

REVISITING THE CONCEPT OF THE 'HERE AND NOW'

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Generating Appropriate Perspectives

Generating appropriate perspectives on psychotherapy is a constant task. Looking at the titles of some books I noticed **Client-Centred Therapy, Reality Therapy, Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy, Family Therapy in Clinical Practice, Dynamics of Group Psychotherapy, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, New Ways in Psychoanalysis, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, Psychodrama, The Doctor and the Soul, Psychotherapy and Existentialism, Gestalt Therapy, Integrated Psychotherapy, Strategies of Psychotherapy, Psychosynthesis, Principles of Preventive Psychiatry**. The list can go on and on. Each title is indicative of a particular perspective developed by the author. We are drawn toward a particular viewpoint because in some way it resonates within our being. In the course of time we adopt a particular approach and we practice it and then we adapt it to our situation as effectively as we can. From time to time we look back at what we have done. Systematically revisiting years of work we notice that various ideas and methods have dropped into the background. We discover that some of the lost ideas are still workable and, if we are wise, we ensure that they are re-integrated into our practice. We also find that other people are doing good work and utilising methods that we had previously rejected. Perhaps it is time to loosen our tie with the method we have developed.

We are engaged in this fascinating task of generating other points of view. We know that the effectiveness and vitality of our work depends on a continuing integration of new ideas. No doubt we have on many occasions attempted to make a new start and perhaps the business of doing this again is a daunting one. If there is any lethargy we can certainly let it go.

The idea of this presentation is that we will benefit by exploring our psychotherapeutic work from the perspective of the here and now. Let us begin with recognition of the experience of discovering life in the present.

Discovering Life in the Present

The moment of discovering life in the present, of being filled with the experience, is a significant one for many people.

A person sees the world clearly

Some time ago I received a letter that was filled with surprised delight. The author of the letter told me of seeing a tree for the first time and of writing a poem to celebrate this experience. A most beautiful poem was enclosed. The letter highlighted the contrast between the way her perception used to be and what it had

now become. Before, a tree had seemed flat and lifeless. Now, the detail of the leaves and the bark, the shape, the movement and the changing colour touched her profoundly.

The familiar pattern of attempting to make a new start

The theme of this letter has been repeated on a daily basis in the course of my working life as people attempt to make new starts.

One person is tired of the repetitive patterns of interacting with other people at work and makes a daily resolve to inject something novel into the familiar routine. From time to time they do, in fact, develop another idea about what they could say and they feel more hopeful. Sometimes they dare to contribute more to their working day and return home at the end of the day in a celebratory mood.

Another person loved to read adventurous books in her earlier years and in early adulthood became cynical about life. Her life in the present is rejected because of her failure to even approximate the bright fantasies developed in the course of the childhood reading. But she too was eventually overcome with surprise. She came to realise that life held new things in store for her. The reading had left her ignorant and unprepared for these new possibilities.

There is another person who is looking for a satisfying relationship. A dark mood pervades his life. He says: "I am living with someone but they don't have all the qualities I am looking for. We lived apart for a short time but one evening there was a knock on the door and we got together again. I think I was rather weak to allow the relationship to continue. But I do like some things about her. Do you think I should have stayed on my own?" Virtually every word, every gesture is tinged with gloom. There is an attachment to the gloominess, as if to say a relationship associated with gloom gives him quite a lot of pleasure. Occasionally this man is willing to look at an ability that has fallen into the background and is now hardly used, he realises that there is something of value in him, and the mood in the room lightens up. Then there is a return to discontented rumination.

Making Sense of our Efforts to Bring Meaning into our Lives

Each one of these people is urgent in their effort to make more of the immediate here and now, to fill each moment with meaning. This is their predominant interest. What significance can we place on the fact that individuals keep working to develop a pattern of living in which immediacy is a prized characteristic? Perhaps we pick up a clue from some famous ancient literature. In the last part of Homer's Iliad we see the Trojan warrior Hector preparing himself to do battle with Achilles. His father and mother are imploring him not to fight. The story continues as follows:

But all their entreaties were wasted on Hector, who stuck to his post and let the monstrous Achilles approach him...Hector stood firm and unflinching, with his glittering shield supported by an outwork of the wall. But he was none the less appalled, and, groaning at his plight, took counsel with his indomitable soul...While Hector stood engrossed in this inward debate, Achilles drew near him, looking like the god of War in his flashing helmet...

Hector looked up, saw him, and began to tremble. He no longer had the heart to stand his ground; he left the gate and ran away in terror.

The reader already knows that Hector will be killed, and yet, the description of events gives a tremendous upsurge of interest. Each moment can be lived through with Hector. There is his readiness for the battle. This we love. We want him to stand firm. We want to encourage him, to cheer him on. Then there is the extensive dialogue that develops within his mind. We don't feel so comfortable with this, and yet we are familiar with our own inner dialogues, and our attention remains riveted. Then Hector experiences an upsurge of fear. We can appreciate this, and yet we are disappointed that this change has come to birth. Hector then runs away as fast as he can. Again we know about running away. We understand the intense experience he is enduring. Yet there is the disappointment, the wishing that his life would not come to an end in this way, a wish to re-write history.

Nevertheless, with all the tragedy we **want** to find ourselves transported to Troy and to live through the events. We want to appreciate Hector, Ulysses, the Trojan citizens, and the army of the Greeks. We want the events to become part of our own lives in the present. And through the abilities of Homer these events do become alive and present for us. Our lives are affected. We come to grips with ourselves to a greater degree. We recall our own deeds. We take note of moments when we too took a stand. We become aware of times when we too engaged in lengthy reflection. We remember **our** loss of nerve and fleeing away in panic. Through such subjective involvement with the recorded events we find enrichment and enlargement of our being. We have faced ourselves and see our character more clearly. We imaginatively enter into an unknown arena and are transported beyond our present abilities so that our safety and security are swept away.

We are deeply interested in well-written novels that present us with the deeds of people. They awaken in us an immediate here and now experience, contributing much to the increase of our wish to live fully. This is what we want. Movies are another strong influence in this regard.

These and many other factors have contributed to the realisation that the words 'here and now' do not have to be just an empty phrase. This gives us a tremendous motivating force to enlarge our ability to experience immediacy. We look to capitalise on every opportunity to fill up each moment.

There is a little book called 'The Here and Now'. It is a presentation of the Art, Ideas and Poetry of Mitsuo Aida. One of his poems begins with these words:

Here and now is all that truly exists
The future cannot be touched
And the past is already gone
Here and now
The life inside you
The life inside me

Elsewhere he writes:

Fiercely swirling
Fiercely churning
The water at the fall's base is not muddied in the slightest way
It's there
Cold, clear and pure

One day in my youth
As I gazed into the water at the base of the falls,
I realised that like it I longed to live my life in the same clear, pure way.
The thought set fire to my soul.
And I decided to keep that feeling forever deep inside me.

As the fire burned I saw myself risking my life for love
I felt my blood boil with determination
I could see myself devoting everything to my life's work
And I saw myself living this life that heaven gave me
With passion, pureness and no regrets

And even now, while writing about that youthful experience,
Though it has been many years since that day,
I can still feel the fire that set in my heart.

And I realise
This is how I always want to be.
One life, forever learning. One life, forever young.

Exploring our Work from the Perspective of the Here and Now

I will now begin to focus on our professional work. There is much to be gained through exploring our work from the perspective of the here and now. A new spirit can be woven into the many different therapeutic methods that we use. This can be done without the creation of yet another method of psychotherapy.

The words 'here and now' remind us to focus our attention on the immediate present. They stimulate the realisation that the present is vital for our existence. They are a call for us to appreciate that the present contains within it an unending treasure house of riches.

The living present is waiting to release its powers into us so that we will enlarge the capacity to feel, bring to birth truly creative thinking, and manifest actions that show what a human being can do. Thus the working idea is that exploration by the therapist and the client of the here and now opens up a source of material, leads to a creative way of being, and enhances the freedom and responsibility both of ourselves and the clients with whom we work.

Focusing on the immediate present is not a new idea. The vision of human beings living in the moment was central to Moreno's life and work. He did everything in his power to see everybody as they actually were in the present. He refused to study written notes about a person before he actually met them. He took the point of view that each person is possessed of at least some spontaneity and that the spontaneity can be trained so that there is an adequate response to each new moment. Gestalt therapy takes a similar view. The aim of this here and now therapy developed by Fritz Perls is for a person to become *truly aware*, at every instant, of themselves and their actions, on whatever level, fantasy, verbal or physical. This enables them to see how they are producing their difficulties, what the difficulties are, and they can help themselves to solve them in the present. And there have been many others who have fostered a similar emphasis. Eric Berne emphasises the same thing in the introduction to his book 'What Do You Say After You Say Hello'. Here he comments:

...in order to say Hello, you first get rid of all the trash that has accumulated in your head...In order to say Hello back, you get rid of all the trash in your head and see that there is somebody standing there or walking by, waiting for you to say Hello back. It may take years to learn to do *that*. (1972, p.4)

William Glasser, the founder of Reality Therapy applauds the therapist who wants to know what is going on *now* in every aspect of the client's life. He writes: '... involvement can start only on the solid ground of our being able to accept him as he is right now.'

Psychotherapists have done much work to bring about a here and now focus. Nevertheless, there is still much to be gained through enlarging our ability to work with what stands in front of us. We are in a new time period. Our ideas are different from what they were forty or fifty years ago. We feel different. There has been a systemic change and every aspect of human life has been affected and this requires of us that we look with fresh eyes at the possibilities of the present moment.

A Look at some Work with Clients

I am hoping that a look at some work with clients will open up our subject much further. I have chosen two seemingly small incidents. For many years now I have emphasised the idea that we benefit from exploring small moments in detail. So this is what I am attempting to do here. The incidents occur in the course of some work with clients. I have chosen these incidents because I think they will help us gain a clearer picture of the emphasis on the here and now.

The Arrival of a Client

In the first incident we are looking at the arrival of a client. What will enhance this significant occasion? I was taught that all the important things were expressed in the first few minutes, but that the therapist was frequently blind to the significance of what was happening. What will assist a therapist to be less blind?

Seeing and experiencing what is happening at the beginning of a session is the foundation for everything that happens afterwards and I am very keen that we know much more about the type of functioning that that will enhance awareness. In my view we have a lot to do to keep seeing more.

Characteristics of Therapists Associated with Enlarging Awareness

With respect to this first incident I have noted four characteristics in the functioning of the psychotherapist that assist her to see and experience what is happening.

The first characteristic identified is an awareness of her own emerging experience and a valuing of this experience as part of the psychotherapy session. She regards her experience as part of the work and takes the view that something will be gained by exploring her experience further.

Imagine yourself watching this psychotherapist called Jane and her client.

Jane is sitting in her consulting room awaiting the arrival of a client. The door opens and the client enters. Jane is aware of herself. She feels pleased. She wants to communicate with this person. She realises that the man who has just come into her room is well motivated to be there and she says to him: 'I am pleased that you want to be here and develop something new. Come and sit down.' They both sit down and Jane continues to express herself. She says: 'Let us first of all appreciate the fact that you are well-motivated to be here and then let us make sure that we both know what is the main focus of our work today.' As we watch we are aware that she displays an ability to be very still at the outset of the session. She is immediately aware of the functioning of the client, sensitive to the experiences emerging in her in response, and her words show she is valuing those small beginnings.

In this time period Jane has registered the fact that her experience is positive, realises that it is a response to something the client has already expressed, and has an interest in identifying the exact nature of her experience.

A second aspect of this psychotherapist's functioning is appreciation of her experience from a systemic point of view. She is seeing her experience as one element in a system that involves herself, the client, and the relationship between them. First of all she focuses on the relationship between herself and the client. She is aware of projecting a positive feeling toward the client and of the client also projecting a positive feeling toward her. She perceives that the mutually positive relationship has value. This type of relationship indicates to her that a functional system is in process of being formed. In addition, the complementary role relationship shows that they are beginning to work cooperatively.

Thus the therapist sees in the relationship small beginnings leading to further effective work. This is a contrast to other relationship systems familiar to both of them that were characterised by lack of mutuality and by neutrality.

A third factor in enlarging experience is that the therapist interprets the positive relationship in terms of creative functioning. In the example, the therapist does far more than simply register the nature of the relationship. She presents the relationship as evidence that both she and her client are well motivated to be there and that both wish to function as creative human beings.

A fourth attribute of the therapist is the ability to enhance the motivating force of the client. The therapist makes clear what she is experiencing and the value that she places on the client's motivating force. *'I am pleased that you want to be here and to develop something new. Come and sit down. Let us first of all appreciate the fact that you are well motivated to be here,'* she says. Her language highlights the presence of those forces carrying the client forward into the external world, forces that are integrative in terms of present experience. The integrative forces are immediately brought into the foreground of the client's consciousness. Prior to this a clear consciousness of the existence of a motivating force that will assist him in the work of the session has not existed. Rather, there was awareness of hesitancy, doubt, fear, and uncertainty about the therapist and the session. These reactive forces now drop into the background. The initiative taken by the therapist has brought this about.

Implications for General Therapeutic Work

A number of implications for general therapeutic work can be drawn from this small beginning of a psychotherapy session.

The practise of stillness in psychotherapy

One significant implication is the practise of stillness in psychotherapy. With respect to our values, lifestyle and functioning as psychotherapists I often imagine what would happen if all of us focused our attention on being absolutely still at the point when a client entered our consulting room or group area. Such stillness is like fresh air blowing through a dusty room. Eric Berne describes his practice of closing his eyes before a group therapy session and letting go of all memories of the people in the group, any analysis of their functioning or personal reactions. He freed himself from the clutter of his mind. He made himself still. And when he opened his eyes he saw the members of the group through fresh eyes. He valued freshness, vitality, new perceptions, immediacy. The accurate analysis that he most certainly valued was to be based on the actual functioning of the person moment by moment, not on preconceptions. Another great figure of our time was Krishnamurti. I recall him dressed in an immaculate suit and walking onto a platform at Madison Square Garden in New York and sitting down on a chair. He sat perfectly still. He was serene and relaxed. The atmosphere in the whole auditorium immediately changed to one of stillness.

There were five thousand people in the place and they were all quiet and expectant. There was the sense that something important was going to happen. This atmosphere provided a basis for the later development of new perceptions.

We can make a list of people who have come from different walks of life and who have practised being still until it has become a regular pattern and brought benefit to

their lives. The general practise of psychotherapy can also be improved through the inclusion of stillness. A person in a crisis or a severely disturbed person benefits from an atmosphere of stillness.

Many psychotherapists practise being still and see great benefits arising from this. Others are not so sure. Some are committed to being constantly concerned about their clients and do their work with a worried look on their faces. Some think that their constant concern shows a sense of responsibility and regard stillness as an irresponsible and selfish luxury. To practise stillness would involve a major shift in their values.

A second implication is the early recognition of the presence of a motivating force and its value for the client.

Most of us are preoccupied with such things as coping with the next moment, dealing with the crises of the day, coping with our emotions. In the course of an ordinary day many people conclude that they are not functioning very well.

Our preoccupations take us away from the awareness of strong motivating forces pushing us toward fulfilling some purpose. As a result many incorrect conclusions are made as to whether our daily lives are worthwhile. What a relief it is to meet someone who highlights the presence of creative motivation and who coaches us so that we can perceive it for ourselves. We begin to see ourselves from a different point of view and to realise that we *can* achieve our objectives.

In addition to highlighting the motivating forces with their clients, psychotherapists can do this in their dealings with individuals and organisations in the community and thus enhance awareness of the creative forces in the community at large.

A FRUSTRATED CLIENT DEMANDS AN ANSWER

Let's continue on now with the look at our work. Next, we look at a different type of situation. This is one in which there is a frustrated client.

Each one of us has been with well-organised clients, who have been productively involved in the work of a session, who suddenly become frustrated, take a helpless posture, and ask the therapist to provide a solution to a problem. Here is a brief example of the interaction in such a situation and the immediate interventions that were made together with several implications.

Brief example

The client has been a trainer in a group of thirty people. She has been exploring the roles and role relationships in this system with a view to developing a new perspective and a plan of action. She is expressing herself confidently and clearly. Her speech and movements are aptly characterised by the words 'astute analyst'. Then her functioning changes. She makes an uncertain movement, her voice has a helpless tone, and she says: 'Does that

make sense to you?’ And then she says: ‘What would you do in this situation?’

The therapist, who has been absorbed in the work of appreciating the client’s social system, registers that this person is now functioning quite differently and that there is an added dimension that gives an increased complexity to the work. The therapist experiences intense interest and involvement and continues to feel relaxed and positive.

The therapist says ‘I am glad you have expressed this. You have brought some significant experiences into the foreground and we can examine them together. Let’s see if we can look at the different systems involved here.’ The client shows interest in this and the therapist then says: ‘We will work cooperatively to set out these different systems. You can set them out symbolically or realistically using objects to portray the different elements in the systems and the relationships. You could start off setting out what is going on between you and I at the time when you are confidently making an analysis of the organisation and I am absorbed in this with you and then set out the situation when you suddenly lose confidence.’

***The client** thoughtfully and deliberately selects different objects and puts them in two different parts of the room. This is done with pleasure. She is well focused, flexible, and artistic.*

One system portrays two people working together closely and cooperatively. The second system portrays two people in isolation, one of whom is a woman defeated by self-criticism.

With some prompting she sets out other situations in which she has been involved. There is a scene at school in which there is a mutually positive relationship with a teacher. There are two scenes in which she is rejected and criticised.

With further prompting she sets out a scene in which she is accepting of herself. In this scene she portrays the things that assist her to become more self-accepting.

She and the therapist look at these different scenes together, looking at one on its own, then looking at two, and then all of them at the same time. As she does this she perceives a different image of herself. She now sees herself not only isolated and self-critical but also decisively taking action to be involved with other people when there is conflict and criticism.

Subsequently she experiences ease with herself, sustains contact with other people, develops a new idea about herself, and is satisfied with these actions.

Examination of the interventions

The work that was accomplished through exploring the immediate situation was completed quite quickly. What are the characteristics of the interventions that were made? The aim of this section is to outline some of these.

What stands out for me is the therapist's consistent highlighting of the emerging experience of the client, irrespective of whether it continues to follow a single idea or whether it quickly opens out into a more complex field. This builds a basis for the therapist to construct an activity aimed at encompassing all the different elements to which the client has alluded.

Crisp facilitation of production. Teasing out the therapist's actions further we notice there is listening followed by facilitation of a dramatic production. A good effort has been made to stimulate the client to set out as many of her perceptions as possible in a short space of time. The crispness and clarity is pleasing and helps to sustain involvement in the work.

Utilising the client's perceptions. The production of the systemic elements has been done *through utilising the perceptions of the client*. This is significant, in that the client sets out objects that are congruent with her own subjective experience. This assists her to sustain her experience for a long time and explore it.

The consistent focus on the social systems that have been objectified ensures that the experience of the client is not skewed or diverted by the personal interests of the therapist. The fact that there are concrete objects in her presence all the time assists her to maintain a focus and not to jump rapidly from one thing to another.

A mutual relationship develops. It is noteworthy that, while the dramatic production or concretisation of the client's experiences is taking place, the relationship with the therapist develops. The client realises that the therapist is appreciating her world to a great degree and a sense of companionship increases. This occurs without the therapist using special words that draw attention to the details of the client's communication.

Extra abilities of the client manifest themselves. The involvement of the client in the production of her life experience and relationships brings into the foreground an artistic talent, an enjoyment of movement, and an organising ability. These abilities are of great assistance in the ensuing work.

I am interested in the fact that the therapist does not directly encourage the development of these abilities. Rather, they emerge as by-products of the dramatic production.

Being rather than doing is highlighted. The focus on production also assists both the therapist and the client to slow down and enter into an experience of their own beingness. This is congruent with the notion that a person develops through first of all learning 'to be', which provides a foundation for working out what they want 'to do'.

The relaxation both of the therapist and the client as they look at what is laid out in front of them contributes to the developing awareness. Negative criticism is well in the background. Perhaps the easy, accepting manner of the therapist as he invited the client to come to another part of the room to take a look contributed to this.

Development of flexibility. I would like to make an extra comment about the development of flexibility in a client and what appears to enhance this.

In dealing with the frustrated client, quite a long time was taken to examine one scene by itself, then another scene, then the whole system, and then to move from one scene to another. Sometimes there was quite rapid movement from one aspect of the system to another. During this process, the client generated an experience and then let it go again, as the focus turned to another scene. Matching the movement from one scene to another, the client rapidly developed new perceptions and new experiences. The client's willingness to enter into this process brought increased flexibility and a loosening from old points of view.

Flexibility was also shown in the movement of the client from reality to fantasy and back again. As she looks at different aspects of her social system she imagines other possible ways of functioning and then she again looks realistically at what is actually happening. This easy movement from fantasy to reality is undoubtedly encouraged by the presence of different scenes and the capacity to move from one scene to another at will.

Promotion of social development. The last area I wish to highlight is the significance of the therapist's functioning with respect to social development.

The methodology of having a person create an image of themselves usually leads to an exploration of the larger social systems that impinge on them. This exploration assists the integration of the needs of an individual and the society as a whole. The focus moves away from the individual and toward the interactions in and between groups and the values that are associated with them. Thus the work takes on the flavour of what has been actively promoted in the field of preventive psychiatry. Gerald Caplan's book *Principles of Preventive Psychiatry*, a classic in this field, presents a vision in which there is as much emphasis on social change as on helping the individual to adjust.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have highlighted the interest in discovery of life in the present by the general population and by psychotherapists. We have looked at two moments in the course of psychotherapy practice, pointing to functioning that enhances awareness of the immediate situation and new points of view. A systemic focus that includes both the experience of the therapist and the motivating force of the client has been highlighted. Mobilisation of the client's ability through their participation in the production of their world has been noted. These emphases could have a valuable place in the methodology that will emerge in this new time period.

Finally, I would like to conclude by reading these words:

The actual is your life in the present: this crowded street, your business, your immediate relationships...As the actual is confusing and painful, you turn to an experience which is over and dead...The present being dull, shallow, we turn to the past or look to a self-projected future. This escape from the present inevitably leads to illusion. To see the present as it actually is, without condemnation or justification, is to understand what *is*, and then there is action, which brings about a transformation of what *is*.
(Krishnamurti, 1956, p.121)

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