

The Transformational Alchemy of Metaphor

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A Psychic Shift /The Case of Lila

At sixty Lila has been a single mother for almost the entirety of her son's 21 years. She has worked diligently to raise him, often working two jobs in highly stressful settings. After living for a year with packed boxes, Lila has finally moved out of her foreclosed home into a condo that she loves.

Lila's schema has included several distorted cognitions, and attendant painful emotions, such as the image of being a lonely, overworked, forever sad, struggling and usually unsuccessful single mother. She has felt "stuck," hating her thankless, demanding job, and facing one personal difficulty after another, including a layer of problems resulting from being a caretaker for compromised elderly parents.

Finally Lila has decided it is time to take care of, appreciate, and love, her Self. To facilitate her goal, I suggest trance work to Lila. After my explaining that during a gentle "intuitive sleep," her inner knowing mind can help, Lila says, "Yes, to being induced."

A fairly short, light and informal induction that utilizes the trust Lila has in her therapy, her comfort in the setting, and her personal resolve, easily puts Lila into trance.

1.

I suggest to Lila that as she rests, she can find some idea or image that represents her true Self. Quite quickly, Lila reports that she sees a butterfly emerging from its cocoon.

When I suggest to Lila that “easily and comfortably,” she can find a moment when this image shifts, and can notice what happens next, Lila says that she feels she IS the butterfly, and she sees/feels herself flying. When asked if she would like to give further feedback, Lila indicates that she would.

“What is happening?” I then ask.

“I am flying away from the negative energy.” She replies. “When I see myself flying like this, I realize that many things I have tucked away inside me have not always been the real me. Flying now, I know I can find a different way to love myself-- maybe the way I loved my son, especially when he was a newborn, and I could hold him this way.

(She gestures as if holding and rocking her baby.)

Drawn from Lila’s personal schema, the imagery of her flying, and the metaphor of rebirth, can now be utilized for transforming Lila’s sad view of her Self, and of her life. The attendant bodily sensations are available for anchoring a psychic shift in Lila’s unconscious.

2.

Toward this goal, I suggest to Lila that she might choose a motion, or gesture, that represents holding and loving her baby--and her Self. Lila chooses the same rocking motion she made

earlier. I suggest further that she can memorize the feelings, emotions, and sensations, associated with the experience of holding and loving the authentic Self that has flown away from negativity.

After a moment or two, the smile on Lila's face, and her radiance, suggest an alchemical shift has taken place in Lila's psychic schema. She is reoriented to the session, and at this time the session ends.

I do not debrief further at this time, but suggest to Lila that by remembering how she feels at this moment, her body will know just how to bring her to the Self-loving feeling any time she might wish to have that experience.

While it is not necessary to explain a "magic trick," (i.e. make the shift overtly cognitive) it might be wise to implant an anchor for the future, such as offering Lila a suggestion at the end of the trance, or post-hypnotic, that each time she: sees a baby, feels a rocking motion, crosses her arms, sees a tree limb swaying, etc., she will realize the intuitive authenticity of Self love.

3.

Necessity, Efficacy and Durability of Therapy With Single Mothers

With little time, not much money, and personal narratives filled with stress, single mothers need tools for relief in the present and a sense of hope for the future. As they perform what is arguably the hardest job on the planet, single mothers deserve to **feel good** and be able to help their children **do well**.

Therapy that combines Metaphors drawn from the single mother's own "Herstory" (Soul Mother Wisdom-Freedson) with the intuitive power of hypnosis opens responsiveness to therapeutic opportunity in four important areas, offering treatment solutions that can be **fast--and can last!**

Four Areas of Efficacy and Durability

1. The therapeutic relationship:

By listening for the phenomena and language of the single mother's personal narrative, and utilizing its metaphors, the therapist promotes a relationship of empathy, compassion and trust.

2. Trance:

In trance the phenomenology of the single mother's psychic schema can be injected with a transformed sense of her resilience, strength and hope.

3. Change:

Shifting metaphors in trance increases and encourages energy for parenting, anchors ability to manage stress, increases emotional regulation, promotes a sense of inner peace, and anchors a durable shift in the single mother's view of self and life.

4.

4. The Contextual Determinants:

Shifting contextual understanding of single mothers' distress from personality pathology to normal reactions to abnormal difficulties (PTSD perspective) de-stigmatizes the normative trials and tribulations of an extremely demanding life.

5. Sympathetic Identification

Identification with a new metaphor can produce positive shifts in Self states, life view and sense of wellbeing and peace.

Transformational Alchemy

As the therapist “feels” the single mother’s narrative, affirming and empathizing with its meaning, he uncovers a “mother lode” of metaphors, similes, analogies, allegories, and imagery that inform the woman’s view of single mother Self and life. Enhancing, refining, and/or reframing these metaphors within the mental readiness of trance produces a **sympathetic identification** with new interpretations. The ensuing and often rapid shift in Self states can improve ego strength and solidify authenticity.

In this way metaphor reaches beyond, yet informs the cognitive, redirecting attention, transforming schematic interpretations, and becoming anchored in the single mother’s narrative with hope and optimism. The resulting positive psychosocial-emotional benefits to the mother possess a golden wealth of parallel benefits to her children.

5.

In her book, Women Who Run with the Wolves, (And single mothers are always running!) Clarissa Pinkola Estes explains the power of narrative to shift perception. “When we hear a story the mind has the ability...to step away from its ego for a time and merge with another reality...Where this learning takes place and (new) attributes are acquired is ‘la selva subterranean’, the underground forest, the underworld of female knowing...While there, we are infused with instinctive language and knowledge. From that vantage point we understand what cannot be so easily understood from the point of view of the topside world.”

She suggests, “If a story is seed, then we are its soil. Just hearing the story allows us to experience it as though we ourselves were the heroine who either falters or wins out in the end. ...If we hear a story about a dove finding her young at last, then for a time after, something moves behind our

own feathered breasts. ...In a very real way we are imprinted with knowing just by listening to the tale.... What we learn in this way cannot be learned in any other form of consciousness...but can be brought back to 'consensual reality.' Among storytellers, this is called 'sympathetic magic.' ” Among therapists this is the **Transformational Alchemy of Metaphor.**