Rob: Yes. And do you notice with that sadness how that feels when you accept the sadness. You don't have to be sad all the time when you let yourself experience that sadness.

When Queen Elizabeth offered a comment after 9/11 to the American people, she quoted, oh, a line from a poem, which said that grief is the price we pay for car-

ing. Without caring, there would be no grief. Without caring, there would be no concern about loss.

What happens when I say that?

I think we've all had clients who say, I wish I'd had the chance to say this, that or the other before some - before this particular person died. If only I'd known, I would have told them, dah, dah, dah, dah. One of the things I'm so grateful to myself is that, before my father died, I had ample opportunity recurrently to let him know just how much I appreciated him.

My father died quite suddenly. He was digging in the garden. A few hours later he had a massive coronary. A couple of days later he was dead. There was almost no preparation, almost none. But in a way, I had done all that preparation before he even had his coronary.

You know, people say on their death bed, very few people say I wish I'd spent more time at the office. On someone else's deathbed, often people express regrets that they didn't say, they didn't do, they didn't express. And having some pre - having some warning, some indication.

Because you know that Canberra weather is cold, because you know that the battery for your motorbike

has a lot of work to do to start that motorbike, you brought that trickle charger. If someone didn't know, didn't have a warning about coldness, about the strain on the battery, they wouldn't know to get a trickle charge and they might not be able to start a bike.

And because you have that knowledge beforehand about Canberra winters, because you have that knowledge beforehand about the strain on that battery, you can do what you need to do to take care of it.

And when you look at that Triumph and you recognise just how it can pull you into a place of feeling more confident, you know about that. You don't need to wait until you come off that bike at 180km going around a corner and discover, just before you smash yourself into smithereens, oh, I think that was a little bit too fast. You already let yourself know that, accepting the challenge of that bike is unacceptable. So you can do what you need to do.

And there may be a sense of sadness if you sell that bike. There might be a sense of loss of future pleasure riding that bike because you really like it. I mean, I know it's only a bike, but it has some importance for you. But you are able to anticipate when you've got the time to do what you need to do.

And you hadn't ridden your mega bike for a couple of months. When you got back on it, you hadn't forgotten anything. In fact, it was a relief to get back on; a pleasure.

Now I can talk about different things and we all know that I have no right to be offering you advice. Who am I to be someone offering ideas to you? The important thing here is for us all to remember that this is your experience, not mine, happening within you, not within me. And allowing yourself to recognise the importance of accepting when something is unacceptable and then doing what is going to be helpful and relevant. That way you can deal with anything, no matter what it is.

I may have mentioned before that one comment that Erickson made in my presence that stayed with me and comes back recurrently and that is that we never need to be afraid of anything that comes from within ourselves.

So, coming in on the bike this morning, it was a pleasure for me to lean into the curves, to the turns. And if I felt any tinge of fear to know that I didn't need to be afraid of that feeling is very helpful to me. But I'm wondering what's happening for you though.

Mark: Now things are settling down.

Rob: Things are settling down, yeah. And just like when your bronchitis started to settle down, there was something to get off your chest, so to speak, and it may be for this situation to settle down. You can recognise in the future, looking back, how important it was for you to get his off your chest so you could clear the way ahead.

And you mentioned the suspension on that bike had some - can't remember the word - travel into something that you can actually ride it on dirt roads, bumpy roads and somehow the bike copes with the bumps and the rough spots.

And you mentioned that man, who was getting overwhelmed by his reaction to his wife leaving and couldn't speak adequately. And you said that he liked mountain bike riding down dirt tracks with washed away bits and he could do that, no problem. When it came to the idea that if he can go down steep, dirt paths with grooves and I don't know what in it, then he can deal with those conversations with his wife.

And so, if you can ride that bike, you can deal with the ups and downs with the bumps and feel better for having done it.

I can say that the time came where avoiding that bicycle, that bike, motorbike, you accepted the fact that was unacceptable. And somehow like you might call a pre-appointment change before you came and sit in this chair, it wouldn't surprise me if you started to accept the fact that, just avoiding what you've been avoiding was unacceptable.

And there's a slight nod of your head. And as that settling continues, there may be some rough spots, tight bends, bumps, washed away bits and you can look back and see that you did exactly everything that you needed to do to get through that.

And you talked about the value of being mindful, going at a slower pace, not having to become focused, but pushing it to the limits and so, going slower in this process, being mindful of it.

I don't know if there's anything more that you would like me to say. Was there anything else that you would like to do or say? I can just offer the idea that perhaps you could sit there for as long as you need or as short as you need and just let that settling continue even after you've let your eyes open and to know that the settling process can have some bumps, some up-hills, some downhills.

Mark: That's right.

Rob: Yeah, good. And what are you noticing about yourself, Mark? What's different now than when you started? You don't have to articulate everything if it's too much to put into words.

Mark: I'm feeling pretty still and centred.

Rob: Still and?

Mark: Centred.

Rob: Centred?

Mark: And my body feels relaxed.

Rob: Your body is relaxed. And can you find another word to say more about that relaxed feeling? What else - how else could you describe it?

Mark: My body is very still.

Rob: Still, yes.

Mark: At one stage when I was just sort of getting back in my body, at one stage I was just a head.

Rob: You were just?

Mark: Just a head.

Rob: Just a head.

Mark: I was aware of the body, but it was just - I was...

Rob: When you are riding, it's always good to keep ahead of where you're going.

Mark: I was pleasantly dissociated with it.

Rob: Pleasantly dissociated and now your body's coming back and there's some stillness in your body.

Mark: Hmm. **[Inaudible 36:41]**.

Rob: And I'm wondering if you, if you would - how you'd respond to the idea that there's some peace in your body, some peacefulness.

Mark: Yeah, definitely.

Rob: Yeah. That's what it looks like. And?

Mark: Well it's sort of like a concentrated experience.

Rob: Concentrated experience.

Mark: In a very short space of time, there was a lot of processing done.

Rob: Very short space of time. And how short does that space of time feel to you?

Mark: Oh, it seemed like it was about 20 minutes only.

Rob: Twenty minutes.

Mark: I'm not sure how long it was.

Rob: No, I'm not either. Probably about 20 minutes. Maybe 19 or 21. I don't know. It might have been a bit longer, I don't know. It doesn't matter.

Mark: But it seemed like a few sessions worth, with minimal words. The body's done it. The process was the body.

Rob: And the more you trusted your body, the more it could do what it needed to do, the more you listened to it.

Mark: Hmm. It didn't seem necessary to talk about it much.

Rob: Yeah.

Mark: Hmm. That was very helpful.

Rob: So was that a place we could stop?

Mark: Hmm.

Rob: And you say that you were getting back into your body?

Mark: Yes.

Rob: And when do you think you can start to come out of hypnosis? And you laugh at that?

Mark: Yeah.

Rob: What's funny about that?

Mark: Oh, well, you can get tricked into thinking you've come out and you have not. You're still on those levels. I'm not as entranced as I was when [**inaudible 38:42**].

Rob: No. But you're more entranced than you weren't at all.

Mark: Yes, that's right, yeah.

Rob: There's a - I remember reading about a condition. I can't remember what it was called. I think it's called false waking or something where someone was asleep and they wake up. And after a while they wake up and realise that they dreamt that they'd woken up. And some people even then manage to wake up and

dreamt that they had a dream about dreaming about waking up. Some people then wake up.

Mark: Yeah.

Rob: So you said that's an okay place to stop?

Mark: Yeah. Thanks, yeah.

Rob: Thank you.

Resources

Websites

www.cet.net.au

Email

rob@cet.net.au



Other enhanced ebooks by Robert McNeilly

Utilisation in hypnosis - building on an Ericksonian approach

Hypnosis in psychosomatics - utilisation after Erickson

Listening for Solutions in Hypnosis - utilisation after Erickson

The Poetry of Therapy - Creating effectiveness after Erickson

Utilising Hypnosis with Children - a girl returns from a dog phobia

Coaching for Solutions