

Reminiscences by a Therapist

I had a late night, writing. The alarm rings early this morning. My skylight shows the mood of the day. Unlike yesterday's rippling treetops behind a watery film, I see Venus sparkle in the ink-blue frame – solitary and bright. High up, the frozen steam of a jet engine draws a sharp line lit by the waking sun.

Often these days, when I don't remember my dream, a phrase or word remains – summing up but not revealing the details of the dream. This morning, a German word pops into my mind – *trotzdem* – the equivalent to 'in spite of'. I like the word. It has a stubborn sense of 'no', and holds the freedom to act contrary to what reason demands. For the rest of the day, my intermediary mind will busy itself to break the code and understand the meaning of my dream.

A busy day is ahead. I'll see five clients, with half an hour between sessions to make notes, reply to e-mails and have a coffee or a quick bite to eat. I love my work. I am fascinated by the movements in the psyche and passionate about unravelling knots of feelings and thoughts. I provide skills to quieten body and mind and guide the focus within the individual, towards the wholeness that is waiting to be realised. Where two or more people are really connecting, they influence each other. Deeper, wider and higher elements are active. The room is filled with presences, and frequently with warmth. In the process of deep reflection, others are unconsciously affected. Relatives, friends and people across the planet, seemingly unconnected, are also influenced. We don't know how thoughts and feelings travel, but a shift in one's attitude, be it an acceptance, a resignation, an insight, or a decision, chimes a different note. We are all aided by each other's expanding consciousness. This mystery happens every day between people. But in a condensed, therapeutic relationship, or in any intense relationship, a fresh attitude travels more with the speed of light.

My work allows me to understand myself better, study inner and outer relationships, and it offers a direct and inspired reading of history, of society and its future. Today, I reflect on a growing phenomenon – a wrongness people try to find words for – frequently in the context of short-term counselling I do for Employee Assistant Schemes. These are agencies that have sprung up in response to staff suffering from increasing stress, which disrupts work-performance. They have contracts with public institutions and corporate businesses, offering staff a number of free counselling sessions. The issue that shouts is the persistent pressure on people in workplaces to implement new procedures. The expected transitions are problematic. Nearly all new policies aim at time-saving – quality assurance and information control. Those who have to implement the new rules are frontline staff dealing with the public, and they are rarely consulted. New software, working practices and the constantly updated 'guidelines' are often arbitrary, time-consuming and lacking in common sense. The painstaking process of filling in endless forms and over-recording meaningless data are experienced as an insult to intelligence. When we are asked to perform like machines, flashpoints fire in brains, irritations and anger settle in shoulders or stomachs. Stress moves round in circles. People go off sick. The presenting issues are bullying in the workplace or personal problems. The deeper truth is that people cannot reconcile the cosmetic sham of meeting targets with their human values. Employees have lost respect for their managers as they won't stand up for common sense. Managers are themselves under pressure. The message throughout the hierarchy is – stringent control and surveillance are for your own protection. Those who cannot or will not adjust to the new climate risk their jobs. The threat sparks collusion, whereby every lower layer protects the higher one. The behaviour resembles

that of anxious children who would naturally protect a parent on the brink of a nervous breakdown and hide their true feelings.

In a therapeutic relationship, I look for what wants to emerge and be transformed in consciousness but is blocked. I witness the resistance to change – but I don't judge – I accept the resistance is necessary, although painful. My attitude rings the first healing chime, since very few people have ever felt sufficiently accepted or heard by anyone.

But how are people to accept a growing stressful environment? What needs to come to light for our materialist culture in the west? Present social changes are driven by relentless monetary strategies that defy intelligence and insult the population. I hear myself saying to people, 'You can't stop runaway change. You can state your case and fight. You can leave your job. Or you can buckle down and learn to use symbolic outlets for your anger. To learn these skills takes commitment. The one power you have is to change your attitude towards change and experience less pain.' I do not sound convincing because I am not convinced. I have moments when I would like to start a revolution. But the stakes are high, too high for a culture that has much to lose – there are families to consider, debts, mortgages, the education of children – livelihoods. I include myself. We are all trapped in a closed system.

Governments would benefit from relaxation exercises. I am not in a position to suggest politicians listen to their dreams or learn about symbolic language. I have been involved in awareness campaigns but had to shape each sentence so carefully it became a full time job. I also have to pay my mortgage. So instead, I facilitate awareness and growth for individuals.

When I look for what is emerging in western cultures, collectively, I perceive chaos, with insufficient containment and lack of deeper social reflection. Present progress moves like a speed train on automatic pilot – resistance is a natural reaction. As with adolescence, if reason demands the unreasonable, nature will assert itself. However, by becoming aware of the growing-curve of change, we can find equanimity in the depths of our minds.

We are the pain and what cures the pain. We are the sweet, cold water and the jar that pours.
Rumi

Anxious of losing control, governments resort to parental prescriptions. Lack of personal freedom, creative space and the lack of real human exchanges affect people's natural body-rhythms. Rather than coercion, what is needed are patience and compassion – for ourselves and others. Calm minds are able to contemplate a wider context. Then it becomes possible to see what shapes from chaos. In Goethe's *Zauberlehrling*, 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', only the master can stop the spell of overproduction. This time, in the west, the respect for outside authority is diminishing. Masters have lost their shine. People are metamorphosing into adulthood with all the wildness of typical adolescents. The master is heard from inside individuals. A double-bind message of demands for discipline and enticement to excess by those who rule the old-fashioned way will eventually lead people to look within and reflect on their internal rhythms. Social dysfunctions and lack of meaning naturally spark stubbornness in us – and bring with it the challenge to think for ourselves. I see inner reflections happening. I trust that process. I trust our young ones. I trust the future will be better than anything before.

Ashen – 12th Dec 2007