

HYPNOSIS WITH, OR AGAINST THE WIND OF LIFE

Summary: Countless highly specialized research papers treat hypnosis in all its various forms, but could the process of hypnosis not also be understood much more simply as a state of mind in which we suddenly stop fighting against the winds of life, and instead begin using their energy?

There is a large literature on hypnosis as a therapeutic act, as an altered state of consciousness, a communication tool, and now even as modification of cortical activity, observable using the latest brain-imaging techniques. During this lecture, I would like to consider with you the extent to which hypnosis might also be understood as a state of mind. And I would like to approach this state of mind of hypnosis by comparing it with our attitude towards the winds of life. You might say it's a bit facile for a balloonist to refer to the wind, but it is the winds of life, not atmospheric winds that I want to talk to you about.

In fact, most of the events we experience in life display exactly the same characteristics as the wind. At a social level, fashions, trends, laws, natural disasters, wars, and stock-market movements are all like the wind. For us as individuals, our successes, crises, failures, loves, symptoms, fears, anxieties, and depressions are all like the wind too. Why? Because they all take you by surprise and push you towards the unknown. The big problem is that the world we are in hates the unknown. All our education encourages us to reject the unknown, refuse doubt, and deny question marks and mysteries.

We want answers, certainty, and reassurance; we prefer exclamation points. We want control and power. Therefore, our usual way of managing the winds of life is more akin to how airplane pilots behave – use engine-power, energy and speed to struggle into the wind, to force a way through turbulence, and decide, as pilots of our own lives, which way to head. This is what we learn to do, and in some cases, it works well. If it doesn't, we do not ask ourselves too many questions – we are just happy to suffer.

It is interesting how ballooning offers us a totally different approach not only to flying, but also to understanding the winds of life. When you fly in a balloon, you are pushed along in the direction, and at the speed of the wind; you have absolutely no concept of movement, and you do not feel a breath of air on your face even at 200 km/h, since you are moving along with the air mass. In this sense, you are a prisoner of the wind. A balloon flight is comparable to a crisis, because you know exactly where you have come from, but you have no idea where you're going! It is very ironic in our world, which wants to control everything, to drift along with the wind, especially when you recall the proverb that “only dead fish go with the flow”. So why go ballooning, why drift with the wind? In this world that teaches us to resist,

why should we want to go along with situations? Why do some hypnotherapists even claim that in many cases they are able to solve a problem by working with the grain of the problem rather than against it?

Ballooning teaches us that as we drift along with the wind we develop a new relationship with the unknown. Normally, in our daily lives, we are programmed in our cerebral software by all our experiences, by peer pressures and the expectations of our loved ones, by our fear of the unknown, and by our need to be in control and have certainty. This usually limits us only to reproducing what we have already learned. When we find ourselves at the mercy of the wind's vagaries and offer ourselves up to them, we realize that what we have learned is not enough. We realize that the exploration of the external world is only interesting if we also explore our own inner world, and so become capable of producing reactions, behavior, emotions, solutions and strategies that are not learned from others.

But if we are suddenly able to produce answers that we have never learned, to behave as we never have done before, where can this have come from? Obviously not from the software that life has programmed into us, but rather from the hard disk - the area buried deep within us that we have not yet learned to use. And all this is only because the unknown and our doubts and questionings, far from being our enemies, actually stimulate our creativity and capability. They force us out of our familiar world where we control things automatically, and suddenly make us realize that loss of control - even if it's difficult to manage and sometimes harsh and painful - can be a major stimulus for a new type of performance.

So adventure is a state of mind in the face of the unknown, it's an attitude that doesn't particularly seek out spectacular things, but rather the «extra-ordinary», that is anything that allows us to break free from our automatic, pre-programmed reactions. Adventure therefore manifests itself less in what we do, than in who we are. The reason I became fascinated by ballooning was because I realized I was dealing more with a philosophy than with a sport, and because what I discovered in it matched my own interests in life and in hypnosis in particular.

But when you are a prisoner of the wind, trapped by its direction and speed, how can you exploit this situation to increase your performance, and heighten your consciousness, your perceptiveness, and your desire to get closer to your inner resources? What freedom do you really have? I think this is where we need to go back to the famous words of Marcus Aurelius: «I hope I have the strength to change the things I can change, the courage to accept the things I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference between the two». In a balloon, we cannot change the direction of the winds or control nature, but there is one thing that we as pilots can change: our altitude.

And here we find that the atmosphere consists of distinct meteorological layers, all moving in very different directions and at different speeds. So rather than struggling horizontally to move to the left or the right, we need to change altitude and find another wind that will take us in a different direction. Life itself is a bit like that - a great balloon flight, during which we are often imprisoned by winds of life taking us in directions that are not necessarily those of our choosing. We can certainly grumble and try to resist, but all that does is to cause more suffering. Responsibility and free will for us in life consists essentially, as for balloon pilots, in “changing altitude”, that is lifting ourselves up educationally, vocationally, psychologically, philosophically, and why not spiritually, so as to open ourselves to new influences, ways of understanding and outlooks on life that can take us to other destinations

Just think how much energy we waste rejecting the ideas of people who think differently, and trying to convince others that they are wrong, rather than using their ideas to enrich our own experience! Changing altitude in an upwards direction is all about opening up to new strategies and ways of doing things. It's to gain an ability to cast doubt on our convictions, to escape from being imprisoned by our fear of the unknown, to open ourselves up to the world around us. But you can also change altitude downwards or descend - something we are familiar with in hypnosis, because it's what we call self-exploration. We are no longer moving upwards and outwards, but rather downwards and inwards, into our inner world. The aim is to explore the inner resources that hypnotherapists are convinced exist. We are now no longer talking about the psychoanalytic definition of the unconscious, which is often compared to a garbage bin into which all unacceptable emotions are repressed. The hypnotherapist believes that deep down, deep inside his patient, there exist resources, a basis for security, sound foundations on which he can build.

But we have to admit that changing altitude is not easy to achieve. When you are in a balloon and you want to climb, you have to jettison ballast so as to reduce weight. This ballast takes the form of sand, water, or - when everything is going wrong – sometimes even your provisions, batteries, navigational instruments, radio equipment or photos...! Dropping ballast can be painful. In life too, that's exactly what we have to do if we want to change altitude - jettison some ballast. Ballast, in everyday life, is our convictions, our dogmas, our paradigms, the things we're confident about, our external security. In other words, paradoxically, everything that we cling to when things start going wrong. It's not easy to convince yourself that you could disengage from being a prisoner of your own convictions, and start throwing these overboard. Nevertheless, problems would take on another meaning. Instead of fighting against some external reality and trying in vain to change it, we would instead be changing an inner reality.

At that point, the best analogy for the therapist guiding a patient becomes the meteorologist guiding a balloon. In the world we are familiar with, what in fact do doctors and therapists do? If we are honest, we have to admit that in general we try to combat symptoms, diseases, and problems presented by patients. If that works, it's wonderful. We then find ourselves in the first situation described by Marcus Aurelius, where we have the power to change what we can change. But if it doesn't work, the meteorologist has to take over from the pilot. You're no longer a pilot administering a therapy that guides the patient back to health, but a meteorologist helping the patient himself to reach different altitudes, and so find the track that suits him best.

We can see that, in this sense, we should go along with the patient, using his own energy and desire to either develop or stagnate. But there's one fundamental thing we need to cultivate, and that is trust in change rather than fear of change. This is ultimately why an adventurous state of mind is essential not only in life, but also in therapy, where we explore the unknown and just have to offer patients opportunities to experiment with different levels. Whatever therapy we may use, and whatever official name we give it, we can adopt this process of "guiding altitude". We will look for the best winds, but it will be the patient himself who will give us feedback, who will tell us at which "altitude" (that is situation, relationship, change of relationships, or new attitude towards life) he thinks he observes this or that particular positive change. In this way, the "meteorologist-therapist" can help the patient find the direction he is in search of.

In summary, changing altitude is a technique for getting away from the automated, programmed way in which we usually respond to various situations in life. Changing altitude often means saying to yourself: «How would I want to react automatically, and how can I do the opposite?». My starting point here - and this is a fundamental point that I'd like to stress - is the idea that things you want to do spontaneously do not necessarily emerge from your intuition, from your deepest self, but mostly from the way that life has programmed you. This moment's pause, when we say to ourselves, «What if I did the opposite of what I want to do» takes us to a different altitude. I would like to give you a few examples, using especially the notion of paradox. Paradox means contrary to received opinion, to what is commonly expected.

In a paradox, the person before us is expecting a normal, conventional, customary response, but receives something completely different. A new patient comes into your office and immediately tells you, «Doctor, I'm useless, I'm no good to anyone, every time I try to do something, I fail, and my life has no meaning. All that's left is for me to kill myself.» Your response if you are not a hypnotherapist - and maybe even if you are - will probably boil

down to something like: «No, just look, you summoned up the strength to come see me. You have energy, you're surrounded by family members, there are things that can make you happy, etc ... ». But you would just be struggling against the wind, strengthening the driving force that the patient is devoting to his self-destruction.

If instead you were to answer: «I don't know you well enough to contradict you. Perhaps it is quite true that you are worthless,» this is exactly the opposite of what he had expected to hear, and the person standing before you will set about reversing the process. The patient himself will start describing for you all the situations in which he doesn't feel quite so bad, thereby himself defining with much greater precision the few dark corners of his life that will have to be treated by therapy. You will have been playing along with the patient, drifting with the wind, going with the grain of the situation, not struggling against the wind.

An example that I like to quote is the little five-year-old boy who came to see me accompanied by his father and his mother because he had developed a kidnapping phobia since attending an awareness session on this topic at school. He no longer dared to wave goodbye to his parents, refused to take the small bus that took the neighborhood kids to school, didn't even have the courage to play in the yard with his friends, instead clinging the whole time to his parents' clothes. Instead of reassuring the child, which is what everyone expected me to do, I asked him to talk to me about his fear. The child explained it all to me in front of his horrified parents, so I went even further, telling him that I needed to get a better idea of this fear that he had, and that for the next appointment I wanted him to build it for me in Lego bricks (he had told me that he loved playing with Lego). And then I added: «But be very careful when you bring me it along to me, because fears are extremely fragile and it would be a shame if yours broke up before I could see it.» A week later, the child arrived in my waiting room with an extraordinary and terrifying Lego model displaying everything that a four-year-old child going through the oedipal phase can possibly dream up. I took him into my office, urging him to be very careful not to break his beautiful, fragile model. It took us more than five minutes to reach the office, because we were so careful. The child placed his fear onto the table in front of his parents, who were livid. I then asked him to describe what he had built. He went around looking at his model from various angles before turning to me and saying, in a very confident tone, «You know, the more I look at it, the less it scares me.» It was then that the parents understood the strategy and promised me that in the next few days they would do the same thing with their child every time he displayed the symptoms. Three days later, their son went back to school and resumed his activities in a totally normal way - and all this without any long drawn-out psychotherapy.

I had a similar kind of experience with a little girl brought along by her parents, who complained that she was so naughty compared with her two sisters, who were both perfect. If they could

have abandoned their daughter in my office, they would have done so. Playing along a bit with their analysis, I first asked them to explain everything the child was doing wrong, and expressed sympathy for their plight. Then I asked them next week to bring along a list of everything that their daughter was doing right, so that I could understand all aspects of their child better. The parents duly returned as agreed with their list and were surprised that, from that moment on, their daughter had begun to behave normally and was taking a full part in family life: «We have noted down everything that's going goes well and it now seems that there's really nothing wrong: she's helping, and working with us... she's not really any different from her two sisters ... ». Here again, our habit of automatically fighting against the wind tends to make us forget everything that can go along in the same direction with it - what maintains a patient's strength, what can help reinforce an evolving process.

A similar situation arose with my four-year-old daughter when I was planning my trip around the world in a balloon. My little girl was afraid of the dark and always asked for a light to be left on at night. Even when she was asleep, she would wake up crying if the light was turned off. I had some night-vision goggles in my equipment, and suggested to my daughter that she have a look through these at the night - they pierce through darkness and reveal objects in a greenish light. As soon as she put them on, she exclaimed: «But Daddy, I can still see my Teddy, my bed's still there, and my table and my whole room! ». «Yes», I asked her, "why - does that surprise you?». «Daddy, I thought there was nothing there during the night.» The simple act of going to have a look at what she was afraid of had demystified her fear. Unfortunately, I can't recommend this to all child psychiatrists, because these devices cost more than 10,000 Euros and I'm not sure they would be reimbursed by the health insurance...! But I can assure you that the treatment was as effective as a course of therapy that might ultimately have cost 10,000 Euros!

We can develop the idea of going along with a problem as much as we want, and I think some of you are already familiar with this approach. But what is interesting is what it can teach us about our own state of mind, our own attitudes as therapists. We often want to fight against a problem, to plan, not to lose control, to keep all the cards in our hand. We can observe this especially when we are preparing for a consultation. We can prepare everything with reference to what we think we know about the patient, but if he suddenly changes one word, an attitude or a response, all our planning collapses and we suddenly become helpless. In fact, I think that this is where hypnosis really begins. We find ourselves in a different situation from what we had expected with our patient, and we accept that we no longer know what to do. All our programming is erased, and now it's up to the hard disk to send us the information, ideas and words that will make us truly effective and creative. We really need to embrace this moment of void rather than reject it, a bit like a writer poring anxiously over a blank sheet who commits to going through agony in order to write a masterpiece.

It's exactly the same thing in a trance. You can have a patient lying in front of you and suddenly an unexpected event disrupts the moment. Someone presses the doorbell, the phone rings or a jackhammer starts operating in the street. All these parasitical events and contingencies can be put to good use. When you have a patient who is in the process of probing deeply into her inner self to find solutions, her mind is wandering around deep in the cellar, and a jackhammer on the street is both a disaster and a fabulous opportunity. It's a disaster if you are thrown off balance by such an incident, but it could be a godsend if you can use the opportunity to make a seamless link, saying something like: «Do you realize that they have now even brought a jackhammer down into the cellar to dig even deeper and help you find your solutions.»

We always have to decide whether to fight against a situation or go along with it. Paradoxically, accepting, going along with something, is a decision. People often think that drifting along like this constitutes abandonment, running away. But I think that it is just the opposite - an extremely conscious decision. You say to yourself, «Now, I accept.» And that allows you to change altitude, quitting the horizontal struggle either to climb up and discover the world, or to descend and discover yourself.

If hypnosis attracts so many people, it's perhaps partly for the magical aspect that it is thought to convey, but I think it's mostly because hypnosis is an opportunity to change relationship paradigms. Imagine that someone insults you just because you have made a mistake. Your normal reaction would be to reciprocate with the same negative attitude. But if instead you enter into the process (not therapeutically, but from the standpoint of your relations with life), and say, «You're absolutely right, I'm sorry I made this mistake, I should not have done it,» it is you who will regain the initiative, you who will be in a process that can help you emerge as the winner.

I remember the day when the owner of the apartment I rent asked me to give up my 10m by 15m cellar, which he wanted to use himself, and swap it for a tiny 3m by 4m cellar into which I would have had difficulty squashing all my stuff. I would have been justified in replying that the terms of my lease entitled me to that cellar and that there was no question of changing any of those. For this strategy to work, I would have had to be very determined, have a good lawyer and lots of money, and accept living on bad terms with the owner, who would then doubtless try to evict me.

I hesitated for a moment - sensing the urge to tell him to take a running jump - and told myself that I really needed to respond in exactly the opposite way: «I'm not a demanding tenant, it is your building, you can do what you like with it, and I will make do with whichever

cellar you can let me have.» In a very friendly tone, the owner immediately responded, «Oh no, I really can't leave you with so little space. There aren't any bigger cellars, but I can let you have two of them if you like.» So by the end of that morning, I had two cellars in which I could store all my equipment.

I love these examples, because it is this mindset that allowed my team to fly around the world in a balloon. One of the keys to our success was obtaining permission to fly over China. We had failed in our second attempt because, despite a year of negotiations, the Chinese had refused to let us through. For the third attempt, it was vital to obtain this authorization. Without it, we could not have succeeded. We analyzed the situation and realized how wrong our approach had been, along with our competitors', who had adopted the same attitude. All of us had told the Chinese: «We want a permit. All the international regulations require you to give permission for occasional civil flights, and all the other countries in the world have given us permission. This shows that there is no problem flying a balloon in any kind of airspace.»

We were struggling in the wrong direction - into the wind, against the grain, against others. So what did we do in the next negotiations? We went to China and said exactly the opposite of what we had said previously: «We are sorry to give you so much trouble. If it were easy for you to give us an authorization, you would already have done so. So obviously we are causing you many problems. We understand that if you have not given us permission, whilst all other countries have, it is because it is much more difficult for you than for others to accept and control a balloon in your airspace. So we've come to see you to try and study the problem together and find solutions.» Wide-eyed, our partners told us: «Of the eight teams who have asked for permission, you're the only one to show us respect, to try and understand our problem and imagine yourselves in our shoes. So we will do the same thing and try to meet your request.»

And in the end we were the only ones who got permission to overfly China. But the story does not end there. A few months later, before we took off, one of our competitors flew over China without authorization. That very same day, they revoked my own permit. If I had reacted spontaneously, I would have replied: «You've no right to withdraw my permission. I'm not in any way responsible for the attitude of the other pilot and I intend to take off anyway as soon as the weather conditions allow.» But no! What I said to the Chinese was exactly the opposite: «I'm so sorry about what happened, and please be assured that I will not take off until I receive a new authorization from you.»

The Chinese responded by inviting us to the Embassy for discussions, and there, thanks to our open attitude, we received a new permit that allowed us to depart on our successful

flight. Bettelheim called this «putting yourself into someone else's shoes,» and I think in that sense it is important to realize that respect is not only a moral value, but also a tool in relationships. Respect goes hand-in-hand with the desire to understand other people, and saying to yourself that, in the end, other people can't operate any differently from the way they do, because they, like all the rest of us, have been shaped by their journey through life

Talking to you here today, I can only tell you what I am telling you and in the way that I am telling it, because I am the result of the way my life has been programmed. And you who are listening to me can't think any differently from the way you're thinking, because you too are the product of the path your life has taken. To communicate, we need respect, we need to enter the world of the other person, to try and understand what he is experiencing. Every time we go against this mechanism, we fail to communicate. It's very funny that we should imagine that we communicate via Internet. Internet is a great invention for transmitting information, but absolutely not for communication.

We developed this approach towards communication both for the aircrew, who had to survive in harsh conditions of cold, stress and close confinement, and for the team on the ground. We realized how useful for team-building the state of mind of going with, rather than against the grain was. Very often, people who want to get together and form a team will try to impose their own strength, their own creativity, and their own ideas, to the detriment of others. You then quickly end up with a relationship between two people where one plus one equals zero ($1 + 1 = 0$) - that is where each person succeeds in obliterating the personality or the value of the other. What you have got to try and create instead is a relationship where one plus one equals three ($1 + 1 = 3$)! In our case, there was Brian Jones, myself, and the two of us together.

For our meteorologists, it was the same thing. There was the first one, the second, and the two together, that is three in total. So it's clear that the key to success is to work along with differences rather than against them. You need to draw benefit from each person's accumulated experience, different approach or vision. Whenever one person sees black and the other white, it is not important to know who is right and who is wrong, because we all know that each has very good personal reasons for saying what he says or thinking what he thinks. It's not what people say that's interesting, but rather why they say it. Communication then ceases to be a sharing of facts and ideas, and becomes a sharing of experience. As long as we retain the mindset that the only thing we are sharing is facts and ideas, we will continue arguing about who is right and who is wrong.

But if you start conceiving communication as being the sharing of experience, you can then start to build something resembling a meta-experience, belonging to both people, and not

just to one or the other. This is how we have managed to keep together a team of about fifty people for several years, despite all the work, doubts and sacrifices that preceded success. We lost only two or three people who could not adjust to this style of operating. What I'm telling you is not a panacea - you can't succeed with just anyone. But these ideas explain the state of mind you can enter into to build a team, if that's what you want to do. It goes without saying that one of the big contra-indications against everything I've just told you is psychopathy or perversion, since in those cases - by definition - you can't put yourself into someone else's shoes, or empathize with their experiences.

Some borderline personalities will also tend to go outside the framework that's been laid down, and so derail the team. So please do not apply this method systematically, imagining that it always works. Sometimes it works, in situations where in any case nothing else would have worked. So you may as well try !

Within our team, we applied the same approach in the search for financial and technical partners. You know very well that part of each person wants to say yes to what is being proposed, and another part wants to say no. This is called ambivalence. When we are trying to persuade or convince someone, we tend to fight against the part of him that wants to say no. We tend to attack that part because we want to show why we are right. We really need to have partners, to be funded or helped with our project. The patient really must enter therapy, accept instructions, change his attitude to family relationships, etc ... We ourselves create resistance when we fight against aspects of another person, when we struggle into the wind. We are at zero altitude, reacting automatically and behaving in the way we have been programmed. Whatever then gives us the right to ask the patient to change his own altitude? It is much more productive to recognize that the opposite of persuasion is motivation. Instead of fighting against the part of the other person that wants to say no, we suddenly begin to reinforce the part that wants to say yes. We should identify with what's driving the other person, be he sponsor, partner, patient or anyone else, and start underpinning the part of him that wants to say yes, amplifying and reinforcing it until you achieve acquiescence, and so line yourself up with the direction of the wind.

In this spirit, we could say that one definition of hypnosis is the state of mind in which we want to go with the grain in a given situation rather than apply learned, automatic responses, which impel us to go in the opposite direction. So we can see that choosing between the mindset of fighting against the wind or making it your ally is a decision with many consequences. Life crises are not immune from this way of thinking. Obviously we would like to eliminate crises and have an easy life, but life is not like that. You may be familiar with the way that the Chinese write the word «crisis» in their calligraphy. The word "crisis" is composed of two characters, one of which means danger and the other luck, or opportunity to be grasped. The two together (again $1 + 1 = 3$) mean crisis. We always tend to lose sight of this a bit. We are constantly fighting against the problems that crop up, rather than going along with them

and changing altitude to find new opportunities.

And here we are again as if flying in a balloon. We are prisoners of life, and our only option is to realize that the greatest adventure of all is to develop the state of mind that allows us to stimulate the part within ourselves that wants go along with life, with all its uncertainties and unexpected turns. This is ultimately how we can develop new resources. Dominique Mégglé offers us an extraordinary example that could be used as the subject of my whole presentation. On the first or second page of his program, he wrote: «We thank the pharmaceutical companies that have helped us to strengthen our autonomy as practitioners by actively denying us their support.» And he lists them.

On my side, I could also have complained about having my presentation time halved at the last moment and could have told Dominique this morning: «Look, this is just not on. I prepared a lecture lasting for an hour as you told me to, and I can't agree to talk for less time ... ». In that way, I would have displayed a total inability to apply what I am telling you, and to exercise that most basic of qualities - flexibility and adaptability. I thought about it and I finally told myself, «If I explained everything, if I told you about all the topics that I wanted to cover, who would still want to go and buy my two books that are available on the ground floor?»

So here is my final word:

The situations that we cannot change have the power to change us.

I hope you have a wonderful adventure in the winds of life.

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC :

Question: «And if the wind stops blowing? What happens then? I'm thinking in particular of all those long drawn-out therapies where the patient becomes dependent on the therapist.

Answer: In fact, to sustain the same metaphor, we first have to clear up a misunderstanding about flying in balloons. Many believe that when there is no wind the balloon drops out of the sky. But balloons continue to fly when there is no wind. They simply stop moving forward, but they stay in the air. It's at this point that the pilot has to change altitude to search for a different meteorological layer where there is again some wind. It obviously takes technical know-how to build a balloon that is capable of flying at high altitude, and you need to develop similar skills to be able to unblock those endless therapies, where the therapist often uses the strategy of the wasp rather than the bee. I do not know if you have noticed this. I have a

terrace at home where two sides are glazed, one has a brick wall, and one side is open.

When a bee enters through the open side, it will invariably collide against the first glazed panel opposite and start flying repeatedly into the glass for hours or days on end. I often find dead bees on the ground at the same spot. When I see a wasp confronted with the same situation, it will try out all the windows before finding the way out. Wasps are able to change altitude and strategy, but not bees. In this context, we have to distinguish between doggedness and perseverance. Perseverance means to keep on trying at many different levels, whilst doggedness is persisting always at the same level, the same altitude, without understanding why you cannot overcome the obstacle. So it is up to us to have this flexibility, this ability to change altitude, when we are faced with the kind of patient who keeps on stumbling into the same obstacles at the same places. We have to teach them to find some other wind.

Question: «Can you tell us something about the importance of self-questioning (soul-searching)?»

Answer: I give a lot of lectures in English, and I once asked a bilingual person who had attended one of my lectures how this French expression “se remettre en question” could be translated into English. This person looked at me wide-eyed and claimed: «There is no exact translation of this expression in English, and a jolly good thing too. It is already a great pity that it exists in French. You should not indulge in soul-searching, what we need is convictions ...». I leave you to imagine what success rate that person would have if he was a therapist!

Question: «I have a personal experience to offer about the paradoxical approach. It involved my son who was having a lot of nightmares and one day told me: «Mom, you know what? Before I fall asleep now, I think of all the most horrible things, everything that scares me most, so that during the night there's no room left for anything but beautiful things and beautiful thoughts. »»

Answer: Absolutely wonderful! And if we want to do this ourselves, as adults, we can retrieve the child deep within us that we have forgotten. When we do this, we get used to finding resources (provided, of course, we believe that they exist).

Question: «I have some experience to offer concerning the alcoholic patients I look after. I tell them that I am not asking them to change anything at all, but simply to note their daily alcohol consumption. This makes them take a more objective view of their problem and leads them spontaneously to reduce their consumption. «

Answer: This is a magnificent example, which illustrates perfectly how we always tend to try and fight against symptoms rather than work along with them. In the same vein, a patient came to see me after consulting with six psychiatrists about his anxiety, which was bad enough for him to be about to be put on disability benefits. He told me that I was his final chance for recovery. It is obvious that if I had wanted to fight against his fears and try to suppress them, I would just have become the 7th failed psychiatrist.

Instead, I told him that I needed to understand the meaning of his anxieties before they disappeared and I asked him to be sure not to lose them before we arrived at this outcome. We had therefore reversed the problem, and after a few sessions the patient resumed work. It's a bit like the situation in which Erickson told a person who wanted to lose weight that she had not yet reached the weight at which she could start losing weight, and that she should come back when she'd put on another 20 kg. If we think we are reacting by following our intuition, in fact we are often merely allowing our automatic programming to express itself. The moment's pause that sometimes allows us to do the opposite of what we would have done spontaneously often makes us much more effective. I have often asked myself why we have more success doing the opposite of what intuition demands, but I just think that what we call intuition is not intuition, but simply the automatic repetition of what we've been programmed to do.

Question: «What do you think about the situations where people who have never really communicated or talked about their emotions suddenly start broadcasting them to all and sundry on Internet social networks?»

Answer: I think that we are dealing here with individuals who have long tried to suppress their feelings for fear of being overwhelmed by them. And we have to confess that this is fairly standard in our society. We learn to control our emotions, to suppress them, out of fear of being overwhelmed by them. But in fact it is clear that this is ultimately a very short-term solution, because while the emotions remain compressed everything goes well for a while. But once they reach a certain level of compression, it's like a gas that increases in pressure and temperature as it's compressed and eventually explodes in our face. The best way to manage emotions is, paradoxically, to accept them, enter into them, feel them, even if they hurt, and give you stomach pain, chest pain, or make you sore all over. This is also valid for suffering - deciding to accept pain is sometimes the best way of getting rid of it.

Question: «Does this also apply to the grieving process?»

Answer: There is obviously a cultural dimension in mourning and I can give you an example

I experienced on a trip to Africa for my humanitarian foundation. I asked how long a mother who had lost her child remained sad. I was told that she would be sad until she had another child. This shows that she is not really crying over the child she has just lost, but rather about having no child, until the moment when she gets another one. In our society, it is exactly the contrary. Here, we lament the loss of a particular child. Even if ten arrive subsequently, they will never compensate for that loss. So all depends on the way we personalize or generalize the members of our family. I started my presentation by talking about the fear of the unknown and our need for control. In that sense I think it is very interesting to conclude this conference on the issue of mourning, because death is the symbol par excellence for entering the unknown, and loss of control.

In the course of our lives we construct a mindset, be it philosophical, social or religious, that allows us to minimize our fear of death, and to compensate for doubt and fear of the unknown with a number of things that we are convinced about. All this to calm our fears about what may be on the other side. Wars of religion then become wars against those who threaten our convictions and our own conceptions about the construct we use to calm our fears of the unknown and of death. So now we should also try to reverse this phenomenon. If we accept that life is a great adventure, we can perhaps also say that the greatest of all adventures is death. Then, we will be able to say to ourselves at the moment of death - abandoning our firm convictions and accepting that we drift along with the wind of our evolving spirituality - that we are finally about to find out what is the other side, and that at the moment of our death seven billion people on earth will still be asking themselves this question, which we alone are about to have revealed to us.

Dr Bertrand Piccard

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