A New Therapeutic Procedure

By George M. Prince

I am concentrating on inventing a new therapeutic method based on EFT and the insights in *A General Theory of Love.* The authors convinced me that our behavior is largely controlled by our limbic brain, which is not available to intellect and words. So talk therapy, unless it stirs deep feeling, is not going to work.

Bessel van der Kolk, who runs an experimental research program for people suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) found that using Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprogramming (EMDR) was much more effective in treating PTSD than the usual practice of gradually taking the person through a reconstruction of the trauma. He used before and after MRI brain scans to prove his point. His summary statement: "the amygdala/hippocampus emotional memory center does not speak English."

EMDR, rapid eye movement, is a physical 'disturbance' stirred up while the patient focuses on something that is bothering them. I think of it as a kind of vibration that slightly rearranges the neuronal 'knots' that are causing the disregulation.

A very new therapy method that is based on a very old procedure is Thought Field Therapy/Emotional Freedom Technique. It uses the notion that there are meridians or channels in our bodies that distribute energy. Emotional and physical disregulation is the result of a perturbation or emotional 'knot' in one or another muscle or organ. It can be reached and untangled by sending impulses through the proper meridian. Acupuncture is a method that has been in use for hundreds of years. The tapping therapies are new but have achieved considerable acceptance. The support is largely anecdotal, but some respected psychiatrists believe it can be useful.

A General Theory of Love expands the theory that the emotional control center does not speak English. The authors use science and biology to prove that the language of emotion is feeling and not words. The treatment of emotional problems will not be successful if it is limited to words.

They describe the process by which an infant and child develops his and her strategies for behavior through limbic (the emotional part of the brain) connection to caregivers. In the case of trauma or neglect, the child creates action sequences that aim at dealing with the painful event. These evolve into 'permanent' procedures that are triggered whenever a situation resonates with the memory of a past trauma. For example, Jimmy grew up in a volatile and uncontrolled family where shouting matches were the typical way problems were

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dealt with. Jimmy learned various ways to avoid getting caught in these eruptions. He learned never to commit himself. He developed the capacity to be instantly disinterested and to withdraw from the scene as soon as he could. These procedures were part of Jimmy's implicit memory. He was unaware of them and they never were described in words. When a situation evoked the remembered feelings, Jimmy's implicit memory took charge of his behavior.

All of us are deeply influenced by the implicit learning that we do as we grow up. If our caretakers are emotionally healthy and loving, most of our procedures are constructive and effective for dealing with life. However, all of us suffer some neglect and trauma so some of our processes are destructive to our self-interests.

These implicit instructions do not, of course, come to us as words. They reach us as feelings, inclinations, biases and impulses . When Jimmy is in a position where it is appropriate to be decisive, he is inclined to procrastinate. When a casual relationship begins to involve him more deeply, he has the impulse to end it. These influences do not seem connected to his past and it is easy for him to go along with them as it "feels" right. But they *are* connected to his implicit direction: "do not get involved, if you do you will be sucked into a whirlwind of danger."

Each of us operates according to an extensive and complex collection of implicit learnings, each arrived at in childhood, derived from observation and involvement with our parents. Each event is made useful by converting it into a story. These are stored as an organization of neurons—a memory bundle. Our amygdala/hippocampus, our emotional center, handles this. After the story is evaluated (the amygdala determines the emotional significance/threat), the hippocampus distributes it to appropriate parts of the brain, so that it can be used as guidance when the situation is similar Much of what we put into our implicit memory depends upon the generosity, caring and loving attention the parenting ones were able to give.

When a traumatic event occurred, this orderly process is exploded. Amygdala signals emergency! The body gets a shot of energy and mobilizes for flight or fight. The incoming information does not get organized into a useful story, the hippocampus is overwhelmed and the neurons storing this information are knotted together in a disorganized clump called a perturbation. Whenever a later event occurs that resonates with any part of that perturbation, if intense, it detonates intense anxiety, punctuated by flashbacks, and the person is gripped by impulses that often lead to destructive action. If moderate, it registers as an inclination, and may still lead to a course of action detrimental to best interests.

Examination of such impulses and actions seldom accomplishes anything because the perturbation is unaffected by words and reason. But the reflection of these perturbations is to be seen in the negative impulses, inclinations and feelings that seek to resolve trauma, based in distant past events.

It appears that EFT can target and untangle these perturbations if the energy from the tapping can be accurately directed. The procedure is as follows: the client sensitizes herself to every impulse, inclination and feeling that presses toward a negative action. She defines that action in the set-up phrase, and then taps on it. As she is focused in that direction, other aspects of the matter will occur to her and she weaves them into her set-up phrases.

The effect of the tapping energy is not to resolve the ancient problem, but to dissolve the fear and anxiety that glues the neuron information tightly together. This permits the amygdala/hippocampus to do their jobs and organize the incoherence into a story to make it an experience that can be usefully stored in appropriate brain cells.

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