

Concepts and Tools for Working with Our Selves

As I was preparing the workshop "Meeting the Different Parts of Ourselves", I made some notes of some of the things I wanted to explain and focus on during the course of the day. Just in case it is useful, I have reproduced these notes here.

Models & Concepts

Models are ways of looking at and conceptualising the human psyche. We can use our imaginative processes to take us beyond the rational. Models help us to understand what is going on. If we understand, we can have some choice and control in our lives (rather than running on the automatic programming which we get from our family and from our culture).

Examples of other models include the concept of the existence of a conscious and unconscious mind -- and taking this one further, Assagioli's concept of a higher, middle and lower unconscious. Another quite simple and common concept is that of different modes such as mind, body, feelings, spirit. So, subpersonalities are just another useful way of conceptualising who we are and what we do.

The map is not the territory

Of course a model is not reality -- it's just a useful way of looking at things. We can understand that a map of Bristol might help us find our way across the city but that the map is not the reality of Bristol -- it's just a piece of paper with marks on it. Useful nevertheless.

Rational versus non-rational

Many of the processes and skills involved in personal development lie outside the familiar territory of rational thought. Although we are quite well served in our thinking processes by our culture and its educational systems, there is a whole load of important stuff that happens in our lives which is not susceptible to rationality. Processes, insights and skills which are outside the analytical thinking box. Recently, some of these non-rational processes and skills have been collected under the title emotional literacy. In my experience, many people are, not exactly frightened, but feel lost and inadequate around the words emotion, sensation, feeling and spirit. So I use the term non-rational to indicate processes and skills which are not thinking based.

Sometimes a non-rational experience can be associated with a body sensation, sometimes it can be a feeling we can identify as an emotion. Sometimes it is an experience so far removed from these others or so all-encompassing that we can only call it spiritual or transpersonal.

Part of what my workshops are about is to create an awareness of all these different levels. You can practice moving between thinking, feeling and body sensation as naturally as walking around your physical environment.

The concept of support -- what you have to offer each other

One of the reasons that workshops can be so effective is that we, and our subpersonalities, need to be witnessed. We need others to witness the truth about who we are. So you have a lot to offer to each other in this role. Also, every time you talk about or work with a subpersonality, you can bet that you are doing it on behalf of others. We hold much in common so, once again, you have much to offer each other.

The concept of ordinariness

People are magic -- the process isn't. I find much slightly woolly mysticism around the non-rational. I think that, potentially, it is as mundane as doing the washing-up. Can you remember how difficult it was to tie your shoelaces at first? Nothing mystical about it, just another skill. So it is here. Plenty of magic and mystery in people but the process itself need not be shadowy or arcane.

Tools

Thinking and reflecting

These enable the use of our very fine thinking minds to become informed, to reflect and to play with some of the concepts. This is where we start (but not where we stop). We can keep circling back to this familiar spot -- trying to put into words the stuff which is beyond words.

As we work we will be asking from time to time -- what just happened? What went on? Returning to thinking and moving beyond it in a really natural way.

Meditation

This can mean a lot of things -- here, it is simply an attempt to reach a place where it becomes possible to let go of what I call hard thinking -- disengage -- and see what floats into consciousness as a result. The concept of *allowing* things to emerge rather than thinking them into existence.

Imagework

Developed by Dr Dina Glouberman, this is a way of using our active imagination to explore whatever messages our unconscious might have for us -- pictures, feelings, sensations, symbols, layers of meaning. Again the accent is on allowing images to arise not building them or writing the script -- just concentrating on exploring what comes up. Non-judgmentally. Judgment is what the mind does -- and it's good to let it go sometimes.

Bodywork and games

As a sort of punctuation, we can play, using some different (and definitely non-rational) ways of going beyond feeling into the thing which generates the feelings -- our body. The body doesn't lie -- it's not that sophisticated. It has many messages for us if we can get beyond thought and even beyond feeling.

Theatre/performance/creative process

In this important section of the workshop each participant will be presenting to us one or more of their key subpersonalities and having an experience of externalising some of this internal universe in the presence of compassionate and supportive witnesses. This can feel scary but with the support of the "audience" who are all in the same boat, you will get an experience of just how powerful that edge can be.

Witnessing

Apart from presenting to the group -- you will be talking to each other, both in the structured work and in the breaks. I recommend that you really listen. This other person has much to offer you in terms of their unique experience and, in return, you can enhance their understanding of themselves by listening properly.

Adrian Longstaffe November 2003
adrian@interactive-consultancies.co.uk