



May, 2007

Volume 7, No. 2

THE *WHAT* AND THE *HOW*

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The work will wait while you show your child the rainbow, but the rainbow won't wait while you do the work.

– Patricia Clafford

Introduction

How we approach each person and each task in life may be as important as the content of how we relate and what we do. This has been explored extensively in psychotherapy literature, with observations about how non-verbal communications contribute to the positive or negative responses we get. Going beyond this level, considering spiritual healing interventions, we often find that when we hold a healing intent in our mind and heart, everything we are and do can become a meditation, a prayer and a healing intervention.

Expectations – stated and unstated

*I will succeed.
Today I will resist
pessimism and will conquer
the world with a smile,
with the positive attitude
of expecting always the best.
Today I will make of every ordinary task a sublime expression,*

*Today I will have my feet on the ground
understanding reality
and the stars' gaze
to invent my future.*

*Today I will take the time to be happy
and will leave my footprints and my presence
in the hearts of others.*

*Today, I invite you to begin a new season
where we can dream
that everything we undertake is possible
and we fulfill it,
with joy and dignity.*

– Linda DeBow

Our personal, inner expectations shape our lives. What we get out of the way we play out our game of life depends on how we play our cards, invest our chips and move our pieces on the board that is our world of interactions with the people in our lives. More important than the rules and the mechanics of our life game is *how* we relate to ourselves, to the game and to each other. For some, the goal is the accumulation of ever more chips and the possessions and power that these can purchase. My observation is that this often ends up as an addiction, an endless chase after ever more chips and things, and never truly satisfying.

When we extend our awareness to our interconnections with other people and our environment, aware that we are co-creators of our relationships and of our world at large, there are usually much deeper satisfactions. The journey becomes our focus rather than some arbitrary destination, which, when achieved, leaves us having to find other destinations to work towards – to satisfy our addiction to achieving or attaining ever more of something outside ourselves.

Our interpersonal expectations shape our relationships. When we are clear within ourselves as to what we want, it is helpful to share this with those who are interacting with us – so that we are on the same page. Many potential conflicts can be avoided when mutual expectations are clarified and agreed. Too often we assume others are on our page, while they are assuming we are on theirs.

1. Years ago, before cell phones existed, I had the silly experience of making a date with a friend when I was living in an apartment in New York – to meet downstairs. I waited 45 minutes, then went up to phone and find out what had happened. We were each annoyed at the other for not arriving at our own ‘downstairs.’

2. In personal partnering relationships, each participant comes with their family styles of being in the world. Each will often assume that the way they were raised is the way the world functions. What a surprise and eye-opener to discover that a partner may have habits that are totally outside the range of our experience, expectations, and tolerances! We laugh about toilet seats left up or down, but may be harder to laugh over major mismatches in manners, cleanliness, dietary, loudness of music or sexual behaviors preferences. There is a lot to be said for taking extended periods to visit or live together so that we can identify these differences and explore ways (and possible limits) to compromising.

Clarifying expectations and putting them on the table can go a long way towards enhancing the success of negotiations between groups of people. Very often, negotiations start from a base of negative feelings and distrust. Even the most severe chasms of differences that divide people, up to and including the perpetrators and victims of violent crimes and genocide, can be bridged when we have the chance to share our experiences and feelings, and come to a place where we can at least hear, if not empathize with, the experiences and feelings of the opposite parties (Pranis).

Mismatches in communication

How we state our preferences can also make an enormous difference in how the other parties respond to negotiations.

Have you ever had someone respond with unexpected negativity to a request or statement that you thought was simple, direct and innocuous? In my personal experience, this is a common occurrence among family members (especially children towards their parents), employees in businesses, and medical staff in hospitals and clinics. I have been startled by annoyed or even angry responses to simple requests, as innocuous as “Would you please pass me a fork?” or “What time is lunch?”

The most common cause for irritated responses is a mismatch between the information in the message and meta-communications that are simultaneously transmitted in voice or non-verbal communication. The best model I know for mapping this is Transactional Analysis (TA), in which various voices are identified within us. Below is an example of how each voice might respond to a problem.

Problem: I was late sending my mother’s a birthday gift, and worsened the situation by making lame excuses for my oversight. My internal dialogue between my inner voices (TA terminology – my *ego states*) might run as follows:

Parent – internalized in childhood and throughout life as the *shoulds* and *shouldn’ts* that are prescribed by family, religion, and society. Internal parent messages can be expressed in supportive or critical ways.

e.g. “You might consider some better ways of looking at and dealing with this problem. She is old, and alone, and craves the little attention she can get.”
vs. “How could you be so stupid as to forget her birthday, and then be such an idiot and dig your hole deeper by making dumb excuses instead of simply apologizing?”

Adult – the inner voice of logic and reason, weighing the possibilities, options and anticipated consequences and then making a deliberate, unemotional decision. This is the voice of Mr. Spock (from Star Trek) or of Christopher Robin.

e.g. “Why don’t we go back and apologize, explain the stressful circumstances that led to the oversight, and promise to be more mindful in the future?”

Child – expressed in three possible ways:

Natural Child - The inner part that is joyous and seeks pleasure; craves loving; and wants what it wants when it wants it;

Adapted Child – The inner part that wants to please and be accepted; and

Rebellious Child – The inner part that fights against being told what to do.

e.g. “We could have a good laugh over this when the heat blows over!”

vs. “Oh, dear, I’d better make some extra phone calls over the next little while to show my mother I’m sorry”

vs. “Screw this! I don’t need that kind of attitude, after all the hard times she’s given me over the years! I think I’ll tell her I’m sick next weekend so I don’t have to visit her.”

Often, when we get unexpected responses to our communications, it is because our tone of voice or non-verbal communications convey messages perceived as coming from critical parent or rebellious child. For example, when I told my teenage daughter to clean up her room,

if I said it in a matter-of-fact tone, there was a chance she might respond from her adult or adapted child and simply do as requested. If there was any hint of critical parent tone in my voice, it was a lost cause (even though I felt justified when this was the 405th time I was telling her to do her chores). She would immediately respond from her rebel child and refuse.

Residual sensitivities and reactions

Projection makes perception. The world you see is what you gave it, nothing more than that. But thought is no more than that, it is not less. Therefore to you it is important. It is the witness to your state of mind, the outside picture of an inward condition. As a man thinketh, so does he perceive. Therefore, seek not to change the world, but choose to change your mind about the world.

– Foundation for Inner Peace

When we have experienced negative interactions based on such communications, we may carry residual hurts, fears, angers and other feelings that leave us sensitive to experiences which are similar to those that traumatized us. Having struggled with conflicts with my authoritarian mother as a teenager, I was sensitized to later interactions with authority figures. My rebellious child would rise up and want to act out when I felt an authority figure was being unreasonable. When supervisors at work would give me instructions, my hackles would quickly rise even when they might have stated their requests or orders in adult terms. I would read a critical parent message into what they had said, based on my stored up feelings from childhood.

There are much broader experiences of these types of reactions. We may find ourselves responding with excessive feelings when we feel we are helpless and at the mercy of people who cut in front of us while driving, statements reported in the media that are made by leaders of other countries, and even at automated telephone systems – where we feel we are being manipulated and controlled, unable to protest effectively and therefore feeling helpless.

When we have triggers like these, we are also subject to manipulation by authority figures. President Bush and company have been masters at stirring fears in the US public, in order to get approval of programs that give the Executive Branch of government inordinate emergency powers. While these executive powers have allegedly been enacted to protect us from terrorist attacks, if and when they are activated, they would severely curtail civil liberties and protections of previously guaranteed Constitutional rights. I believe that people have been vulnerable to such manipulations because of residual child reactions.

Head and heart

*It is only with the heart that one can see clearly,
for what is essential is hidden from the eyes.*

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Similarly, when we respond to a person's joy or suffering or pain from our heart, we often get much different responses than when we respond from our head. People naturally warm to the feeling of being understood and accepted – that is conveyed when we are present in a truly caring way. Words and thoughts and suggestions

often fall on deaf ears, or are experienced as irrelevant when people are in the midst of an emotional experience.

I have often heard people who were suffering from acute injuries or chronic pains and other symptoms, and from people who are bereaved, that they were totally put off or even angered by advice that was given – however well meant – by friends and family. In their pain and suffering, they were just wanting a compassionate word or touch. They felt that because their suffering was making people uncomfortable, people wanted to ‘fix’ them – not so much out of compassion as out of wanting to decrease their own discomforts.

When I speak of heart, I include:

Empathetic, feeling responses – conveyed through reflections and acknowledgments of the feeling states of those we are responding to; understanding words; empathetic touch, tone of voice, and other non-verbal communications;

Intuitive knowing of the heart, mind and spirit

Spiritual awarenesses that extend into the collective consciousness and beyond our ability to fully comprehend

I believe we make distinctions in the last two levels or aspects of knowing that are based upon our limited perceptions from the perspective of our human existence. Most probably these levels are far more overlapped or perhaps even identical, but appear to have different components because of the nature of the human receptors and processors for this/these levels of awarenesses.

Much more on these in my discussions, *Mind of head and mind of heart* (Benor 2006a), *Intuition* (Benor, 2002) and *Personal Spirituality* (Benor 2006b).

The *how* and the *what* in our modern world

How does it feel to read these two approaches to life in this order? In Western society it generally feels more natural and comfortable, and therefore ‘better’ to put the *what* first. Our whole educational system is geared to left-brained, analytical, linear, often reductionistic thinking. We pick apart the pieces of people in order to understand their micro-functions, and dissect ideas similarly, seeking first causes in order to be able to identify root causes to manifested surface issues. This has served us well to transform our world into a safer and more predictable place, with advances in many fields of science, industry and medicine.

Unfortunately, the focus on the *what* has led to our addressing the *how* as a secondary issue, of less importance. This has reduced the quality of life in the Western world significantly, and has destroyed cultures in non-Western worlds. In pursuit of material gains and a physically safer environment – for those who can afford it, mostly in industrialized countries and upper classes (with decreasing benefits in middle classes, and negative benefits in lower classes) – Western society has come, largely, to value the *what* of our lives and to ignore the *how*. Amassing ever more *whats* as a measure of our success in life is an endless pursuit of material gain that is largely devoid of deeper satisfactions. It is competitive, self-centered, frequently selfish, and often based on a scarcity mentality. It leads to a society in which the *haves* seek ever more *whats* at the expense of the *have nots*, who tolerate this in the hope that someday they may climb the ladder to sit at the top of the pile of *haves*. This rarely

happens, but is one of the guiding myths that guides Western society, suggesting that anyone who works hard enough can get there. If you've ever played Monopoly or another board game where one player begins to amass greater resources than the other players, you know that it is highly unlikely that other players will be successful in getting out of their constricted circumstances, much less getting out of the bottom rungs of property ownership. Real life is just like that.

Focusing on the *how* of life is ever so much more satisfying. This is well illustrated by one of my favorite stories, which I repeat here:

A Full and Busy Life

An American businessman was at a pier in a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow-fin tuna. The American complimented the Mexican on the quality of his fish and asked, "How long did it take to catch them?"

The Mexican replied, "Only a little while."

The American asked, "Why didn't you stay out longer and catch more fish?"

"I have enough to support my family's needs."

The American asked, "How do you spend the rest of your time?"

The fisherman replied, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life, señor."

The American scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and could help you. You should spend more time fishing and, with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats. Eventually, you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution.

"You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then New York, where you will run your expanding enterprise."

The fisherman asked, "But señor, how long will this all take?"

The American replied, "15-20 years."

"But what then, señor?" asked the Mexican.

The American laughed, and said, "That's the best part! When the time is right, you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public. You'll become very rich, you would make millions!"

"Millions, señor?" replied the Mexican. "Then what?"

The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siestas with your wife, and stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos."

WHEE is hugely successful because it focuses on the *how* as well as on the *what*

In seven years of using WHEE as my primary intervention in psychotherapy, I have had only one person who has not responded with significant improvements in his presenting problem. I have pondered how this can be true, when every other way of helping that I've used finds some people responsive and significant numbers of others not, the latter in much higher proportions than I find with WHEE.

WHEE is based on several principles:

1. *Reciting an affirmation that includes a focus on a problem plus a positive statement;*
2. Stimulating both sides of the body
3. Installing a positive affirmation to replace the negativity that has been released

The *how* of doing a WHEE session is focused on the ongoing process, on the unfolding of the feelings and inner perceptions of the client. The *what*, i.e. the content of the affirmations is not standardized, nor is the procedural protocol for doing WHEE. The protocol for WHEE is designed to be flexible and track the client's focus, releasing negativity as it becomes evident through a variety of approaches that are guided by the evolving states of awareness and feelings of the client. Affirmations are used, with positive statements that counteract the negativity the client is wanting to shift and release. The affirmations are adjusted during the process – both to refocus constantly on the currently perceived points that need releasing, and to adapt the positive statements to be as potent as possible. There is a constant feedback loop – from client responses to the refocusing of the interventions, to the further release of negativity, to the reassessment of focus in the following round of releasing.

In many other therapy systems, particularly when they are formalized into research protocols, there is a standardization of interventions that limits the flexibility of the therapy to meet the individuality and the shifting needs of the client. This limits the flexibility of the interventions and their effectiveness. WHEE is so effective because it is constantly focused and refocused on the changing needs of the client as the therapeutic process unfolds.

In summary

Often, when we are clear within ourselves about the *what* of that which we are pursuing, and the *how* of our communications takes into consideration the sensitivities and needs of those with whom we are negotiating our way through life, our path through life is much smoother. When we do this, we are human beings, not human doings.

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