

In Praise of the Conditional.

*“To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wildflower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.”*

William Blake

The Realm of the Conditional.

As we move deeper into the tidal enfoldment of the Primary Respiratory System we deepen into the realm of the unconditional. The unconditional comprises of that in us which is untouched by the conditions of our experience - our species, our nationality, our gender, our family background, the choices we have made in life for better or worse. The Breath of Life breathes through each of us, regardless of the forms we have adopted through our incarnation into the world.

Yet even within the realm of the conditional we all share far more in common than there is to distinguish us. We all have the same basic needs to survive - we all need food, water, air and shelter to survive. As a species we all share the same basic form- a head, two arms, two legs, and a trunk full of organs that behave in fairly much identical ways in each of us. We each share the same physiological functions such as breathing, digesting, urinating and defecating. Each of us has hopes and dreams, desires and aversions. Each of us is a sexual, emotional, thinking and spiritual being. Each of us suffers. Each of us experiences pleasure. Each of us mutually arises within a world of conditions. Each of us is born and each of us dies.

Yet the realm of conditional is even wider than this in its common ground. We share 98% of our DNA with the chimpanzee. We share 60% of our DNA with the banana! We exchange atoms with the world around us in a constant process of flux. The atoms that make up our anatomy today may yesterday have belonged to Buddha, Christ, Hitler, an onion, a worm, a rock, a river, or an air molecule caught up in a gust of wind. We are in a constant state of interaction with our environment and with each other.

That part of us which is unique to us is just the tip of the iceberg of who we are. We have far more in common with the world around us than we have to set us apart. Yet, generally, we identify far more strongly to that tiny percentage of ourselves that we consider to be uniquely ‘me’ than we do with larger universe to which we belong. Often we are terrified of admitting to ourselves how little we belong to ourselves and how much

we belong to the greater flow of things. So we cling to the conditional and the greater the conditioning the more desperately we cling to it. We cling to being human, citing our intelligence or refinement as being the great divide between us and an ape or a dog. Though in reality we have far more in common with them than there is to separate us. Stepping up the ladder of conditioning we identify ourselves with racial, class and gender groups, with religious and intellectual ideas, with life styles and personal tastes to identify our separateness from the common pool of humanity. Though again we have more in common with each other than there is to separate us. As we sit within the group or the crowd, we identify ourselves in various ways that stand us apart from the rest of the group. Yet we are each of us mutually arising as an expression of the same breathing of nature.

Our identification with this tiny aspect of ourselves may cause us great suffering. We cling to the idea that I am this sort of person and that sort of person. We miss the bigger picture. There is something very fragile about our clinging to the little outcrop of ideas, emotions and attitudes that we identify as 'I'. The poor vulnerable ego easily becomes overwhelmed and battered by life's experiences. And the more we cling to it, the more easily we become suffocated by our own anxieties. Yet just as we may tend to identify ourselves with our conditioning, it is also easy to belittle this part of us which is so easily knocked about in the maelstrom of experience. Yet there is something heroic and mythic in the struggle of the poor battered self as it navigates life's up and downs. Within that small speck of self that is unique the individual there is something truly great that is being enacted and played out. Each of us has our own destiny to fulfil, our own story to unfold, our own insights to offer, that are as important to the constellation of creation as creation is itself. There could be no whole without all the parts and so each individual consciousness is also universal consciousness that has become wrapped up in itself. Each of our stories is also the ever evolving story of a continually incarnating life force.

In the prologue to his novel *Demian*, Hermann Hesse writes,

“.....every man is not only himself; he is also the unique, particular, always significant and remarkable point where the phenomena of the world intersect once and for all and never again. That is why every man's story is important, eternal, sacred; and why every man while he lives and fulfils the will of nature is a wonderful creature, deserving the utmost attention. In each individual the spirit is made flesh, in each one the whole of creation suffers, in each one a Saviour is crucified.”¹

When clients bring their stories to therapy, be it verbally or in the silent telling of their tissues, they bring into play the story of us all. Each story tells something of the struggle

¹ *Demian*. Hermann Hesse. Panther. 1960.

of the human spirit to overcome adversity and pain. When clients engage with the conditions of their existence, they engage with the conditions that beset us all in one form or other. There is often a point in therapy where the presenting symptom becomes the gateway to a deeper inquiry. With each insight that is gleaned from looking deeply into the nature of the conditions the universe becomes a little more self-aware. There is nothing lofty or extraordinary about this. Our human dramas are often beset with banality and meagre in their magnitude. Yet it is through the facing of these very ordinary conditions, along with their accompaniment of anxieties and fears, that life rekindles itself and begins to flow freely again.

I am often very moved by the courage with which clients engage with their pain and suffering, with the honesty and determination that emerges out of their willingness to push on through the difficult patches and moments of fear. Our clients often need to be met in their conditioning, to have their experiences heard and understood. So much may be missed if we hold the intention to only meet our clients in the spirit and not in the flesh. To be met and held in that place where all our human weaknesses and limitations can be accepted without judgement is often necessary to healing to take place. If we bypass that place of need in our clients we not only bypass a layer of experience that needs to be resolved, but also a layer of experience that is rich with insight and the joys of discovery.

Ernest Hemingway wrote,

“Life breaks all of us, but sometimes the place where it was broken becomes stronger than before.”²

This strength comes from self-examination, which gives rise to self-acceptance and self-knowledge. From acceptance and knowledge of the self, acceptance and understanding of others is spontaneously generated. There is less need to be defended and more chance to be authentic. One client, who recently completed therapy with me wrote:

“I feel compelled to write because I am feeling such a profound awareness of all the work I have been doing in this time with you..... I can feel something behind my eyes I never thought I would allow to flicker when someone looks at me.... a deeper recognition of what happens within myself as a response to another.”

We have wonderful opportunities in cranial work to touch into the unconditional roots of our being by deepening into the tidal enfoldments of the Primary Respiratory System. But that layer of experience which is conditioned can sometimes be dismissed by therapists as

² A Farewell to Arms. Ernest Hemingway.

somehow unworthy of attention. Deepening into the unconditioned can become a condition in itself. There is an agenda being set by the therapist that may make it difficult for the client to bring the suffering arising out of their conditioning into therapy. The Breath of Life generates form. Form, by its very nature, is conditional. The realm of the conditioned is therefore produced by the unconditional. If the Intelligence that formed us has generated conditions, it seems only respectful to engage with them.