



CTP Orientation 99/09/08
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I'm not used to wearing a nametag. Usually I don't want to know who I am. I was going to tell a few jokes before I started but I couldn't get them through the CTP censor board. They said that some of them were so bad they would knock a buzzard off of a barn wagon. So I thought I would tell you a little story.

A young man is walking down a southern Californian beach and he sees a bottle picks it up, rubs it and out pops a Genie. The Genie says "Look it's a hot day, none of this three wishes deal. Today you get one wish." Well, even one wish is better than nothing, thinks the man. So he thinks and thinks and finally says "You know, I have always wanted to go to Hawaii but I am afraid of flying and I get sea sick. I want you to build me a bridge from here to Hawaii."

The Genie says "That is impossible... thousands of miles over water? Think of the logistics, all of that concrete and steel to put pylons down to the floor of the Pacific Ocean. Forget what I said-think of another wish."

So the young man thinks for a while and he says "Well Genie, I've been married for sometime and my wife says that I am indifferent and insensitive. What I want you to tell me is what women really want? What do they feel? What makes them truly happy?"

The Genie looks at him, looks over the ocean and says "How many lanes do you want in that bridge? Two lanes or four?"

(Laughter widespread)

Tonight I get to talk about *my* problem. I spend all day talking about other people's problems, so this is the one occasion in fifteen years that I get to talk about my little problem.

I need to give you a little background to set this up. You know that there is a field in psychology called parapsychology and one of the topics is psychokinesis or PK. It is generally defined as the ability to move or influence material objects with the power of the mind alone. It has been an area in parapsychology that has been researched for decades.

I remember a debate I had at York University with Professor James Alcock, I believe he is still there. He's a professor of psychology and it was 1979 or 1980. I won the debate by pointing out to the group that I had written more on the field than he had read.

However there was one scientist, Martin Gardner, whose name most of you will recognize as an internationally known mathematician, a brilliant mind, and editor of the mathematics section of *Scientific America* for some twenty-odd years. He is one of the few hard core scientists who has actually looked at the parapsychology field and in particular the experiments with psychokinesis.

These experiments involve things like the mind influencing radioactive decay, or the mind influencing a random number generator: things that ordinary scientists would consider completely impossible.

Professor Gardner read all of this literature and declared that yes, on the basis of the statistical results it was real. But then he basically added that this is impossible, there has got to be something wrong with the foundations of mathematics for all of these results to be statistically significant.



In other words he could not accept something that was out of his worldview and instead disavowed his very own subject, mathematics!

Imagine the resistance that he was facing in himself on this topic: and that word, resistance is the key word for us. That is also my problem, resistance and that is what we are going to talk about tonight. Perhaps for some of you it is also a problem.

Over the last century a few truths have survived within the psychoanalytic thrust, though some others have been discarded. What remains are a few powerful tools for understanding a number of things about people. One of them is that psychoanalytic thinking nourishes an incredible fascination with why people resist things in ways that directly counter their own interests.

People resist all kinds of things as if their very lives depended on it, ideas, feelings, experiences. But, the irony is this, precisely the things they most vigorously resist are those that stand a chance at turning them into happier people. It is this patent self-destructiveness of the resistance that is so impressive.

As therapists we see it all, daily. From the brilliant artist who resists putting brush to canvas, deeply loving husbands who resist telling their wives they love them, natural leaders who resist the lead by playing perpetual second fiddle, creative writers who resist writing, PhDs who haven't written any-thing since their thesis and stock traders-like me-who resist taking a good trade and profit and instead take the losing trades.

As therapists we are at our best when we help people become fascinated by what on earth they are doing as we are. In fact I would say that is our job. We try to harness our own fascination in the service of stimulating a parallel fascination in the people we are trying to help. Particularly we try to nourish fascination with all the ways people manage to resist things. Things that might turn their lives into happier lives.

Here is why nourishing that fascination proves useful. When people start to become fascinated by some-thing they tend to entertain all kinds of questions about it. When new questions are on the table they stimulate new ways of thinking. New ways of thinking can recast treasured convictions and long held positions in life. Old solutions may suddenly show up as outmoded, or rooted in illusion, or grounded in pathogenic fantasies. When people abandon old solutions they have a shot at re-inventing themselves.

One of the things that psychoanalysis has done best is to develop a clinical theory about how people actually get to this point of re-inventing themselves. Clinical psychoanalytic theory has some very specific things to say about that. Argument doesn't work nor does wishing the resistance would go away, nor does pretending it isn't there. What works is to respect the resistance. What works is a kind of dance with it. What works is the clinical theory that describes that dance and how to do it. It is intricate, complicated at times, but fun and mutually engaging. So in your coming years it is my one wish for you, to learn at CTP how to do this dance.

This lecture was inspired by the writings of Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer.

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