

Bringing Peace to the World One Person at a Time

Keynote Address Delivered to the 2010 EATA Conference in Prague

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It is an honor to be invited to give this address at this 2010 EATA conference here in Prague, especially as we celebrate 100 years of Eric Berne's life and work. I want to thank Jan Henning for his invitation to deliver this address. I personally owe a great deal to Eric Berne for shaping my own life and work, as I know he probably has for many of you as well. I am deeply indebted to Berne for the non-pathological emphasis he placed on human personality and functioning. That has been the single most influential element guiding my own life's work. He helped us see that we are all okay as human beings – that at the level of essence, we all have basic worth, value, and dignity – and that that knowledge is the single most important factor in helping people change. My experience is that people don't change from a not okay position. They change from an okay position. Once they experience their own okayness, the rest of the change process is much easier. Berne also helped us see that psychological symptoms are not the real problem but rather the result of decisions we made in childhood regarding how to take care of ourselves in light of the fear we faced of the possibility of annihilation or abandonment. These early decisions involved magical beliefs about how we could get others or the situation to change by behaving a certain way, which Berne referred to as the "Life Script." Once those decisions are changed, the person no longer needs the symptoms and lets them go.

Berne (1969), further pointed out that the ultimate moral standard we could use for what is good is whatever lowers the infant mortality rate and that one of our challenges as therapists should be to work toward that goal. That is certainly relevant in our present world. Our world today is full of trauma that negatively affects the infant mortality rate. This trauma is both natural and man-made. Presently, the man-made trauma seems to be escalating with increasing acts of terrorism and violence world-wide. Even our religious and political systems seem to be becoming more and more polarized. People are increasingly acting out their conflicts rather than putting their energy into talking them out.

It is interesting to note that in TA theory war is a type of passive behavior (meaning non-problem solving behavior, as Jacqui Schiff defined it). It is acting out in a violent way rather than taking direct action to solve the problem. Fritz Perls said that we have war when natural healthy aggression is denied. When people don't use their natural healthy aggression to talk out their differences and problem-solve, they often resort to violence, i.e., war. The irony is that if individuals acted like countries do, we would lock them up.

We have also discovered in recent years that trauma is the primary factor behind the creation of psychological symptoms. It is interesting to note in this regard that very little attention was paid to trauma until the 1980's. The diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder, for example, did not appear in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association until the third edition which was published in 1980. So the idea of trauma causing psychological symptoms is a relatively new one. Since 1980, however, we have discovered what a significant role trauma plays in the development of psychological symptoms.

It may be helpful at this point to define what I mean by trauma. A trauma, as I am using the term, means any situation which when we think about it or it is triggered by some present event, still evokes difficult emotions, physical symptoms or sensations. These traumas can be situational like accidents, war, natural catastrophes, criminal assault or rape. They can also be developmental like forcing a child to remain symbiotic, dependent and infantilized, or forcing them to grow up too quickly and give up being a child, or not allowing the child to feel like they have ever been successful, or never feel valuable or worthwhile or loved. There are also more severe developmental traumas like being physically or sexually abused, or being judged or shamed or criticized on a daily basis. These traumas in early childhood often produce what feel like to the child, unbearable emotions. Therefore, the child has to come up with ways to escape these unbearable feelings. Some of the many ways children learn to escape are: 1. Obsessions, compulsions, and phobias. If you are being anxious, you won't feel the deeper feelings from the trauma that are underneath the anxiety. 2. Hallucinations and delusions to disguise the real trauma being avoided. 3. Addictions – to cover or numb the feelings and sensations caused by the trauma. 4. Personality Disorders – to barricade the person with rigidity, projection, and ego syntonicity so the individual doesn't experience the deeper painful emotions. 5. Learning Disorders – to avoid feelings by making it difficult to focus, concentrate, and think. 6. Dissociative disorders and PTSD – symptoms that keep the person away from what caused the trauma by mentally going someplace else or staying away from the deeper feelings. 7. Living in Fantasy – to escape the reality that the trauma is part of. 8. Physical disease – to somaticize the emotions rather than feel them. 9. Pseudo-emotional blocks – Judgement, Criticism, Blame, Depression, Anxiety, or Boredom – which are terrible enough in themselves but not as terrible as the original traumatic situation and accompanying emotions.

The paradox is that these symptoms are used to escape deeper suffering but the symptoms themselves produce suffering and the suffering frequently causes additional suffering as it is acted out on others. When we have had to give up a sense of power and okay-ness in childhood, one way of attempting to get it back is to unconsciously act out on someone in a weaker position, frequently our own children or spouse. In that way the trauma gets perpetuated generationally.

The Southeast Institute for Group and Family Therapy in Chapel Hill, NC, which I currently direct, began in 1969 as the Fellowship for Racial and Economic Equality with the goal of helping to eradicate racial and economic injustice in the Southeastern United States in the 1960's. Under the leadership of Graham Barnes as its first president, the Fellowship began with a grant from the Irwin-Sweeney-Miller Foundation to work with groups of conservative white Christians and militant blacks. In the workshops we ran, we often had groups with members of the Klu-Klux-Klan and members of the Black

Panthers in the same groups together. Needless to say, we had some very interesting group dynamics.

One of our guidelines for our workshops in those early days was “no weapons,” and we often had to take knives and guns away from participants at the beginning of the workshops. Participants often came with a real fear of persons of the other race. These fears, we found out, went all the way back to civil war times when white slave owners would sometimes lynch their black slaves or black slaves would sometimes rise up against white slave owners and kill them. Both sides had injunctions of “don’t be close to persons of the other race, they will kill you.” Therefore at the beginning of the workshops, both races would be fearful and distrusting of the members of the other race. Once we began doing therapy with the people in the group, we found that the real violence for the individual participants, occurred not at the hands of the other race, but in their families of origin when as children they were punished by their parents for infractions that the parents were upset about. Since the children couldn’t express their anger at their parents without being hurt worse, they often later found that they could project it onto and express it toward people of the other race, with cultural sanction. It was okay to be angry at and hate people of the other race and even act in violent ways toward them, so the violence that was originally done at the hands of their parents, and the resulting hatred, was projected onto and acted out toward persons of the other race.

When the participants experienced the origin of their anger and violence and how each had suffered abuse from their own parents, that was then projected onto the other race, they began to empathically identify with one another, and see that the other race was not the cause of their suffering. This allowed the individuals to begin to feel close to one another and let go of their fears and mistrust and actually become supportive of one another. By the end of the week, participants who had originally been fearful of one another, were now laughing, and playing and even hugging each other. It was a powerful demonstration of how effectively people can change when the true origins of the problem are dealt with rather than the symptoms.

It was also a powerful demonstration of how the real power for change is in the Child ego state as the trauma is resolved and the natural spontaneous Child feelings are allowed to emerge. Prejudice and mistrust can quickly change to empathy and identification with the essence of other human beings. There is an idea from Buddhism that says that the people we have the most difficulty with, have the most to teach us. The reason for that is that we tend to project onto them the parts of ourselves that we have the most difficulty with. These are usually an internalization of the people who hurt us most in childhood. Those aspects of ourselves are hated internally, and often unconsciously acted out on others. As we own and integrate those intra-psychic aspects of ourselves and resolve the original trauma, we change our interpersonal relationships as well. A primitive tribe in Malaysia, the Senoi Indians, who have a history of some 300 years without significant mental illness or conflicts with neighboring tribes, have discovered through their dreamwork that making friends and allies with our internal demons allows us to become friends and allies with those around us.

The psychotherapeutic tools we have today for diagnosing unconscious information and resolving trauma are so much more efficient and effective than what we have had in previous generations, especially the tools of energy psychology. Energy Psychology has resulted from a rediscovery of ideas from Chinese and Indian Medicine combined with Applied Kinesiology. These ideas have helped us understand that when we experience trauma, it is held on an energetic level in the body. Wilhelm Reich (1945) was one of the first to recognize how we hold trauma in the body in such a way that it actually affects the structure of our body. He referred to this as ‘Character Armor.’ More recently, we have discovered how this energy remains “stuck” in the subtle energy systems of the body: the meridians from Chinese medicine, and the energy centers or chakras from Indian medicine. We have also discovered how it can be cleared by stimulating the meridians or the chakras.

Asha Clinton, Ph.D., an American psychotherapist, has developed a powerful, in-depth energy treatment approach for resolving trauma called Advanced Integrative Therapy. It is an integration of Jungian Psychology with Energy Psychology. It offers a way to quickly diagnose the unconscious origins of the trauma underlying current problems by using a technique from applied kinesiology called muscle testing. It would ordinarily take years to uncover this same unconscious material through traditional methods, if it were uncovered at all.

AIT also offers an equally quick way to clear this trauma using the energy centers or chakras in the body. In addition, the triggers for this trauma can be permanently erased. This work is so rapid and different in its approach, that it often requires a paradigm shift for most of us who were trained traditionally. I will be doing a demonstration of this work in a workshop on Sunday entitled “Disconnecting Our Triggers.” You can also see a demonstration of energy work on-line. There is also an incredible video on-line of American soldiers who have returned from war all the way from Vietnam through Iraq and are suffering PTSD symptoms, being completely relieved of those symptoms in two to three days time. This is done through work with the meridians called the “Emotional Freedom Technique,” which was developed by an American named Gary Craig. You can find this video at www.stressproject.org. Obviously, we are just at the beginning of discovering what is possible using these new treatment approaches.

I would like to give you a couple of examples from my own work with my clients. The first was a 50 year old woman who was about 60 pounds overweight. She said that she was feeling stuck in trying to lose weight and that her weight was beginning to affect her health. We used muscle testing to diagnose whether there was underlying trauma related to the difficulty she was having losing weight. (For those of you who may not be familiar with muscle testing, it is a process of using a muscle in the body to establish a direct connection with the person’s unconscious by applying pressure on the muscle and establishing a “yes”/ “no” response. When the muscle remains strong that is a “yes” response and when it goes weak, that indicates a “no” response.) The muscle testing with the woman I’m describing indicated that there was underlying trauma related to her difficulty losing weight. We also tested to find out when this trauma first occurred and

found that it was between conception and birth. We further diagnosed that her mother was not ready to have children and was ambivalent about her birth.

We then used the energy work with the chakras to clear that originating trauma. In the AIT work, we do this by having the client hold a stationary hand on the chakra that is most involved in the issue (in this case it was the root chakra), and then we have the person move the other hand from the crown down the other chakras to the root, allowing the stuck energy to clear from each one. We use a suds scale of 0-10 to rate the level of the trauma still remaining, and continue with additional rounds of clearing until the suds are at 0. In this case, once the originating trauma was cleared, we tested to see if there were other aspects of that trauma and found that she had felt like she shouldn't exist and was afraid as a child that she wouldn't survive. We cleared those traumas as well. Further muscle testing revealed that there were no other aspects or traumatic patterns that needed to be cleared.

Next, we came back to the present and cleared what had been the initiating trauma which was that her health had been suffering because of her weight. The final step was to clear the connection between the originating trauma and the current trauma which prevents the present issue from triggering the early trauma. The statement we used was "Because my mother was not ready to have children, and I felt like I shouldn't exist, my health has been suffering because of my weight."

I think you can hear the Script implications in that statement. Also, those of you who are familiar with Redecision therapy may recognize the similarity between the AIT Energy Work and Redecision therapy. The difference is that it is done on the energetic level. All of that work, by the way, was done in one session.

The next session my client reported that she no longer was feeling stuck about losing weight. She had begun to eat differently and to exercise, which earlier she had difficulty doing, and she had even lost a few pounds that week. She was no longer feeling any conflict about this and was feeling excited about improving her health.

Again, the thinking behind the energy work is that trauma is held on the energetic level in the meridians and in the energy centers of the body. By clearing the stuck energy, it allows the free spontaneous energy to flow again and releases the trauma. The Chinese call this energy Qi, in India it is called Prana, and in TA, we called it Natural Child energy. The interesting thing about this work is that when the energy of the trauma is cleared, it not only changes the feelings but also changes the way the person thinks about the trauma as well. In other words, clearing the trauma seems to help the person access their Adult, see the big picture, and think differently about the situation.

A second example is a male client with Narcissistic traits who had what might be labeled a sex addiction. He had had multiple affairs and was now going through a divorce as a result. The initiating trauma that he was in touch with was feeling lonely and empty with a desire to look for the perfect woman to try to fill that emptiness and void. We again used muscle testing to determine if there was underlying trauma related to what he was

experiencing. The testing indicated that there was. We found that the earliest origin of this was in an ancestral trauma. His great, great, grandfather was killed by slaves. We then used the AIT work to clear that trauma. We found that another aspect of that trauma was that his great, great grandfather was killed for having sex with his female slaves. We cleared that as well. A further aspect we found and cleared was his great, great grandfather's feeling of entitlement. We then diagnosed and cleared the shame of my client's family that he was carrying as a result of his grandfather's behavior (and of his own affairs). Next, identified and cleared his own feeling of entitlement to have the woman he was currently having an affair with. Finally we cleared the guilt he felt for not being true to himself.

The following week, he reported having ended the relationship with the woman he was having an affair with and said that he had realized that what he really wants is a genuine loving relationship rather than being obsessed with finding the perfect woman. A week later he reported having begun dating a woman who he was enjoying getting to know and felt good about. They have dated for several weeks and have not been sexual, and are developing what sounds like a very appropriate, healthy relationship in which he is really getting to know the woman rather than just using her to gratify his narcissistic needs.

In both cases, the major work was done in one or two sessions. I don't know about you, but I had not gotten these kinds of results so quickly before using the energy work. The results also seem to be permanent from what I have observed in the 15 years I have been using this type of work. It also integrates very well with the TA and Redecision therapy that I use. Clearly we are on the threshold of something very powerful and unique in the therapy world using these techniques.

It is also becoming abundantly clear to me that in order to truly relieve suffering, we have to treat the original cause, which is the underlying trauma. As we treat the earliest originating trauma, the current trauma, and the connection, we stop it from being triggered and acted out on others in the present. In that way, we not only help the individual to heal, but also prevent the trauma from being passed along to others and perpetuated in society. The overall result is that we begin to bring peace to our world, one person at a time. I think this is a worthy goal for all of us who are Transactional Analysts, as we celebrate 100 years of Berne's influence, and honor his legacy by accepting his challenge to help reduce the infant mortality rate. Thank you.

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