

## CLEANING UP SLOPPY THINKING

At least some of our failed attempts to deal with our troubles stem from how we think. Even though we habitually emphasize feelings and emotions we cannot afford to overlook cognitive stumbling blocks. When we ask a person what she wants to work on, she may offer "my anger," "frustration," or "procrastination." The therapist may temporarily accept the given version with a supportive comments such as "It's good to hear you own your anger rather than blame someone else."

While grateful, the client may back pedal rapidly with "Yes, I know the anger is mine. but he's the cause of it all." The therapist may sidestep, "But we don't have him here. You are the one who's here, so let us work with you." Missing the point, the client may launch into a diatribe at the absentee. What may the therapist do?

Accept the angry feelings as her's, without reinforcing the basis for them. "Yes, I hear your anger. How have you been dealing with it?" It emerges that the client hasn't been dealing with it. She's been immersing herself in it, and seeking allies. You are the obvious candidate. One way or another, we inform her that we that, just as we don't pass judgment on her, we don't judge 'significant others.

If that slows her down, she recovers with "Tell me what to do about it." The therapist passes the baton back, "Let's see what you've done about it so far. How has that worked out?" It hasn't. "What else can I do" she asks. The therapist responds, "Let's see where the other guy is coming from. If you understand him better, maybe another approach may occur to you. In psychodrama we get the protagonist into the role reversed position. We may call for a dialogue, have the protagonist address the empty chair. Maybe have a double help the protagonist to be more emphatic. Call role reverse, As the protagonist takes the chair opposite, one director option is to put the double into the recently vacated chair as the protagonist continuing in the spirit of the stage that has been set. Now our protagonist feels the impact of himself on the other.

This may not slow her down, as she presents a caricature of that he's like, We may go along with this for a while, till the absurdity of the caricature dawns on the protagonist. The director stops the process to ask "Where are you at?" Before she can answer, he reverses her back to herself (to aid her owning her reply). The double may not complete the reverse, but stand to one side, back into the doubling role, to mirror the confusion. The director continues interviewing the client. In all that has transpired so far many clues have emerged, some of which may be pertinent scenes from the past. Or the director may focus on the emerging mixed feeling and move to an intrapsychic scene.

Beware of slipping into the contrasting "parts of me" pitfall. I have no objection to temporary polarizing. Indeed, I may reinforce it. The notion of "parts" is what sticks in my craw. What we have here is the individual in alternate roles, but when she's in either one, all of her, not part of her, is in that particular role. A role is not capable of independent existence, but requires the participation of the whole

person---even though her momentary focus goes through that lens. From my point of view, my role is me---though at other times and places roles I play may vary.

Then and there in these other roles, I am still "me." Persons who fail to own the roles they take may consider the roles themselves 'fake.' It's common English usage. I counter that they refer to taking the role of the 'pretender' which is who they are at that time. We may want to examine what leads to their taking the role of the pretender. At times it may be appropriate (actor in a play, a spy abroad) and socially welcome. But the question is, "Is it true to what I want for me---over the long haul?" I admit to a bias favoring the 'long haul.'

Let's go back to where we started. The imagery which supports qualities, traits, abstractions...etc seems to be this. "The human being is a receptacle, who contains all these things. If I could get rid of this or that I'd be OK." No wonder that demon exorcism has such an attraction for some among us. We'll never cope with the demonic within us by radical surgery. Contrary to "the devil made me do it," for better or worse, I am the one who did it. The whole legal system agrees that the convicted shall be held accountable. What that may consist in is another matter.

We do have a problem with our individualistic culture. Therapists who luxuriate in the intrapsychic tend to dwell on personal fantasy or presumed remote influences beyond the reach of reliable memory. When a client 'reifies,' that is, makes an entity out of an abstraction, I quickly construct the interpersonal context which is always there. When I do move to the past or forward to the future, the protagonist lives through the interpersonal dimension, where she may find, get, or let go of her onerous present preoccupation, for the present is where it's at.

Note how our approach facilitates getting in touch with 'all of me,' being present with those about me, including their need to be true to themselves too. We readily slip past the permeable boundaries of 'inner' and 'outer', the 'me' and the 'not me' the self and others, the 'now' and the 'then,' the 'agent' and the 'victim.' There is always something I can do for myself, for I don't have to do it alone, For a little while I have a therapist, but therapists, when successful, work themselves out of the job. We do not dispose of boundaries, we acknowledge and respect them, for they are always with us. We take into account expectations as balanced with reality. We learn not to butt our heads against a stone wall. Eastern wisdom identifies suffering with frustrated desire, therefore curb desire. Better, be flexible and spontaneous, transform desire. Let someone---let the Cosmos, help you. You are accepted. You are acceptable. You belong. Include, don't exclude yourself. Rather than say, "They don't like me," admit "I don't like me," but don't stop there. With a little help from your friends, begin with how much of me there is to like. Above all, disdain sloppy thinking. Those who love you will expose your blind spots if you'll let them. They know you better than you do and find you're OK. Enter the bigger world. It's there for you too. **Don Miller** 1130 am.