

THE MASTER WEAVER

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1. Introduction

- How often do we look at the night sky and ask - why? Why me? Why this? Why now? We are trained to think in terms of cause and effect. If there is an effect there must be a cause. If there is a creation, there must be a creator. If there is a tapestry, there must be a weaver. --- So, who is the master weaver that creates that tapestry we call our life? What are the tools used to create this tapestry? And, if we don't like our life experience can we change it? The purpose of today's presentation is to answer these questions.
- The last time I had the privilege of sharing my thoughts with you, I had mixed feelings. I wasn't a member and wasn't sure why I was being asked to give the equivalent of a sermon. I felt a little like Groucho Marx who didn't want to join any club that would have him. Now, after listening to so many of you share your experiences, your struggles and your insights, I realize that sharing our selves with the fellowship is an honor and a responsibility. For me it's payback time for all the wisdom and inspiration you have shared with me.
- In the last presentation, we talked about how humans have been making sense of the universe since the beginning of history. We talked about an organizing principle that is a constant in the symbolism of all cultures. It describes the essential energy forces that sustain the world. This power flows through the planet and through us, and is directly reflected in the four elements of the ancient Greeks – earth, air, fire and water. It is also in the four yogas in the Bhagavad Gita – Jnana, Bakti, Karma, and Raja, and the four suites of the Tarot Minor Arcana – Pentacles, Swords, Wands and Cups and the four functions in Jungian psychology – Sensing, Intuition, Thinking and Feeling.
- Many of you have asked me to expand on the original presentation – to talk about each of the four essential energy forces – which I will do. This three dimensional mandala represents the integration of all four essential forces. The sword represents the one force I will speak about today and has been a symbol for this power in the east and in the west.

2. Situation

- On August 23rd, Fran and I drove to New Jersey for a wedding and stopped for gas at the intersection of routes 3 & 301. I fueled the car and Fran went inside for water. When we tried to get in the car we couldn't because the car automatically locked the doors with the keys inside.

It was 1:30 in the afternoon and the temperature was 96 degrees. At first I sensed that we were about to get into the “Why did you... Why didn't you ...?” conversation. It didn't materialize. Then there was the “Do you know how many times this sort of thing has happened to me lately?” but that stopped as soon as it started. As we had towing companies refuse to come and professional repossessors unable to get into the car, after hours of being in the sun, there was that uneasy feeling that the system wasn't working. To make matters worse, it was frustrating using the public telephone because a truck pulled up along side and was pumping out the station, making it almost impossible to hear the other party. We thought through our options and called the Infinity dealer in Richmond. He insisted the towing companies should be able to handle the lock out with a “slim Jim”. Nevertheless, we asked for the road service number provided to new owners and called them. After some hassle there, they told us only a locksmith would be able to get into our model.

One was called and after being there for three hours, we continued our journey – tired, wilted and our feet sticking to our sandals because of the heat. We laughed and changed all our plans for the day.

- Has anything like this ever happened to you? It's all part of being human. Have you ever noticed how we act most of the time? I've noticed four different typical responses. Let's imagine our friends leaving their houses on a cold snowy morning on their way to a very important meeting. And they find the battery dead. Some respond by blaming those damned ----- car companies, or their spouse for not winterizing the car, or reminding them it was winter. In other words, somebody else is to blame for his or her misfortune. Another person can't start the car and blames him or herself. “I can't even remember to winterize the car, and winter is almost over.” “I can't do anything right.” “Why didn't I create a contingency plan?” And a third person concludes the life sucks. It's all too much, how could anyone be expected to cope with the complexities of modern living. And the fourth person doesn't assign blame. Its just life getting in the way.
3. Have you noticed how our perception of the situation affects our feelings, behave and physically reactions? For example if we choose to believe someone else is to blame for our misfortune we frequently feel angry, our heart races, our face flushes, we speak loudly, and behave as if we were looking for a **fight**. On the other hand, those who blame themselves often feel depressed, breath heavily and **flee** the situation. If we choose to believe that life is to blame and the world is

unsafe, we often feel anxious, overwhelmed and **freeze**. We stop participating. We can't cope. And those who accept the situation without the need to blame anyone or anything often see it as a problem that needs to be solved and might feel enthusiastic and caring. They identify the problem, consider options and make decisions. They **flow**.

3. Interpretation

- Recently, I had the opportunity to experience and observe the relationship between thoughts, feelings, behavior and physical reactions. I was in the mountains of North Carolina participating in a congregational leadership workshop. There were many large and small group exercises. The small group that I participated in every day included the facilitator, who also headed up leadership development for the entire association. She was a very experienced Phd in her field. At one of our meetings, a colleague expressed how angry she was because of something the facilitator said in the larger group meeting. She said she was so angry she felt she could hit/kill her. The facilitator stared in disbelief and asked, "You would hurt me?" The facilitator had difficulty breathing and said she could not participate in the group. Her accuser, realizing the impact of her statements began to cry. This triggered a third woman to cry and the man who had volunteered to facilitate this meeting to stutter. Trying to be honestly supportive, I said that she "was a significant asset to the group and if she left I would be disadvantaged." "This is something we can get through together." I also asked if what she had said in the larger group was an honest statement based on her professional experience. She said, yes. Still trying to get her to see the situation for what it was I said, "you know, feedback sometimes tells us about the person receiving it, but it always tells us about the person giving it." Nothing worked, the group was going into a meltdown and she was getting up to leave, when in desperation I challenged her. I said, "Today, you taught us about family of origin issues and the process groups go through as they evolve into high performing teams. This is exactly what is going on here, which is to be expected. If we can't work these issues in real life, it undermines the credibility of the school and our reason for being here." She said she didn't care and left the room. She later returned but the feeling in the room was tense.

Later, when I went to my room, I thought about what had happened. This was not what I wanted my experience at the school to be about. And I did not want to be in the role of leader, consultant or rescuer. I believed my assessment and comments were accurate, but were they helpful? The group was still intact, but was it functioning. I was afraid that my behavior would reinforce the myth that men were rational and women were emotional. In working through this I said to myself, "let's pretend you were as hooked as everyone else. What is there about you that was hooked by her behavior?" I immediately realized what had happened. I

also realized the momentary insight, which I immediately shut down during the small group encounter.

When I was a child, my mother was afraid that I was too good and gentle for the world she brought me into. I can still remember clearly her getting down on her knees in the kitchen and saying “Cliffy, I’m going to start punching you until you start punching back.” I can’t remember how it ended, but I became the toughest kid in five neighborhoods. I lived by the motto “I will never start a fight, and I will never lose one.” Cyranno de Bergerac became my hero. He was a warrior poet. He hid his gentleness behind a sword. The difference between us was that I was still in bunties.

When the facilitator asked, “You would hurt me?” I realized how hurt she really was. She had suffered polio as a child and still needed two crutches to walk. She was also a lesbian working in a religious community where many still see her lifestyle as an abomination, a sin against God. All of her life she has been hated and rejected simply because of who she was.

In the small group meeting, my unconscious intention was to rescue her. She was a leader. She was the teacher. Two hours earlier I was on the phone with the House of Representatives critiquing the performance of someone in her position. She wasn’t walking her talk. She wasn’t doing her job. She was failing. I wanted her to be strong, - like I had to be. I wanted her to stand up to the bully, like I didn’t. I wanted her to be strong so that I didn’t have to remember when I was weak.

At our next meeting, before we even started I apologized in front of the group. I said, “I am not apologizing for what I said but that I said anything at all.” “I’m not a woman, or gay and I don’t need crutches to walk, but I understand how you felt, because I have felt the same way. I know what it feels like not to be accepted for who you are. (I told her my story and said) By insisting that you assume a specific role in the group I rejected who you were in that moment and didn’t support what you needed in that moment, and I sincerely apologize.”

Without getting into whether I was right or wrong, appropriate or not, my feelings and behavior were directly controlled by my thoughts. In the first case, I interpreted her behavior as failure, causing me to feel anxious and critical. My intention was to rescue her and so my behavior was challenging.

In the second case, my conscious intention was to be a member of the group not its leader. My intention was to be a member of an intimate learning community where no one looked good at the expense of others. My interpretation of her behavior was as a competent and courageous leader who was threatened and tired of always having to be on guard. I

felt empathy and my behavior was open, honest and supportive.

- Another example involved a client of mine. She was angry with her daughter. She had stood by her alcoholic daughter when everyone else had given up and helped her to become a sober, fully functioning woman. My client had her own needs and expectations and felt her daughter was not being responsive. She described in great detail her daughter's behaviors and motives. I asked her what she wanted the relationship to be. I also asked, "What's another way of looking at your daughter's behavior?" She was obviously irritated by what must have seemed like a stupid question. After a long pause, she talked about how hard her daughter was working, that she hardly had time for herself and was struggling with a number of problems. As she talked, I could feel a deep sense of empathy and caring develop for her daughter. When she stopped talking, I asked her how she was feeling about her daughter. Her whole mood changed. She was filled with love and concern for her daughter and a desire to call her and be of help, which she did. And in expressing the love she felt she received the love she wanted. Her mood and behavior changed simply by shifting her point of view.
- One of my brothers visited for a week over the Fourth of July. While playing darts in the finished basement, he became very critical of his own ability. The game had obviously triggered sibling rivalry. I asked him, "So what was your purpose in coming up for a week?" He said, "I'm going through a lot with the divorce and wanted to spend some quiet time with my family and enjoy their support." I said, "I throw darts all the time. I probably do it every day. It's my way of relaxing." "What's another way of describing your dart throwing ability?" He said, "Given the fact that I never throw darts, I'm surprised that I'm keeping them on the board." I said, "We are not competing. Relax, focus and let the darts go wherever they want. Trust your body to do what is necessary." We had a great time and he felt good about himself when he doubled his score. One again, his intention and his interpretation is what created the experience.

When we played golf, by the way, that same attitude enabled him to help me take ten points off my golf game.

- Fran and I have saved each other's life at different times in our relationship. She helped me **change my life by changing my mind**. I was feeling that everything I valued was coming to an end and she chose to see it as a new beginning. Without saying anything, she gave me a birth certificate. It was my birth certificate with the date changed. The obvious message was that I had been reborn.

- If you read the ancient or modern wisdom literature from the East or the West, they say the same things:

"People are just about as happy as they make up their minds to be."
Abraham Lincoln

"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."
William Shakespeare

"Thinking is the grand originator of our experience." Every experience and perception is based on thought. William James

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind." William James

"Our hopes and fears sway us, not events themselves." Epictetus

"Things themselves don't hurt or hinder us. Nor do other people. How we view these things is another matter. It is our attitudes and reactions that give us trouble." "We cannot choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them." Epictetus

"What really frightens and dismays us are not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them. It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretations of their significance." Epictetus

"We are what we think: All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts we make the world." Buddha

"Plant a thought and reap an act, plant an act and reap a habit, plant a habit and reap a character, plant a character and reap a destiny. All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts." The Dhammapadda

"The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts."
Marcus Aurelius

"Nothing can give you peace but yourself." Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Circumstance does not make the man; it reveals him to himself."
James Allen

Or as I say to myself, "What I see is me?"

” Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” “Man can retain his human dignity even in a concentration camp.” Victor Frankel

- So, our perception or interpretation of a situation powerfully affects our emotional, behavioral, and psychological responses to it. I find it helpful to remember that my core beliefs significantly influence how I am likely to interpret something. When we think we know something, we tend to block out contrary information. Imagine a woman who was sexually molested as a child. How is she likely to interpret the behavior of men? How is she likely to see herself? A more positive example is if I think life is a miracle, I will probably see examples around me every day.

4. Intention

- In any case, our life becomes our own creation. But interpretation is only one half of the process. Intention is the other. Gary Zukav writes in *The Seat of the Soul*:

”Every action, thought, and feeling is motivated by an intention, and that intention is a cause that exists as one with an effect. If we participate in the cause, it is not possible for us not to participate in the effect. In this most profound way, we are held responsible for our every action, thought, and feeling, which is to say, for our every intention...It is, therefore, wise for us to become aware of the many intentions that inform our experience, to sort out which intentions produce which effects, and to choose our intentions according to the effects that we desire to produce.”

- James Allen says, “You will always gravitate toward that which you secretly most love.” And Heinrich Heine says, “The thought precedes the deed as the lightning the thunder.”
- Intention increases the probability that certain things will happen.

5. Conclusion

Hypnotism is another example of how controlling thoughts controls our emotions and behavior. Physical relaxation and mental concentration create an environment conducive to the acceptance of suggestion. The hypnotist is simply introducing a new thought, idea or image to the subconscious mind. It is a little like reprogramming a computer. The hypnotist is programming the intention (you will go to...) and interpretation (you are feeling refreshed/sleepy/no pain).

As a young person I hypnotized my brother with a ear ache so that he did not feel it. When I was a young lifeguard, I used to participate in underwater swimming contests. I was always the winner because I hypnotized myself to imagine that I returned to the surface and took a huge breath of air and was feeling relaxed and refreshed. This is obviously a very stupid and dangerous game. But it does go to show how our thinking can block out physical and emotional pain.

If you want to change your life you need only change your mind.

Test these thoughts out by changing a predictable outcome. You know, the situations that keep repeating themselves. The relationships that seem like a dance where everyone keeps doing the same things and getting the same results. It stops when the music stops or you are exhausted. You might want to ask yourself these questions:

What are my intentions?

[Be clear about your intent/preference and detached from the outcome.]

What is another way of looking at this?

How can we make this work for everyone?

Of course, the field of psychosomatic medicine also bears this out.

In conclusion, our intentions determine what we focus on, what is likely to happen and our interpretations give it meaning. Our experience of life is the meaning we give to what happens.

So, who is the Master Weaver? In your life, the Master Weaver is you. The tools you use are intention and interpretation.

“Stop jabbering like a magpie. Notice what’s actually happening, not just what you think is happening or wish were happening. Look and listen.” Epictitus