NEURONS

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NEURONS — 2023

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WHAT'S NOT POSITIVE
ABOUT POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

I have long appreciated, quoted, and acknowledged the work of Martin Seligman in his well-known studies *Learning Helplessness* (1975) and *Learned Optimism* (1991) and integrating the core of that in my work on resilience (*Resilience: Being the Phoenix,* 2019). In those two books, he moved from being a Behaviorist to becoming much more a Cognitivist Behaviorist as he recognized the role that cognition plays in depression and other emotional states. Later he became the President of the American Psychological Association (APA). And with that one-year term, he launched his version of psychology, known as Positive Psychology.

But from the beginning, I have had questions and concerns. "What in the world could I say that would not be *positive* about Positive Psychology?" Actually, a lot. Here are some of them. First, the term itself "Positive Psychology" originated in Abraham Maslow's 1964 book, *Toward a Psychology of Being.* Positive Psychology was one of his chapter titles. But if you read in the field of Positive Psychology, *you would never know that.* Neither Seligman nor any of his students acknowledge such or give credit to Maslow for the term. And *not giving credit to sources* is always a sign of poor scholarship and low integrity. This means that not Seligman but Maslow is the true father of Positive Psychology.

Second, as I read books on Positive Psychology, and I have read many of them, not giving credit for the name itself is not the only thing they overlook. For the most part, the writers completely overlook that it was Abraham Maslow who began the *focus on the positive side of human nature* way back in the 1930s and 1940s. Somehow they completely ignore that (or intentionally overlook it). They also overlook the work of Carl Rogers in his focus on the positive side of human nature and even the Human Potential Movement which arose in the 1960s from Maslow and Rogers (see *Self-Actualization Psychology,* 2008).

Third, when Seligman does mention Maslow, which is very seldom, it is almost always in a context where he disagrees with Maslow and criticizes him. Now I'm fine with one scholar offering a critique of another, but when *every single reference is a critique and there is not a single acknowledgment of Maslow's contributions— something is wrong.* In other books on Positive Psychology, the first mention of Maslow or Rogers will be some 100 pages in and again, most of the references are critical of them. In Martin Bolt's book *A Positive Psychology Guide* (2004), the first reference to Maslow is on page 135, the next was on p. 153 where he criticizes Maslow.

Now why would anyone do that? Why would a famous psychologist do that? Typically when a person has to push someone else down it is in order to push himself up—which is a sick neurotic behavior. It is an illegitimate and unhealthy maneuver to prop up oneself.

Now also unknown to most people, the reason Positive Psychology got a big boost and became recognized as quickly as it did was because Seligman was given over 30 million dollars in grants from having been voted President of APA in 1998. Dr. Carl Lloyd, who teaches Positive Psychology, says, "It was these two things which really helped him to launch research in the field of Positive Psychology." And with 30 million dollars, who couldn't make a gigantic splash in any field of Psychology?

Fourth, another concern about Positive Psychology relates to the online research pieces they have distributed. Often it really does not reflect the best research. Dr. Lloyd noted that his junior-level students who had some studies in undergrad sequence of research and statistics have raised relevant questions about the validity and reliability of the research methods and results.

> "For instance, they can take one questionnaire and then repeat it several days later and get fairly different results. That's a problem with reliability. It begs the question if the research concerns are defined well enough to be valid. Anyone can collect tons of data, but is it enriching the field at all or answering the questions that are being asked?"

Fifth, in reading much of the literature on Positive Psychology from Seligman, there is the presence of what can only be characterized as arrogant self-promotion. It reeks of self-promotion in a lot of the writings.

Sixth, Positive Psychology seems to be almost exclusively for normal people or those who only need a bit of counseling. It does not seem to address the deeper issues of therapy, neurosis and character disorders. In Bolt's book, there is not a single mention in the entire book of therapy, trauma, or neurosis. He quotes Seligman:

> "The main purpose of a positive psychology is to measure, understand, and then build the human strengths and the civic virtues." (2004, p. 2)

When Positive Psychology was first launched, all of the original books were mostly academic and offered very little in terms of practical applications. Over the years, others entered into the field and began creating applications, especially in the areas of appreciating, thriving, flourishing, personality strengths, looking for a positive frame, etc. Today Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi are considered the founders of Positive Psychology, both of them have contributed significantly to psychology and especially to humanistic psychology. In Neuro-Semantics I have from the beginning given plenteous acknowledgment to Seligman for his work in learned helplessness and learned optimism. I also gave full credit to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for his work in "flow." In relating to how flow relates to the genius state, I quoted many of his books.

The kind and quality of psychology that we use in Neuro-Semantics is certainly *positive psychology.* It was developed from the developers in the Human Potential Movement—people who predated Seligman by 50 years. It was demonstrated by Satir, Perls, Bateson, and others which is how it entered and formed NLP.

NEW YEAR POWER

As we are beginning a new year, now is a great moment to refresh your awareness of your innate powers. Why? Because *your innate powers is your key to your self-management and mastery of your engagements.* After all, while you do have these innate powers and you can't lose them, still ... in order to make full use of them, you need to be fully cognizant of them. Otherwise you could forget them or overlook them or even minimize them. People who do that then make the mistake of thinking that they are victims without any power to effect change. When you refresh your mindfulness about your powers and utilize them, you become a victor over life's circumstances and can no longer be a victim. How's that for a goal for 2023?

The truth is that you have the power to do all kinds of wild and wonderful things! But that is true only if you're willing to tap into your innate powers, activate them, develop them, and then put them to good use. That's *up to you;* you have to do that. Default on doing that, then any competency that you have will actually atrophy.

I recently came across the following a quotation from Ralph Martson who first, vividly expressed *the powers* that we all have and then provided a challenge about using them for your highest meanings and values. It might be a good idea to print it off and put it on your bathroom mirror and read it every morning as a way *to awaken the spirit of possibilities in yourself.*

> "Right here and now, this very day, you have the power to think, the power to dream, the power to make decisions, the power to act, the power to create, to learn, to influence others, to change things, to experience and enjoy. On top of all that, you have the power to invent, to innovate, to change your mind, to understand, and to move into a new direction. You have the power to persevere, to work with discipline and focus, to manage your time, to recognize your opportunities, to take responsibility and to act responsibly, to solve problems, to effectively utilize your resources, and to make a positive difference in your world. Some people take these very same powers and achieve great things. How will you make use of your power today? It is an incredible opportunity and an awesome responsibility. It is real and it is yours. Challenge yourself to transform that power, with your thoughts and actions, into your own special greatness."

Talk about power! That is a powerful description of a person who is in touch with his or her powers and knows out to put them to good use. When you refresh your awareness of your innate powers, then when there is an opportunity, you are able to take advantage of it. Your powers give you the capacity to make good use of opportunities. It's important that you know that an opportunity is not a "right." You can't claim that as a right or demand it. Instead, think of it as a chance. It's your chance to seize the possibilities in an opportunity and see what happens. And that requires an active mind and body.

The most obvious aspects of your innate powers are those by which you express yourself

externally, namely your linguistic powers of speech and your behavioral powers of action. When you develop these inner capacities, you increase your ability to make a difference in the world and to be effectively productive. The internal powers are much more subtle. These are in your *meta* place and here you have to activate your thinking and emoting, your brain and body. Then you can create a lively and rich inner world. In Neuro-Semantics, our new focus on *thinking* and the thinking series in the Brain Camps are designed to richly enhance these internal powers. In NLP, when Richard Bandler spoke about this as *running your own brains,* he identified a common problem that people have in taking charge.

> "Most people don't actively and deliberately use their own brains. Your brain is like a machine without an 'off' switch. If you don't give it something to do, it just runs on and on until it gets bored. If you put someone in a sensory deprivation tank where there's no external experience, he'll start generating internal experience. If your brain is sitting around without anything to do, it's going to start doing something, and it doesn't seem to care what it is. *You* may care, but *it* doesn't." (1985, p. 7)

That's the problem. Apparently, your brain needs direction. It needs to be told what to do. That's where *meta-thinking* comes in. Above and beyond thinking, is the instructional thinking. That's where you tell your brain (or focus your mind) so that you think about things that make your life better and more resourceful. In both NLP and Neuro-Semantics, we enable people to learn to take control of their lives and change their experiences, by showing how to control what happens in the brain. Speaking about *control,* Bandler uses the metaphor of driving.

> "Most people are prisoners of their own brains. It's as if they are chained to the last seat of the bus and someone else is driving. *I want you to learn how to drive your own bus*. If you don't give your brain a little direction, either it will just run randomly on its own, or other people will find ways to run it for you—and they may not always have your best interests in mind. Even if they do, they may get it wrong!" (1985, pp. 7-8)

So, just as you go to a gym to develop your body, if you want *your innate powers* to be well developed, to be sharp and ready to put you into action, you need to develop those innate powers. Then your zone of power will be at your ready access as opportunities arise. Then, your *experiences in life* will be under your control and not the environment, the culture, or someone else's.

THE EXPERIENCE
IS NOT THE MEANING

If there's any misbelief, myth, misunderstanding, and false perspective that influences just about everyone, it is the idea that *your experiences determine your meanings.* That's wrong. It's wrong on many accounts. And it is an error that undermines the quality of life, the response-power of a person, that denies a person joy and hope, and that misdirects how to cope with experiences.

To give you an idea of how pervasive this deadly idea is, consider the following statements. Sadly, they are as common as they are erroneous and misleading.
> "Losing my dream job means I'll never find another one as good."
> "I can't help but feel depressed, everyone does when they go through a divorce."
> "I can't help but being negative. The way I was treated as a child has made me the pessimistic person that I am today."
> "You don't understand what being molested does to a person, it's something that you don't just get over, you carry it with you all the days of your life."
> "What I want is to fall in love because then I would feel really good about myself and have the high self-esteem that I have always wanted."
> "We're social beings so needing approval is just built in, so don't tell me that I need to have thicker skin and not take criticism so personal."

The hidden idea behind all of these is that *your experiences determine your life.* They determine your meanings, your emotions, and your responses. And what we can infer behind that is that you have very limited range of responses when you have certain experiences. If you have had X-given experience, then you are pretty much fated to think, feel, speak, and act in a certain way. And to make that more explicit: you can't help yourself. You have to feel depressed if you had a loss. You have to feel suicidal if you were publically humiliated. You have to feel an insolvable grief if you lost the love of your life.

If *experience determines life*, then we are all in a pretty desperate and pretty much hopeless situation. However, there's good news—*experience does not determine your response!* In fact, whatever happens, whatever *experience* you have or go through—you have a whole range of ways to respond. This is worth writing down— *whatever the experience, you have many choices about how to interpret it.*

The truth is that you have *the power inside you* to choose your response. That's why we have the word, response-ability or response-power. You can determine what your experience means and how to perceive it. You can draw a whole range of different conclusions about the experience so that you can give it the best one possible. In this way, you have the power to fashion your world,

your thinking, your emoting, your coping, and your mastering of your life situations. The power does not belong to the experience, to the event—it belongs to you. You are the meaning-maker.

Alfred Adler spoke to this subject in his book, *Understanding Human Nature* (1927). There he argued that the key is how a person interprets the experience and that from that conclusion he creates his how "style of life" which he will then project onto other experiences.

> "We must remember that any experience may have many interpretations. We will find that there are no two people who will draw the same conclusion from a similar experience. This accounts for the fact that our experiences do not always make us any cleverer." (1927, p. 20)

Whatever you have experienced is just that—*an experience.* What that experience means, however, depends on you. It depends on *how* you think about it, perceive it, reason about it, draw conclusions from it, in a word—how you interpret it and give it meaning. And whatever meaning you give it, that's the *semantics* that you have created and from that will come your *neurology,* your emotions, your body sensations, your physiology, your felt life. Together we now have your *neuro-semantic reality.*

It is in this way that we say that you have a *neuro-semantic nature.* And the key is your semantics, your meaning-making powers. That's what enables you to live with hope and optimism, with resilience and determination, and to make your life a work of art.

THE ART OF DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES

Given that *experiences* do **not** come with built-in meanings, and given that it is up to each of us to attribute meanings, and given that there are many, many meanings that you could give to any experience—the challenge in life is to *learn the art of developing meaningful experiences.* How are you at this challenge? Do you have the required skills for this? Fail to do this, and you could very will become the victim of an experience. Then the experience (and the un-owned interpretations that you let it have) will control you.

This is a challenge. And it is a challenge that many people fail to master in life. They experience an event and in doing so, they seem to give up any and all of their power in determining its meaning. They default to cultural meanings, to the meanings of people around them, to the easiest and most hurtful ideas that pop into their minds. If someone criticized them, they default to assuming that words are real enough to hurt them, and so they feel bad. They don't even pause for a moment to realize that at some level, they are accepting the words as given. In them there is not enough of a pause to wonder about the source of the words, where the person is coming from and what he may be trying to achieve.

The challenge is even more intense for every single human being who has not learned to do *critical thinking.* That's because without the ability to question things and to produce clear and precise communications, you will inevitably use *childish thinking patterns*. You will automatically use the cognitive distortions that characterize how a little child thinks— generalizing, exaggerating, personalizing, emotionalizing, awfulizing, and so on. Yet if you do use those ways of thinking, the conclusions you will draw inevitably creates misery and falsehoods.

In the fields of therapy, coaching, and consulting, professionals learn to expect that where there is emotional pain, there is a high probability that the person is not doing critical thinking. Instead, the person is thinking in erroneous and fallacious ways. That's the problem. *They* are not the problem, the thinking patterns are the problem. They are *thinking in ways* that attribute ugly, nasty, dark, and toxic ideas to some experience, and that's the problem.

Where there is an *experience,* whether it is an experience that most people consider negative, but also for those that would commonly be considered positive, *the experience itself does not determine what you will experience.* Paradoxical, isn't it? What determines the *quality* of an experience is the *meaning* you give to it. Your power to construct meaning and to attribute meaning is that powerful.

For instance, you can take a positive experience and turn it into a trauma. You could succeed at work, produce something that leads to recognition and bonus pay, but if you compare it to a colleague who did more and got more, you could feel really bad. Jealousy could eat at you; envious thinking could ruin the recognition. You could feel one-down and mistreated and "never given the breaks that others get." You could go to a party with friends who care about you and find that the party makes you feel miserable. To do that, you only need to use a strategy of focusing entirely on *what is not there* or who is not there, and not what and who is there. Focus on the divorce you experience three years ago and how your ex- is not there and everybody else has partners, and then notice just how lonely, rejected, and hopeless you feel.

Conversely, *the art of developing meaningful experiences* starts with owning your powers of meaning-making. Once you do that then you can focus your attention on what is meaningful to you—what you value, what you care about, what you are grateful for, what is a blessing. This is not a shallow "positive thinking" message. The truth is that you can hold both positive and negative meanings in your mind at the same time. Yet a negative meaning does not have to *overwhelm and obliterate* the positive meanings.

> "Yes, last year's winner of this recognition award did more than me, but her success takes nothing away from me. I'm glad for her and I will be glad for myself. It's foolish to compare myself with others, I will only compare what I'm doing now with what I have done in the past."
> "Yes, it seems that most people here at the party have a partner, and when I'm ready I will set that as a goal; for now I will focus on the fact that I have loving and caring friends and we're having a party."

Meaning is the key and your *power to make meaning* is the determining factor for the *quality* of your experiences. Now you know the pathway to having much more meaningful experiences in life—develop your innate powers in your inner *meta* place. Become a well-trained and well-practiced meaning-maker extraordinare. Because this is central in Neuro-Semantics, you might want to consider some Neuro-Semantic training or coaching this year.

WHEN PEOPLE MIS-LEARN
FROM EXPERIENCES

There's a mis-belief and a myth about experiences. One myth is sometimes expressed as, "You only learn from experiences." Of course, that's obviously false, there are also other ways to learn beyond having a direct experience. Further, sometimes having a direct experience leads a person to learn the wrong thing. Given the experience and the person's cognitive skills—and cognitive distortions—that person can learn the very opposite of what he needed to learn. And that learning can become a block to learning what should have been learned.

What happened to you?
> "I signed up for a course and it was really hard, I just didn't get it, I guess I'm not made for college. Anyway, if that subject was for it, it would have come easier."

So that's what you have learned from that experience? Maybe you need to give it more time, study more, ask more questions, and that kind of thing.
> "No, no. I don't have to be hit between the eyes to know that I just don't have what it takes for that career path."

Here's a person *drawing a conclusion* and *reasoning* from an experience, but what he concludes and how he reasons is itself the problem. The experience, in and of itself, is just an experience. What anyone *makes* of it, however, is that person's interpretation of the experience and these are two very different things. They are not the same at all. In this, *experience does not teach anything.* Not in and of itself.

Now the list of things that human beings have mis-learned from experiences is actually incredibly extensive. In fact, over the history of mankind, probably the great majority of the things *learned* were false. Take any field, medicine, geography, engineering, physics, chemistry, philosophy, psychology, etc. and when you consider the ideas that informed that field at the beginning and the ideas that now inform it, there is generally a tremendous gap. In fact, reading what people thought about the human body and medicine even 200 years ago is totally laughable today. Sometimes it's even hard to believe that people *thought* such things!

Truly, *experiences do not teach,* it is always human beings who do the thinking, reasoning, concluding, and meaning-making *from* the experience. And their cognitive understandings are not always up to the task of truly understanding the experience. More often than not, they mis-understand and draw ill-formed conclusions, illogical inferences, and erroneous beliefs. So what should a human do in the face of the field that experiences do not teach anything?

The first thing is to *always be suspicious* when someone asserts that they learned this or that from an experience. *Always be suspicious* when someone tells you that a particular experience teaches

some particular conclusion. Then *skeptically question* the person about the experience, when, where, with whom, in what way, etc. and about the conclusions— based on what logic, what reasoning, what assumptions, etc. Use the Meta-Model in your questioning to gain more precision and specificity regarding the learning process.

Because an experience is just that—some event that occurred at some time to some person—see how many possible interpretations you can identify. Since you are the meaning-maker and since every person is a meaning-maker, ask around about *other possible meanings that could arise from the experience.* When you do that, then you generate a menu list of possible interpretations and from that list, you have the choice about picking out the best ones. You have the choice of not being imprisoned by the worst interpretations.

Typical mis-learnings from experiences that undermine everyday human life are these:
- Some learn from a mistake that they are inadequate, flawed, and inferior.
- Some learn from a challenge that whatever is hard should be avoided.
- Some learn from being corrected, that the world is mean and cruel.
- Some learn from bankruptcy that they should be less honest with their finances.
- Some learn from coming in second that striving for excellence is stupid.
- Etc.

I could extend the list for many pages. That's because one of the common cognitive distortions is too quickly jumping to stupid conclusions before taking the time and trouble to thoroughly think through an experience.

From: L. Michael Hall
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BROKE WITH WOKE

"Woke" and "wokeness"—relatively new words, so what is it? What does it refer to? It seems to have arisen as a slang word representing by some to indicate the embracing of progressive activism. Merriam-Webster added it to the dictionary (2017): "aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)."

> "Woke is a slang term that is easing into the mainstream from some varieties of a dialect called African American Vernacular English," according to Merriam-Webster.

Now originally, the term referred to social and political injustices and to that extent, I can sympathize with it and see the value. But it no longer means that. Today "woke" seems to be a mixture of radical and mostly unintelligent activism, along with some socialism thrown in for good measure. To that concoction add a good dose of narcissism and rigid dogmatism. Today, as an ideology, it mostly propagates itself as inevitable and unquestionable. And why? Because in that way those who promote it don't have to debate or argue for it. In this way they can avoid critical thinking (which they seem to be allergic to) and do not have to examine the legitimacy of their ideology. And why would the do that? Because they know that it would not stand up to scrutiny. So with an attitude of dogmatism and authoritarianism, they declare what they declare, arrogantly assuming that there are no other perspectives.

But, of course, as with everything, there are! There are many alternatives and much better ones. And as one person who disagrees with the conclusions of the woke crowd, I am fully ready to engage those ideas and to question them. And why would I be so ready to do that? Because when you go woke, you go broke. The woke ideas will bankrupt you in every way— mentally, emotionally, relationally, and economically. Because the assumptions in "woke" are not even intelligently sound, thinking in that way undermines clear and precise thinking as it gives place to lots of cognitive distortions.

It also inter-personally bankrupts. Already we can see the fruits "woke" ideology produces— prejudice against anyone who disagree. A bullying attitude that seeks to "cancel" anyone with an opposite position. An arrogance of being a know-it-all, the hate language and the language of violence against conservatives. Pretending to be against racism, they actually promote a new and more vicious form of racism. Saying that they dislike stereotypes, they stereotype their opponents. All of this is full of incongruencies and hypocrisies.

What probably started out with some good positive intentions has turned really sour. It has created and is creating more division, intolerance, and partisanship.   "Woke" people on school boards, in universities as professors or decision-makers have subverted education and transformed it into brainwashing. Once sensitive to injustice, they perpetuate what is unjust on parents who disagree, students who want to question things, and conservatives who would be invited into schools and universities to offer a differing opinion.

Those who believe in the "woke" ideology ought to truly *wake up* so that they can truly see the damage that they are doing with that ideology. They need to *wake up* to realize that every ideology is a belief system and not a set of facts. The person who forgets that or who does not know that, then operates in the dark confusing their map with the territory. They then over-identify with the ideology, personalizing it, so now any question of their ideology is treated as a personal attack. Then to that they become ridiculously self-righteous, talk as if they are the victims, and boldly victimize the person who simply asks a question.

The so-called "reasoning" that goes on in "woke" ideology is like the circular and self-defeating "logic" during the ancient witch hunts. You accuse someone of being a witch or non-"work" and they deny it.   Their denial is then quoted as proof that they are heretics to "wokism." In fact, the more vehement their denial, the more convinced they are that you are a danger to them and the more willing they are to burn the witch.

Basic NLP and basic General Semantics (Korzybski) and basic Neuro-Semantics *starts* from the position that whatever you think and believe is your mental map and no matter how accurate parts of it is, *it is not the territory.* It is not "real."   It is a representation, a fallible human opinion, and it not only should be tested and question, but it must be constantly tested and questioned. Even scripture says, "Test all things, hold firm that which is good."

Democratic freedom *begins with the power to question.* It is in questioning, debating, continually checking on facts, and collaborating with others that we come to as good as understanding as we can— open to new facts emerging that will demand we keep adjusting our understandings. That's the true heart of science, the true heart of education, the true center of an open and critical mind. Let all who are "woke" *wake up* to that realization.

The attached video is another voice speaking out against "wokism," it's a video that has gone viral and when you see it, you'll know why.

THE UNSANITY OF
IDEOLOGICAL THINKING

There was a tragedy. You probably heard about it on the news. Actually it occurred January 7, 2023 and it resulted in the tragic death of Tyre Nichols, a 29 year old black man. The officers claimed to have stopped Nichols for reckless driving in Memphis Tennessee. Then several things went wrong and it resulted in a tragedy for everyone.

The first thing that went wrong was that Nichols began resisting the officers and fighting with them. Bad decision! So after pulling him from his car, they used pepper spray and a taser on him. Then as Nichols continued to resist, he managed to break away from them. That's when the next thing that went wrong occurred on the officers part. That's because when they caught him, they were not in the right state and they beat him for three minutes, punching and kicking him in the head and striking him on the back with a baton and they did that while he was restrained. More really bad decisions! Afterwards Nichols was hospitalized in critical condition and he then died three days later.

Now all five of the Police officers were also black. Two were new to the force having been hired after the Police lowered standards for hiring in order to get more people on the force (another bad decision!). As of January 20, all five officers have been fired from the force. Not only that, but in addition, three firefighters, two emergency medical technicians and a lieutenant who attended the scene were relieved of duty and subsequently fired for failing to conduct an adequate patient assessment of Nichols. Two other police officers were also later relieved of duty.

That was the event—that's what happened. But what does it *mean*? What explains it? The simplest and most obvious explanation is that it was an interplay of two sets of forces—on the part of Tyre Nichols, his resistance and refusal to cooperate. He should have known better. Anyone pulled over should know better. Cooperation always makes things go better. Talking it out to determine the truth of a situation is always the best choice.

On the part of the officers, they seemed completely incompetent about knowing how to subdue a person and how to do so showing respect to the person while trying to control a situation. Several videos have been publicized on television and on the internet since this event showing simple trainable techniques for subduing a person without causing bodily harm. But these officers apparently did not have that training and fell back on more savage behavior.

As noted in the previous posts, *experience and meaning are two very different things.* What happens consists of the sensory-based facts. Meaning comes after that and goes to a person's interpretations. And with determining the validity of an interpretation, we have to look to the person's ability to be as objective as possible and the cognitive biases that predispose a person to

read into events things that are not there. William of Ockham insightly said:

"With all things being equal, the simplest explanation tends to be the right one."

The simplest explanation here—unintelligent resistance plus professional incompetence equals tragedy death and firing. What a disastrous combination! By way of contrast, a dozen or more so-called journalists on the mainstream media *used their biases and ideology to interpret this event*. Unbelievably they were able to distort things to such an extent that they concluded that the five black police officers were "white supremists" of all things(!) and/or "contaminated by white racism." And as ridiculous as that is, they expressed that ideology with a straight face. That's how blinding any ideology can be, how unsane. For them, interpretation comes before facts. And, let the facts be damned if they don't support our ideology.

> [Who has said such non-sense? The former ESPN talking head Jemele Hill was one who rushed to blame White supremacy. CNN's Van Jones echoed the sentiment, as did Democrat Reps. Maxwell Frost of Florida, and Mondaire Jones of New York, and Black Lives Matter activist Bree Newsome.]

There was no racism in that event—there was incompetence. There was stupid resistance. There was hiring of officers who had lower standards. Simple as that. To *read more into it than that* demands that a person rely on his ideology, prejudices, and biases—the opposite of critical thinking. The solution is to teach people how to truly *think,* and to think clearly and objectively. And that's what the Meta-Model of Language is designed to facilitate.

THE ART OF THINKING THROUGH YOUR EXPERIENCES

If there is a tendency to jump to stupid conclusions when you suffer an undesired experience, then part of the cure is *the art of thinking through your experience.* In that way, you can take the time and trouble to fully *consider* what the experience was and what meaning you can give it. I mentioned this in the last post. I also mentioned the Meta-Model as a way to gather more precise and specific information. From that I received several questions about how to do that. So here goes.

What do the questions of the Meta-Model actually do? They enable you to *index the details and the context* of an experience. This means that you *extensionalize* the words that a person uses in describing an experience so that you get empirical, sensory-based information about it. You *index* the time, the place, the person or persons, the context, and the processes involved. For example, imagine that someone says the following:

> "Relationships are hard. They are especially hard if there's any conflict because then there will be bitter feelings and lots of anger, and people just don't handle anger well at all. It's better to just keep your mouth shut and not bring up anything that creates conflict. Then at least, you can get along."

What is the *experience* being referred to here? Relationships. But whose relationship? Don't know. So ask, "When you say 'relationships,' who are you talking about?" If you get, "Well, you know, relationships in general," then again, *keep indexing the referent.* "Is there someone that you find it hard to relate to? Yes? Who?" That indexes the person.

Now index the time and place. "When did you find it hard to relate to Salina? What was the situation?" This helps to index the context. Now you can find out if this is typical or if it is unusual. Even if it is typical, you might want to ask about an exception, "Have you ever related to her in a way that you found easy rather than hard?"

Next, find out about the context. "What was going on that, for you, felt hard and that led you to think you ought not bring up something that might lead to a conflict?" Was it a conversation about money, scheduling, planning, options on where to go or what to eat, differences in how to approach a problem, or what? If there's one or more contexts that the person finds hard, what is he or she actually *doing* that makes it hard? What did you expect? Were your expectations realistic or unrealistic?

We can also index skills. Give that "relationships" entails relating, communicating, understanding, seeking to understand, caring, exploring, accepting, etc., we might ask, "What are

your skills for effectively relating to Salena?" "What skills are missing that you might want to use?" "What are some of her skills?" "How do you generally go about talking about differences so that you are not 'conflicting,' but just seeking to understand each other?" "What conflict resolution skills might you need?"

You could index each person's states. "By the way, what state do you get into when you think there's a conflict or differences?" "Is that the best state for you at that point?" "What state does the other person get into?" "Do you help each other to bring out the best in each other or do you hinder by triggering the other person to become more defensive?"

All of this is what is meant by *thinking through an experience.* In the end you discover the difference between the many facets of what occurs and the meanings that you give to each of those occurrences. In and of themselves, experiences have no meaning. You, as the meaning-maker are the one who attributes meaning.   So if an experience is personally difficult or painful —the likelihood is that it is your meanings which make it so. Your meanings are the primary culprit. Change them, and the experience changes.

EXPERIENCES
ARE AT YOUR COMMAND

In the last post I intentionally ended with a provocative statement, one that I was pretty sure would elicit some comments and questions. And it did.

> If an experience is personally difficult or painful—the likelihood is that it is your meanings which make it so. Your meanings are the primary culprit. Change them, and the experience changes.

Several wrote to ask about the experience of pain caused by physical things like accidents or natural disasters. "Are those things also primarily caused by meanings?" The immediate answer is obvious, *no.* When you suffer from an automobile turning over or accosted by something or someone beating on you—the first and immediate experience is a function of the damage done to the body. But afterwards, after a time a healing, the ongoing *experience* becomes increasingly a function of your meanings.

In the previous articles in this series, you learned how an experience can be at your command. You learned that by distinguishing *what happens* from *how you interpret* what happens. You discovered that by learning how to live *inside–out* and to be the meaning-maker in your life, you can take control.

One amazing aspect of this is known as *the placebo effect.* Believing that a sugar pill with no active ingredient in it is medicine, your belief in it can result in that effect. Statistically this can occur from as how as 30% of the time to as high as 70%. Because experiments with every new medicine is connected with a placebo, we know a lot about placebos and their level of effectiveness. Experiments have shown that placebo surgeries are 50 to 70% effective. These fake surgeries give the persons every indication that they had a surgery when they did not. Apparently, the ritual of preparation, being sedated, having stitches, etc. *convinces the mind* and *establishes the meaning,* "I had surgery."

The *noplacebo effect* is the same thing, except in reverse. If you believe that something is harmful to you, dangerous to you, a curse, etc., then your meanings make it so. Voodoo deaths were one of the first sets of experiences that were studied in an attempt to understand how a person could die from a hex or curse. Today knowing about the mind-body as a system, and about neuro-immunology, the idea of psycho-somatic illnesses, death, and healing is much better understood.

Here again we understand that there is an intimate connection between mind-and-body, mind-and-emotion, between our semantics and our neurology. What you think, how you interpret things does make a difference in what you thereafter experience.

If then *what* you experience is *not* the most critical factor in your life, and *meaning* is the most essentially fundamental factor, then learning to manage your meanings—ah, that becomes one of your most powerful tools and intervention. Therefore when you develop the meaning management skills, then experiences truly are at your command.

While this idea of your neuro-semantic nature and functioning shows up to some extent in NLP, we have taken it to a whole new level in Neuro-Semantics. You can see this in the basic books on the Meta-States Model such as the book on *Meta-States,* the book that presents *Secrets of Personal Mastery, Winning the Inner Game*, *Inside–Out: Empowered from Within,* and *The Meta Place.*

In this way, your meanings can precede your experiences. Your meanings can then operate as maps enabling you to go where you want to go. At other times, your meanings can reflect back onto your experiences—qualifying them, tempering them, and giving them such different meanings that the experiences are not the same.

EXPERIENCES
AND THE PLACEBO EFFECT

There's several things which are incredibly amazing about the placebo effect—first and most obvious is that *a true cure can be substituted by a non-cure*. Take a sugar pill which has no active ingredient in it and associate it in a sufficient way to some medicine, and 30 to 70 percent of the time, the neutral sugar pill will create the same results as the medicine. Amazing! How does that work? It works through the power of association and the power of belief—two foundational psychological processes. Create an association so that you *think* and you *believe* that the pill you're taking *is* the medicine, and more often than not, it will have that effect.

The same placebo effect has been discover with "shame surgeries." In double-blind studies, some patients were submitted to a surgery that never happened. The doctor made a slit in the skin, stitched it up so it certainly gives evidence that there was a surgery, yet in reality, nothing more was done. And sure enough, 65% of the patients experienced relief from their symptoms and recover.

The negative backside of the placebo effect is the no-placebo effect. Similarly if you *think and believe* that something is a curse, a hex, a forecast of doom and gloom—so it is to you. This was first reported in scientific journals with the "voodoo deaths" in Hatti. Medical researchers who went there and re-examined the bodies of those who died, did autopsies, and discovered that they could *not* discover the cause of death. Something else was going on. What was going on began to become clearer when they discovered that those who died were *those who believed* in the hex. Conversely, those who did not believe, those who were outsiders to that culture, did not.

What amazes us regarding the placebo effect is that it shouts aloud that there is a mind-body connection. That merely *thinking and believing something is real* is enough to have actual physical effects in the body, in one's neurology, in one's immune system, etc. Today there are hundreds, if not thousands, of studies being conducted on this mind-body relationship. We know that, in general, yes the mind influences the body. And we can postulate where in brain anatomy we construct certain kinds of thoughts and how those thoughts send signals to the body about how to respond.

What we still do not know or have is a dependable process that we can offer someone to gain relief and to trigger the body's self-healing powers. Yes we have a few patterns like the Allergy Cure pattern that works about half the time. And there are hypnotic patterns that Erickson developed that can often work with patients for pain control. Yet all such patterns depend on a variety of variables—the patient's state of mind, background experience and knowledge, relation to the healer, the healer's knowledge and skill, the set-up for the process, and a hundred other

factors. There are just a lot of unknown variables and relationships which explains why if placebos work 30 to70 percent of the time, then they also *do not work* 30 to 70 percent of the time.

More recent studies have brought to light another, in my opinion, even more fascinating and amazing facet about placebos. *You can know that a pill is a placebo and it can still work.* Now how crazy is that? Prior to this, researchers always hid the fact that a pill might not be the real thing, but a placebo. We then considered the effective factor to be *the belief* that it is real. But now with studies wherein the experimenters told people, "This is a placebo pill; there's no active ingredient in it. Take it two times a day with water and it will do X and Y." Then an absolutely amazing thing happened—in spite of knowing what they knew, people experience a relief of symptoms. The placebo works even when they knew it was not real.

Normally we would think that *knowing* it is not real, a person's mind-body system that can active self-healing would not be activated. Yet it was. One's self-reflexive consciousness does not inevitably turn off or reject the placebo effect, but most somehow allow it, maybe even facilitate it. *Knowing* whatever you know is not an innocent thing—it is *neuro-semantically alive and dynamic.* And even *knowing that you know* doesn't discredit it. Human consciousness —what a mystery!

INTRODUCING META-EXPERIENCES

Experiences can occur at various levels of the mind. The most obvious, and even undeniable experiences, occur at the primary level of the empirical senses. Here you and I *see, hear, feel, small, and taste* things. And as we do, these are the components of our primary states of mind and emotion. These are our primary experiences and from these, we build up all of our higher level experiences.

Primary experiences is what you encounter in your interaction with the outside world of things, processes, people, environments, etc. And if human life is anything—it is a set of wild and wonderful and also ugly and hurtful *experiences*. Primary experiences answer the questions— What happened to you at school? At home? With your friends? When you study? When you talk? When you run and play? When you create?

First, there is *what happens to you.* But as I have noted, *what happens to you* does not "mean" anything in and of itself. As the meaning-maker, *you have to interpret what happens to you.* And the interpretation that you create then becomes the experience that you experience within your mind-body-emotion system. Now we are at the first level of a *meta-experience.* Your interpreting of information and of the happenings in your life, that is your own unique meta-experience.

And amazingly, *you interpret it up the levels.* You interpret it layer upon layer of thoughts, emotions, memories, references, imaginations, decisions, etc. As you do, you then create a matrix of meanings made up of so many aspects of the *meta* place that you live inside of. I say "amazingly" because most of your meta-layering of meanings and interpretations occurs outside of your conscious awareness. *Outside*, that is, until you bring it into your awareness and become *mindful,* which of course is what we focus on in Neuro-Semantics. And we do that so that you can take charge of your meaning-making and therefore of your meta-experiences.

Asking about and getting answers from you about your experiences, about "what happened to you?" is easy and natural. Asking and getting answers about your meta-experiences is not so easy and natural. Well, it is *natural* in that you have the inner capacity for it. You have your self-reflexive consciousness by which you reflect back onto yourself, your thoughts, your emotions, the things that happen to you. But without some training, some meta-learning and some meta-thinking, you won't have much access to this inner real of your neuro-linguistic system.

To learn to use your self-reflexive consciousness effectively to empower your capacities and enable you to truly take charge of your life, you have to *learn to use your meta-functions*. These include meta-thinking—thinking about your thinking so that you can quality control your thinking and do clear and precise critical thinking. It includes meta-learning—learning about learning, how you learn, what's the best way to learn, the blocks and deficiencies of learning so that you

can avoid them, etc. It includes meta-reading and meta-writing—learning how words work, how to read effectively and how to write so that you truly take charge of the process of transferring ideas to paper or screen. It includes meta-communicating—communicating about your words, what you are doing with them, how you are using them, their neuro-linguistic effects inside your body and on others, etc.

We have just completed the *Learing Genius* and the *Writing Genius* trainings here in Cairo Egypt. Several participants with Masters Degrees commented, "I wish I had known these when I was in University! I would have done a thousand times better." Commenting on that with my wife Geraldine, we dreamed out loud about what if we could get every college student and every high school student to experience these Neuro-Semantics trainings so that they could learn to truly manage the meta-functions of thinking, learning, reading, writing, and communicating? We could facilitate a whole generation of people who could manage their higher meta-experiences.

Meta-experiences determine your life, your skills, your emotions, your health and fitness, your career, your relationships, etc. It is what is in the highest part of your mind—*your meta place*—that is the most determinative factor of your life. Not your parents, not your environment, not your genes, not your luck or lack of luck—it is your self-reflexivity by which you create your inner life. Interested? Contact a Meta-Coach or a Meta-Trainer. We are the *meta people* and we're here to help.

Follow up on previous articles
About Placebos: a great video that Nicola Riva sent to me of a medical doctor research from Harvard Medical School:
　　　　https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbu6DolnUfM

About Woke— An excellent video about Wokism: its history and its current ideology.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fw4dUbbVxSc

META-EXPERIENCES
IN THE *META* PLACE

Above and beyond your everyday experiences are *meta*-experiences. These are the experiences of your mind. And when I say "mind," I mean all of the known and unknown aspects of consciousness itself. Here are just some of the higher or meta-experiences in your mind:

- *Your memories*. What you "hold in mind" and take with you and use as your internal reference system—your library of what you've learned about what things mean, what things there are, what to focus on.
- *Your knowledge.* What you "know" or think you know. The ideas that you have become aware of in your home, culture, school, life experiences. As one aspect of a meta-experience, your knowledge informs you about lots of things.
- *Your beliefs.* All of the things that you "hold real and true." They may not be real or true, but you believe them anyway and have all sorts of experiences both in your mind and in your outside life because of them. Why? Because every belief sets up a self-organizing and self-fulfilling process.
- *Your imaginations.* Your powers of imagining, fantasizing, pretending, thinking of possibilities, playing around with "what if...?" is your ability to create all sorts of internal meta-experiences—some very creative and productive, some that create pathology.
- *Your decisions.* You make choices, everyday you make lots of choices, little ones and big ones and cumulatively, your choices generate the over-all meta-experience of your life orientation—the direction of your life. In your decisions, you forecast how to live, where to go, and a thousand other inner experiences.
- *Your intentions.* Within intentionality are your choices, your decisions, and also *your values*—what you care about, what's important to you. And this is the source of inside–out motivation, the energy and vitality to live with vigor and passion—more really important meta-experiences.

Well, you get the idea, do you not? Inside your mind—your wonderful consciousness by which your self-reflexivity operates—there are a hundred or a thousand *meta-experiences.* And they are all at your command when you learn how to use the meta-functions. In Neuro-Semantics we have been using the old NLP idea of "going meta" for two and half decades and since 2002 we have used *The Matrix Model* to sort out the human system. And it has worked pretty well. We modeled numerous experiences using the Matrix Model including stuttering. But now we have something even better. Something that takes *the Matrix Model* further, deeper, and higher— *The Meta Place.*

While the *Matrix Model* gave us three key dimensions of the *Meta Place,* that is just the beginning. It gave us meaning, intention, and self (identity in five aspects). But there is so much

more. And what it provides is a dynamic structuring of consciousness so that you can follow consciousness in a conversation and thereby come to understand another person at a much, much deeper level. What is *meta* to our everyday experiences at the primary level? If at the primary level of experience we have immediate thoughts and feelings (a state) as we respond (or react) to some trigger in the outside world—what is *higher* than that? What *meta-experience* do you first have and then have, etc.?

- *You first represent the outside experience.* You create, as it were, a movie in your mind and use the representational systems—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.
- *You then edit your inner cinema.* With all of the cinematic features that are available to you, you customize your movie sometimes making it wonderful, sometimes horrible.
- *You then draw conclusions.* You never just represent—you construct beliefs about things and once you do that, every higher meta-level is some form or aspect of a belief. You believe something is important—a value. You believe you should do something—a decision.
- *You construct your identity.* You invent a self-image that includes your worth, your skills, your social self, your temporal self, your roles, etc.
- *You learn and remember.* You encode and store learnings into your memory banks which become your Background Knowledge, which when fully habituated become your automatic programs.
- *You anticipate and predict.* Your mind as a prediction machine is always trying to figure out "what's next?" "what's coming?" It's a survival mechanism. This is the foundation for thinking strategically, thinking consequently, and for hoping.
- *You meta-state or set frames all the way up.* By this self-reflexive function you then layer thoughts upon thoughts to create complex understanding and belief systems. You create value hierarchies, belief hierarchies, decision hierarchies, etc.
- *You set multiple intentions.* Now you are creating your life orientation, your future direction, and the management of your attentions.

Your meta-mind is rich! It is also chaotic and for most people *unstructured.* And because people do not have a sense of structure of their mind, they don't know how to use it effectively. To do that, they need to develop an ability to use the meta-functions.

Want more? Check out *Meta-Therapy* and look for the newest book, *The Meta Place.*

EXPERIENCES
AND THE META-FUNCTION

There are experiences and then there are meta-experiences. That was the point of the last post about meta-experiences in the *Meta* place (Neurons #12).

Now if you want to know where NLP got the idea of *meta,* many decades before Facebook got the idea and changed their name to *Meta*, way back in the early 1970s, Gregory Bateson popularized the use of the term *meta*. *Meta* came from Bateson's work as he was sorting out how to understand anthropology and systems. He developed the idea as he studied various cultures, diving into the cultures, and then *stepping back* to reflect on them. In that way he developed various concepts in an effort to understand those cultures. Eventually, he and his colleagues at the Mental Research Institute (MRI) discovered that it was because the schizophrenic cannot "go meta" to his situation that he is locked into a double-bind situation.

Then in his writings (which he eventually put together as a book, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* 1972) he described the power of meta-connections and meta-functions. He wrote primarily about meta-communication as a way to understand the meta-communication habits of schizophrenics. From there he developed a model of learning and meta-learning. He spoke about meta-therapy as well.

In introducing the terms *meta* as well as *frame*, Bateson introduce the idea of *levels* within the mind, a hierarchy of levels. In the following quote, *meta* which conveys the idea of "about," enables us to consider the layers of our thoughts as hierarchical in its structure.

> "... the steps of an hierarchical series may be constructed by the successful use of the word 'about' or 'meta.' Our hierarchical series will then consist of message, meta-message, meta-meta-message, and so on." (Ibid., pp. 247-248)

It is by stepping back from an experience, we can *learn how to learn*. That is, we learn to punctuate the stream of events in a way that allows us to understand what's going on. A *frame* describes the context of a communication. And as such, *the context* of a message determines its meaning. So the context or frame informs us about "what sort a message a message is." As *meta* level information it functions as the interpretative key.

> "... a frame is meta-communicative. Any message, which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, *ipso facto* gives the receiver information or aids in his attempt to understand the message within the frame. ... Every meta-communicative or meta-linguistic message defines, either explicitly or implicitly, the set of messages about which it communicates, i.e., every meta-communicative message is or defines a psychological frame." (Ibid., p. 188)

In moving up levels, be it levels of learning, levels of mind, levels of messages, etc., there is a

discontinuousness between levels. That is, a classification cannot be a member of itself. A *member* of a class and *a class* are different phenomena occurring at different levels.

> "The content (or meta-message) *classifies* the message, but can never meet it on equal terms."
> (Ibid., p. 247)

This describes the meta-function. When you *go meta* to an experience or an idea, you are now *in reference* to that experience or idea. This allows you a larger and more expansive view. You are now thinking and feeling *about* the experience or idea and not merely thinking *of* it. You are no longer *inside,* you have moved outside and above it. Now your thoughts layer it and is *about* it. And because of this shift, your *meta* positive offers you a place to set an interpretative frame about the first experience.

Because the *meta* function enables you to *classify* the experience, it gives you your ultimate power as a meaning-maker. You can now *punctuate* the experience in such a way that you can use it for learning and you can prevent it from creating hurt or trauma. This gives you a lot of control in how you see the world and how you can take charge in sorting out your experiences.

> "A *way of punctuating* is not true or false. ... It is like a picture seen in an inkblot; it has neither correctness or incorrectness. It is only a *way* of seeing the inkblot." (Ibid., p. 300)

Do you realize how powerful this is? As a meaning-maker, the one who can establish the meaning frame as a frame of reference—*experience is at your command.* You do not need to be a victim of any experience. You can only be a victim of an experience if you so classify it as such. Pretty powerful stuff!

IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE YOUR MIND...

An amazing thing in modern science and medicine is that we can now take pictures of your brain. We can even take pictures of the brain *while it is in action.* Amazing! Sometimes we do that to identify where blood flow may be low or lacking, or the location of a lesion, and sometimes we do it as part of attempting to identify the anatomy of the brain. It is to identify how the brain works in different situations and with various contexts.

Taking a picture of a living brain is one thing; what about *the mind*? Do we have any instruments by which we can learn to see *the mind in action?* That's a very different thing. So the answer is "no." Actually, the situation is worse than that—we can not even clearly and accurate define what we mean by *mind*! We can't even agree upon what it is that we are referring to when we mentioned *mind,* let alone see it.

Yet we all know that we have a mind. We even have developed methods for measuring the *intelligence* of the mind, or at least there have been attempts at measuring intelligence. Whether the tests actually measuring the concept of *intelligence,* that's another question. Howard Gardner called that in question with his Multiple Intelligence model as has Robert Sternberg in his models, especially about Practical Intelligence.

If we go to the field of Psychology, what have those who have studied the *mind* said or developed that may help us to *see* the mind? What enables us to *conceptualize* the mind or tools by which we can more intelligently work with *mind*? Sadly not much. Freud picture consciousness as an iceberg with just a bit of it being conscious and most of it being unconscious. Then he picture emotions as like a steam engine that builds up pressure before it blows. Philosophers of the mind in the late 20th century started comparing mind to a computer—mind inputs and processes information. It encodes information, stores it, and transforms it. Perls viewed mind or personality in terms of top-dog and underdog. Transactional Analysis pictured it as a set of sub-personalities: parent, child, and adult. Yet in all of these metaphors or concepts, none give us a clear picture of *mind,* intelligence, or consciousness.

Further, not only do we all have a sense of *mind* and *consciousness,* we all also have a pretty good idea of *what is in the mind.* What's there? What are you aware of when you think about your mind? Thoughts, beliefs, values, memories, imaginations, anticipations, understandings, knowledge, rules, intentions, decisions, and on and on. Now, if only we could *see* these things.

Yet all of these "things" which are in the *mind* are not "things" at all, they are processes. We are thinking, remembering, believing, imagining, etc. *Mind* is what you and I *do* as we encounter the world we live in, represent that world, mentally map out how things work and what's important. Korzybski gave us a picture of the mind as a "map" *about* the things outside, levels of abstraction. That helps a bit, but it still does not give me a clear picture of the mind. What does

your mind-map look like?

The next development came from NLP when the developers took their clue from Korzybski and said that we have a *representational map in our mind of the things we have seen, heard, felt, etc.* And with that, we can begin to *see* the mind as a cinematic representation of the empirical world. It is *as if* we all have a theater in our mind and on that theater we can re-present to ourselves whatever we have seen, heard and felt in the world. In Developmental Psychology, we call this *constancy of representation.* This refers to the ability to "hold in mind" what we have seen and heard. Now we can take our visual, auditory and kinesthetic experiences with us wherever we go as a movie or cinema that informs us about things.

This inner cinema of the mind, however, is not actual or real—it is a simulation. There is no movie theater in your brain! Rather, it is *as if* we are looking a sight and hearing sounds. And while it is not an actual thing—it gives us a way of coding the world. And not only that, we can *as it were* edit our movies. We can make them bigger or smaller, brighter or dimmer, closer or farther, etc. We can ask, "Is your memory of that event in color or black-and-white?" "Is the volume coming from your right side or left side?"

Imagining this *cinema of the mind* now gives us a way to *see the mind in action.* Well, at least see what we are doing as we think—we are visualizing, reproducing sounds, sensations, etc. And as we add words and conversations to this mental movie, we now have a meta-representation system at play. All of these is giving us a picture of the mind.

But there's more—a lot more. We can imagine that above the movie and above the editing and above the languaging— there is believing, valuing, imagining, intending, remembering, etc. We can imagine these and *see them as higher logical levels.* This extends our picture of the mind. And this is a description of the *meta* place.

Want more? See *Movie Mind* (2002) and *The Meta Place* (2023).

SUPPOSE YOU COULD
SEE YOUR MIND, WHAT THEN?

When doctors and medical specialists enable us to see *the brain* and see *what is happening* as it is functioning, that can let them know what to do if they find a problem. It gives them insight into what's causing a problem and how to remedy it. When researchers develop new equipment for viewing the brain, it gives them more information about the overall functioning of the brain, how the parts are related to each other.

So it is with the mind. When you and I can *peek into the theater of the mind and see what's going on,* we can know what's working well and what's not working well. Now we can more effectively enable the functioning of the mind. I began doing that with the *Matrix Model* (2002/2012). By identify seven of the key variables of the mind, the Matrix Model provides a way to sort things out and see relationships between them. The structure of the Matrix Model was very simple:

- Three process dimensions: meaning, intention, and state. These create all of the internal understandings, beliefs, knowledge, emotions, etc. for any experience.
- Five content dimensions about one's self: you as a person (self-esteem), you as a doer (self-confidence), your social self, your temporal self, and your roles in various domains.

Essentially the Matrix Model focused on three major things which the *mind* does—it makes meanings, it sets intentions, and it generates a sense of self. Bob Bodenhamer and I first applied this model to the experience of stuttering. We found we could model *what* stuttering is and *how* it works in the human mind-body-emotion system using it. We found we could specify with precision the exact order, organization, and structure of that experience and knowing that, how to transform it to fluency. (See the book, *In Their Own Voice,* formally titled, *Mastering Stuttering and Blocking with NLP and Neuro-Semantics*).

For the past 20 years I have presented the Matrix Model in the Meta-Coaching course as a tool for modeling the desired and undesired experiences of coaching clients. It has provided a way to *follow the person's energy through their system* (their matrix of frames). In the past few years, however, I've been expanding that model by adding more of what we know is in the *mind.* The result is now *The Meta Place* (see 2023 Neurons #12 and #13).

What then? What is the value of being able to see *mind* as a meta place? Beyond the first benefit of being able to identify *what is there,* you will be able to recognize and understand *how your mind works.* Then, from understanding how your mind works, you can first monitor its functioning and then regulate it so that it serves you. Today we talk about this in terms of EQ— emotional intelligence and/or mindfulness.

For Neuro-Semanticists including Meta-Coaches, this gives one the ability to *follow a person's energy through his or her mind-body-emotion system.* This refers to following how a person takes some stimuli in the environment, builds up mental maps about it, and then how that information then integrates into the body to become the person's dependable response patterns. And the good news is that we can do this with any and every "experience." The end result— we can generate a dynamic process structuring of how a person does (or performs) any experience from stuttering, to depression, to optimism, resilience, over-seriousness, playfulness, etc.

Seeing your mind in action is a meta-cognitive skill. It is mindfulness and it is meta-stating. It puts you into a position where you can begin managing what you are doing and how you are doing it. This then results in a feeling of self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-trust, and self-determination. Now you know why. Now you know how to answer the question, "Suppose you could see your mind, what then?"

We are now training Meta-Coaches to do this very thing—to see a client's mind or mind space and to do it in real time. I often demonstrate this in a step-by-step fashion as I conduct and map a conversation as the dialogue progresses. Those who know the structure of the Meta place immediately recognize the mapping as they follow the conversation. This trains their intuitions to be able to do the same.

HEALTHY AGING—
IS IT POSSIBLE?

Here's the thing about *aging,* while it sounds like something only older people do, it is actually something that every single one of us do. You do it! I do it. Every single day of our lives, we are aging. In this, aging is inevitable, it is inescapable, and it is the best thing given the alternative. All of my life I have been aging and so have you! It is built into our genetic make-up. So the question is *not* whether you and I will age, the question is *the quality of our aging.* Are you aging well? Healthily? With energy and vitality? Would you like to?

For me, I want to access and experience *healthy aging* as much as possible. How about you? I want to age with grace and dignity rather than become an old grouchy person. I want to age with energy and vitality—*alive mentally, emotionally, and physically.* That's what I mean by healthy aging. Healthy aging means getting older in terms of years, but *not* getting old in terms of attitude, thinking, or acting.

Of course, it is *not* your chronological age alone that determines this. We all know young people who think, talk, and act as if they were old people. I have many younger friends and associates who are so much "older" than I am when it comes to their attitude about learning, staying active, taking risks, and so on. I tease them whenever I can that while they get older in years, they could become younger in spirit. Some smile when I say that; others ask, "How?" That brings up the quip about age and aging, "If you didn't know how old you are (your chronological age), how old would you be?" "How old do you feel?"

Age and aging are not the same. While the speed of your chronological age increases at a steady rate. Chronologically, you inevitably add one year to your age for each revolution around the sun that we make here on this planet. By way of contrast, the speed of your aging is actually highly variable. That's because it is, to a large extent, under your control. *Aging* depends on your attitude, your life-style (active, inactive, passive), your commitment to your mental and emotional growth, the quality and nature of your intentionality, your health habits (eating, exercising, sleeping, etc.), etc. The good news regarding what this means is that *you can take control and manage your aging to a great extent.*

Now if *aging* is something that you *do* rather than something imposed upon you (like the number of years you have roamed around on this planet), then there are all sorts of resources in Neuro-Semantics for *healthy aging*. To that end, I will write about those resources in this series of articles. That's because, as NLP says, there is a *structure to every subjective experience,* and aging is simply that—a subjective experience. That means we can interview and model those who effectively and healthily age and then replicate the successful variables.

Another distinction. *Healthy aging* is not merely about longevity. The length of your life in terms of years is important, but only if the extended years (which we call longevity) are *good* years. Some people live a long time, but in pain, distress, and misery. Some have no quality of life to speak of, they are merely existing ... waiting to die. That's not the kind of longevity I would think that anyone would want. I certainly do not. Instead we want to experience what Spock says as his greeting— "Live long and prosper." We want to live long with energy, vitality, meaningfully involved in our daily activities, and joyfully mindful about how we are contributing to the significance of life.

Back to the opening question in the title, "Is healthy aging possible?" I believe it is. As long as you are alive and have your faculties and can exercise your power of will, I believe that you can make choices about how to engage yourself in the things that will make for healthy aging. Of course, the sooner you do this—the better. If you wait until your years are about to run out, you will have far less time to set things up for healthy aging. The best time to begin to take charge of this is mid-life. For most people, that is in the 40s and 50s. That's when they begin to get over "the immortality of the teenage years and of the 20s." Suddenly we become aware that we are actually mortal creatures and that there's an end point.

Now whether anyone else wants to make this part of their journey, I certainly do. I have set it as my aim to engage in *healthy aging*. And to actualize that, I have been studying this from the perspective of what we can learn and model from those who have lead the way in aging with grace and vigor, energy and persistence, and end with a legacy of "a life well lived."

POSITIVELY FRAMING AGING

The very first thing you will want to do in service of *healthy aging* is to frame aging as an experience that you can manage. Refuse to let society frame aging for you—if you do, you will be pretty much doomed to experiencing it as a highly debilitating experience. The ideas that we have all grown up with about aging are some of the most dysfunctional and toxic ideas around.

> After 30 you are over the hill.
> When something slips your mind, you are becoming senile.
> As you get older, your memory will fail, your intelligence will falter, you will become useless and a burden to others.

Begin by clearly distinguishing *age* from *aging.* In the last article, I called that the first critical distinction that we need to make. When someone asks about your age, they are asking about a number. That's all. And that number is not necessarily the same thing as your mental age, your emotional age, your bodily age, your fitness age, your creativity age, etc. Because *aging* is something that you *do*—it is dependent upon what you do and the quality of how you are doing things.

Let's ask, "What are you doing?" The answer is *growing.* Well, at least I hope that is your answer and if it is, then the next question is even more critical: "How you are growing mentally, emotionally, behaviorally, in your attitude, etc.?" At the heart of *healthy aging* is the experience of continuing to grow. *Growing* does not end at 18 or 30 or 65. Growing is what every human being who is inwardly *alive* is doing.

- You are still growing in your understandings, you are reading and studying, you are keeping your mind alive. You are exploring new areas and subjects.
- You are still growing emotionally in learning the fundamentals of emotional intelligence. You are becoming ever more aware of your emotions, monitoring your emotions, regulating them, and using them to relate to loved ones and friends. You are keeping your joy alive, your curiosity, your playfulness, your compassion, your passions, etc.
- You are still growing relationally as you keep yourself involved with people, extending yourself for the welfare of others, for mentoring, for caring.
- You are still growing physically as you keep your body alive with cardio-vascular exercise, muscular skeleton strength, stretching, etc. You may no longer be experiencing the exponential growth as you did in your teens and 20s, but you can still experience the endorphins that come from maintaining your fitness.

If *aging* is what you do, then the quality of your aging and the nature of it depends on developing healthy habits that sustain you in all of the dimensions of being human. This obviously requires taking responsibility for yourself, giving up any and all excuses, and using your creativity to find a way to keep yourself in the game of life.

If you have *learned* the opposite, that aging happens to you, that you have no choice, that your genetics control everything, that you can't fight against getting old and decrepit, etc., if you have learned any of those toxic ideas about aging from your family, culture, or from the general society you live in—*you can also unlearn those ideas.*

It's up to you to personally *frame aging in a positive way.* When you do that, you thereby transform the aging experience into an experience that you can manage. Does the idea of aging create any problems for you? Good. Take that idea and examine it. What are the assumptions that you are accepting about aging? What are the frames that you are allowing to influence your thinking and feeling? Whatever "problem" you find, here is the good news, *you are not the problem.* If there is a problem, then *the frame is the problem.* And that's why addressing the frame is so crucial to your well-being.

ADJUSTING YOUR THINKING

Given that *healthy aging* is a function of your framing (#17), by positively framing your understanding of aging as a process and experience, you adjust your thinking and believing so it fits with healthy aging. How do you do that?

Let's begin by peeking into the theater of your mind to see how you are currently *picturing* aging. Think about aging. Think about someone you know who is aging. What do you see? How do you picture the aging process? The cultural pictures that we are constantly fed on TV, in the movies, on social media, in books, in jokes, etc. typically create some very unpleasant and undesirable pictures.   Here are some old jokes:
> I don't trip over things, I do random gravity checks.
> Old age is coming at a really bad time.
> When I was a child, nap time was a punishment, not it feels like a small vacation.
> My people skills are just fine, it's my tolerance of idiots that needs work.
> At my age, 'getting lucky' means walking into a room and remembering why.

I remembering watching the New York Marathon some years ago and toward the end of it, there were three or four centurions finishing it in 5 to 6 hours. Talk about an image! Here were three 100-year old men finishing a 26.2 mile run. I immediately grabbed that image and put it into the theater of my mind as an image of *aging with graceful energy.* Later I put some images of 90-year old weight lifters still going at it.

What's in your mental theater? Representing is the first level of thinking and when you have images of vitality and youthfulness there—you are sending those kinds of messages to your body. For many people, this is the first place to make some changes—alter the representational code that you currently have in your head. Create a picture of aging that you find attractive and compelling.

Now while you age, as a number, represents a mechanical process, simply counting the years, *aging* itself is a fluid process. In addition to your mental pictures, it involves your beliefs, values, understandings, etc. Therefore in service of teaching your body how to age well, you need to incorporate empowering beliefs, values, and understandings. One way to do that is to engage a friend in a conversation about aging. Simply start with, "What do you think about aging?" and then, just listen to what you automatically say. Listen without censoring or judging. Doing this is a way to flush out limiting beliefs and understandings. Now you are in a position to upgrade your beliefs and understandings.

Years ago, as a good friend of mine was speaking, a piece of information slipped his mind. Though he was only 55 at the time, he immediately commented, "Michael I'm having a senior

moment." I asked him, "Do you hear what you are saying to yourself?" He had not. I called attention to the *implication* by asking, "Do you believe that as you get older, your memory will get worse and you'll forget more and more?" "Sure do!" he immediately said without a moment's hesitation. At that point I decided to install a belief in myself, "As I get older, my memory will get better and better."

Now I don't know if that statement is true in any absolute sense. But I also know two things—first, a belief does not have to be true to be believed, and second, a belief well installed is a "command to the nervous system." A third thing I also know, there is a phenomenon in our minds, the placebo effect, and it can activate processes in our mind-body system apart from something being factual (see Neurons #10, 2023).

The bottom line: Take good care of your brain. The following comes from Brain #101 training manual about how to take good care of your brain.

      1) Breathe! Your brain needs lots of oxygen; 20% of oxygen goes to the brain. Do what you can to get blood delivered to very cell in your brain.

      2) Exercise: aim for "healthy mind in a healthy body."

      3) Sleep: your brain transfers short-term memory to long-term memory during sleep as it engages in working through problems. Aim for 7 to 9 hours.

      4) Detox: eliminate toxins inside and outside which can damage the brain.

      5) Think/ Learn: engage brain in stimulating activities. Read, reflect, debate, solve puzzles. "Nurture your mind with great thoughts, for you will never go higher than you think." Benjamin Disraeli.

      6) Play: children are ferocious learners because they play; play with ideas.

      7) Reflect: use solitude to reflect, read, write, etc Reading makes you full, speaking articulate, and writing precise.

      8) Reduce stress: stress reduces brain functioning; can't think well under stress, stress hormones has toxic effect, leads to death of neurons. Control your blood pressure.

      9) Love: be compassionate, caring, engage in collaborative communications. Love your work.

      10) Eat well: avoid junk food, sugar, flour, etc.

HEALTHY AGING
AND BELIEFS

As strange as it may sound, *what you believe plays a tremendously determine role in how you age.* In this, there are healing beliefs that you can adopt and there are toxic beliefs—beliefs which you will want to discover and replace. Now when it comes to beliefs, there are many kinds of beliefs—identity beliefs (about who you are), causation beliefs (what causes what), equivalence beliefs (what is equal to and equivalent to what), contributory beliefs (what contributes to something), assumptive beliefs (what you assume without question), etc.

- Identity beliefs: "I am a diabetic." "I am an alcoholic."
- Causation beliefs: "Things going wrong makes me depressed." "When you lose a loved one, you have to grieve for two or more years." "If there is heart attacks in your family, you will probably have a heart attack."
- Equivalence beliefs: "A diagnosis of cancer is a death sentence."
- Contributory beliefs: "I smoked for years before I quit, I will probably get lung cancer."
- Assumptive beliefs: "My grandfather smoked heavily everyday of his life and he lived into his 90s."

What we know in Neuro-Semantics is that unlike a *thought* which sends signals to your body and which can influence how your body responds, a *belief is a command to your nervous systems.* That's why a belief sets up a self-fulfilling prophecy and begins to make happen what we fear will happen. That's what makes a belief so much more powerful than a mere thought. You can think all kinds of things without doing any semantic damage to yourself. But if you *believe* something that is limiting, toxic, dysfunction, or dangerous, that belief will activate all of your many nervous systems to try to *make it real.* It is this actualization process that is the problem.

Let's peek into this actualization process for just a moment to understand it. The reason a mere thought will not do semantic damage is that you can try on a thought without believing it. It's just a thought. So it does not activate any commitment to the thought. A belief is different. Having *confirmed* a thought that it is real, actual, or factual, the belief informs all of neurology that *reality* is such and such. In response your autonomic nervous system, your immune system, your sympathetic nervous system, and on and on all go into action to help you adjust to reality (well, to your perception of reality). That's why the-confirmed-thought (a belief) can get your body to create ulcers, headaches, backaches, strokes, heart-attacks, and on and on.

The bottom line? *Be very careful what you believe!* What you believe can have drastic effects in your mind-body-emotion system. One of the most effective solutions to this is the critical thinking model in NLP, The Meta-Model of Language. As a thinking tool, the Meta-Model empowers you to think critically about the things you think and believe and to quality control your thoughts so that they are more accurate and precise. Another effective tool are the belief

change patterns. These are processes by which you can transform a limiting belief into an empowering belief.

Anne Harrington wrote about a story from a 1957 psychiatric journal that radiates questions and puzzles. It is in her book, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine.*

> Mr. Wright was diagnosed with lymphosarcoma, cancer of the lymph nodes. "Tumors, some the size of oranges, infested his neck, groin, and armpits." He ceased to respond to conventional therapies. Then he learned of a new experimental drug, Krebiozen, and was "persuaded that it would be his miracle cure." On Friday he begged his doctor for an injection. On Monday, the doctor was greeted by Mr. Wright "walking around the ward, chatting happily." The tumors had "melted like snow balls on a hot stove."
>
> Mr Wright continued his stunning recovery until he read conflicting stories about Krebiozen's effectiveness in the newspaper. His confidence undermined, he relapsed. His doctor then convinced him that the original injection had been defective and administered another one—actually distilled water. He recovered even more dramatically than the first injection and sent home, "a picture of health."
>
> Later when Mr Wright read that the American Medical Association had denounced Krebiozen as a worthless drug, he relapsed once again. He was admitted to the hospital and died two days later.

Whatever happened there, obviously his *mind* played a significant role in both his recovery and his relapses. What he *believed* somehow activated his mind-body system both to his benefit and then to his detriment.

HEALTHY AGING
AND INTENTIONALITY

To live healthily and to age healthily, *you have to have something to live for.* Viktor Frankl discovered that in the concentration camp. He noted that those who had something or someone to live for were able to live longer and better than those who did not. Without something or someone to live for, they tended to give up, to become depressed, and their body became less able to handle the stresses of concentration life.

When you have a *purpose* to live for—what you are activating is your intentionality. That's the part of your brain, your pre-frontal cortex, that enables you to live forward, directing you to the values and purposes that give you energy and motivation. This shouts at us, "Never retire!" Retirement, as we have learned from medical science, is bad for your health, it undermines your well-being and especially the ability to age with energy and vitality.

> A European study that tracked 16,827 Greek men and women for 12 years found that those who retired early had a 51 percent higher mortality rate than those who kept working. A study that followed 3,500 Shell Oil employees found that those who retired at 55 were twice as likely to die during the next ten years as those of the same age who continued to work. (*The Longevity Revolution,* Public Affairs, 2008).

The solution is to use your intentionality to set continual purposes that will give you a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Intentionality is your internal capacity to set intentions, that is, to set goals that you then strive for. Once you stop striving for something, your whole system becomes de-activated and you get old. Do that and now you have nothing to live for.

Therefore, long before you reach "retirement age" (what a toxic phrase!), establish goals and purposes that get you out of bed and give you a reason to exert your energy. Use your intentionality to set goals that will give you direction into your future. Set goals which will enable you to live for something that goes beyond yourself, that transcends just you and yours. Those who fail to do this end up merely "trying to stay busy" and the statistics about life after retirement is that people live just a few years and then die. Human nature requires that we live for something— something big enough and bold enough to activate our mind-body-emotion system.

A growing body of research today suggests that is it *meaning* and *purpose* that enables us to age healthily. "A 2005 study that followed 12,650 middle-aged Hungarians found that those who felt their lives had meaning had significant lower rates of cancer and heart disease than did those who didn't feel this way." Another study of centenarians noted a common trait, namely, "having a

reason to get out of bed."

Now intentionality tends to play a significant role in people who have a sense of the spiritual. Herold G. Koenig, M.D. at Duke University Medical Center writes, "People who feel their life is part of a larger plan and are guided by their spiritual values have stronger immune systems, lower blood pressure, a lower risk of heart attack and cancer, and heal faster and live longer."

> A 1999 study published in the journal *Demography* tracked 20,000 Americans. They found that those who regularly attended church lived an average of 7 years longer than those who did not and 14 years longer for Black people. The reason? It gave their life *meaning*.

HEALTHY AGING
AND EXTENDING YOUR TIME-LINE

By distinguishing age from aging, I earlier asked about your age. "How old are you?" "How old are you mentally? How old are you emotionally? Behaviorally? Relationally? If you didn't know your chronological age, how old would you be?" These questions imply that *we are at different ages in different aspects of ourselves.* This poses several possibilities. You could be *young* mentally and old chronologically. You could be *young and youthful emotionally*, but old mentally. You could be *young* in your activities and old emotionally. So, how old are you?

After learning NLP and after writing a book on time-lines, *Adventures in Time* (1997), in my forties, I decided to extend my time-line. Having worked with some people in therapy who had short time-lines which only extended into their 50s or 60s due to certain beliefs that they had picked up ("the men in our family die in their 50s"), I decided I would extend my time-line to 100. Shortly thereafter I read about 100-year old centurions finishing the New York marathon; four finished in 1997. So with that, I extended it to 120. Later while reading in the field of human anatomy and reading that "apart from disease or accidents, the human body should function healthily to 140," I extended my time-line to 140.

Crazy? Ridiculous? Probably! Especially since no one has ever lived that long. And especially since no one in my family heritage has ever lived beyond 92, let along to 100. But what the heck? I checked the ecology of the idea—would it do any harm? Would it mess anything up? When I figured that it would not be harmful in anyway, *in my mind I imagined my time-line going out to 140.*

Suddenly, I experienced some changes. First and foremost, the strongest change that I felt was, "I'm just a kid at 47." If 140 is the length, that means middle age doesn't begin until 70 so I still have more than two decades before I need to decide what I'll do "when I grow up." At some time someone asked me, "How old do you feel?" And for many years I said "30 to 35, somewhere in that range." By the time I reached my 60s, I felt like I was approaching 40. The strange thing is that I never have felt my chronological age, always younger.

Another interesting facet about time also occurred. I never felt rushed for time. I always felt that I had plenty of time. This came from two sources, first from extending my time-line and also from experiencing and using "the genius state" of focus that we use in Neuro-Semantics. In the 1990s and beyond, I shifted the way I read, study, and write to working on *one project at a time.* I stopped reading two or more books at the same time. Oddly enough, my productivity actually doubled or tripled, and in spite of a busy traveling schedule, I never felt *rushed.*

By extending my time-line I also had another realization. If by any chance I happened to live to or beyond 100, I didn't want to live in regret of not having done the things that I needed to do to age with energy and vitality. So even though I had always exercised, now I had another significant reason to be consistent and regular in my exercising. Somewhere I had learned about exercising the core via sit-ups, crunches, leg lifts, etc. so I began starting every morning with 200 crunches. Later I extended that to 300 or more. Today that is how I start every day.

Of course, none of us know how long we will live. Accidents happen all the time and given the unpredictability of things, none of us have a guarantee of even a single day; no guarantee of tomorrow. But if you and I are lucky, and we aren't killed in a storm or car wreck or other accidents, and if we don't happen to suffer from the hundreds of diseases that could be fatal —and we do keep living, what will be your *inner experience*? Will you age in a healthy way and still be *young at heart* when you hit 100?

Extending your time-line will influence your beliefs and values, it will readjust your intentions, and it will even affect your sense of self. To extend your time-line, you may have to give yourself permission to "outlive your parents and/or grandparents." That often stops people. That was what I heard in the 1990s that made me realize that the length you encode about your life span on your time-line is a matter of belief. And given that, what would you like to believe? If you didn't know your age, *how old would you be?*

DEVELOP HEALTH HABITS
FOR HEALTHY AGING

It is not rocket science to know that if you are going to develop healthy aging as your way of moving forward into the future, you need to *develop some really good health habits.* Do you now have healthy habits for eating, exercising, and sleeping? That's a very different question from asking, "Do you know what healthy eating consists of?" Most people *know* lots of things that they could do that would improve their heath and enable aging with more energy and vitality. The problem does not lie primarily in knowing, it lies in doing.

Eating
Undoubtedly the biggest problem lies in all of the things that we eat that we should not. Sugar is probably the biggest culprit and it is in just about everything. Simply cutting out sugar would be a major contribution to better health and aging. Similarly, we eat far too much flour and salt as well. Personally I have gone on an anti-cancer diet and have eliminated as much as I can all sugar, flour, salt, dairy, and red meat.

That's the *doing,* yet above and beyond the doing is *the thinking.* What you think and believe about eating, about food, about deserts, about sweets, about fast food, etc.? This brings us to your neuro-semantics—the meanings that you have given to these aspects of eating that are now programmed into your neurology. Why do you eat? For what purpose? Many eat for de-stressing, others eat to be social and to connect with others. Some eat because it is a reward, or an expression of being loved. Some eat because the clock says "it is time to eat."

Ultimately, it is your food neuro-semantics that govern your eating. Over the years of your life, you have *learned* various things about eating, and now those learnings are your neurological programs. But the good news is that if you learned your current programs, you can unlearn them and learn new and better programs. This is the central theme of *Games Fit and Slim People Play* (2001).

Not only do most people eat too much of the wrong stuff, most people also eat too much. They take in more calories than they burn. The result is that they constantly gain weight. Statistics indicate that more than half of the American population is over-weight. And with obesity, every ten pounds of extra weight cuts off another year of life. But this is not merely a matter of too much food, it is also a matter of too little exercise.

Exercising
What we call *exercise is simply movement.* And for well-being and health, you need to *move* your body. That means more walking and less sitting. That means taking the stairs instead of the

elevator, that means walking up the escalator rather than riding. That means getting minimally 30 minutes of cardio-vascular exercise four times a week. Do that and you keep your internal organs in better health.

Again, it's not *the doing* that's the biggest problem, it is *the thinking*. What you think and believe about exercise plays the critical role. It's not even your schedule or life-situation, it is the *meanings* that you give to your situation.

Sleeping
Then there is sleep. What's amazing about sleep is that what is natural and easy and non-neurotic for animals is a major source of problems for we humans. It takes a human being to mess up something as natural as sleep. And this is mostly a matter of your *semantics*. So again, we ask, "What do you believe about sleep?" The biggest barrier today is that people de-value sleep, discount its benefits, treat it as a nuisance, and do things to interfere with it. As a result, a large proportion of the population suffers from sleep deficiency which leaves them tired, grumpy, stresses, and not at their best.

By "burning the candle at both ends" most people push themselves so that they do not get their needed seven to eight hours of sleep. Nor do they create a "getting ready to sleep" ritual that helps them relax so they can release the tensions and worries of the day. To make matters worse and to interfere with sleep, many eat and drink just prior to going to bed, others take their phones with them to bed, and others stay up watching TV or surfing the internet which does not put them in the best state for sleep.

Eating, exercising, and sleeping—the easiest things you can to to age healthily and yet the very things most people discredit as having a significant impact on their health. Nor is it that most people don't know what to do. They do! The problem is that they simply do not *implement*. And why not? Because their semantics are in the way. Their *meta* place is not organized and well-formed for healthy aging. That's where the problem lies, that's where the solution will occur.

> For more, see *Games Fit and Slim People Play* (2001); also the training manual for *Unleashing Vitality.*

HEALTHY AGING
BY STAYING ACTIVE

To be alive is to be active. Conversely, when a person stops being active, that person becomes less *alive.* This gives us a basic formula for healthy aging, namely, *Keep yourself active in every dimension of life.* Simple! Keep yourself *actively alive* mentally, emotionally, behaviorally, relationally, etc. Now while that is the general principle, we have to be more specific. To that end here are some questions:

> "What makes you feel alive? What enlivens your mind? Your emotions? Your activities and behaviors?" And if you don't know, then, "What *could* enliven these aspects?"

Your answers to these questions may serve as possible directions for how to stay active. As I have already mention, the very idea of "retiring" countermands this idea of staying active. Retiring is probably the worst thing to you can do and the worse goal you could possible to set. *Don't do it!* Instead, set the goal of staying active and continuing to strive to "be more, do more, think more, feel more, have more, give more." That is one of the objectives of living in the *Being*-dimensions where self-actualizing occurs. And because of that, this is one of those interconnections between self-actualization psychology and the psychology of healthy aging.

This also brings up one of the problems or challenges for people in the "golden years." As most people grow older, they become less and less active. They opt for sitting rather than walking. They opt for watching TV rather than engage themselves in an activity that calls upon them to stretch themselves. The problem is actually more sinister than this. If in growing older, you become less active, your less activity will result in you having less energy and stamina, and with less energy and stamina, you will tend to do less, take on fewer activities. In this way, a negative downward cycle is initiated. You do less, have less energy, so do even less, feel less energy, etc. This is a formula for growing older unhealthily!

Yet while that may seem to be a "natural" and inevitable process, it is not. You can interrupt that process and you can, in fact, create a virtuous upward cycle in its place. You can keep taking on activities that stretch your mind, body, emotions, actions, etc. And as you do, you can experience more energy and more stamina. Whether you experience life as a *downward vicious cycle or an upward virtuous cycle*—it is up to you. It's your choice. It's one choice that plays a significant role in healthy aging and it's a crucial choice.

What does this take? Mostly *mindfulness.* Mostly you need to be mindful of the choices you make and consciously use your intentionality to set goals that keep stretching you. In fact, you can use that as a way to monitor how you are doing. "Is this choice I'm making one that will stretch me or not?" "Is this choice an option to rest and retire?" However you use your intentionality for setting goals and objectives, you will be setting in motion a life-orientation.

That's what intentionality does—it establishes a direction in life and from that, a sense of purpose. *Mindfulness* is the quality that enables you to not default on these choices.

Now knowing that *to be alive is to be active,* I've set this as one of my conscious intentions, namely, *to stay active.* I may no longer be able to do 10-mile runs before breakfast as I did in my 20s and 30s, but I can and will keep my mind, body, emotions, speech and behaviors *as active as I can.* I don't want to rest on a beach or play bingo. I intend to keep studying and learning new things, things that I hope will disturb my current knowledge and keep opening up new possibilities, new patterns, new trainings, etc. My intention is to stay on the cutting-edge of things in psychology and Neuro-Semantfics as I can.

In this I recall the fabulous words of George Bernard Shaw in the following quotation when he said that he wants to "be thoroughly used up when I die."
> "This is the true joy in life,
>> the *being used for a purpose* recognized by yourself as a mighty one;
>> the being a force of nature,
> instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances
>> complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.
> I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community,
>> and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.
> *I want to be thoroughly used up when I die,*
>> for the harder I work the more I live.
>> I rejoice in life for its own sake.
> Life is no 'brief candle' for me.
> It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment,
>> and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible
>> before handing it on to future generations."
> [Source: Dedicatory Letter, Shaw, G.B. (1980), *Man and Superman*, Penguin, Harmondsworth]

HEALTHY AGING
AND AGING FACTORS

Not surprisingly, *there are healthy and unhealthy aging factors.* Unlike previous generations who really did not have a good idea about aging factors, today we are much more aware of both factors—the positive and the negative aging factors. We also know both the internal and the external factors. Externally, there are numerous negative aging factors, things that cause us to age more quickly—the lack of exercise, smoking, too much drinking, junk food, obesity, etc. For the external positive aging factors—regular exercise, moderate eating, managing blood pressure and weight, etc. These external factors are obviously important. In fact, they are critical.

Since I have already addressed some of these external factors, I want to here focus on the even more importance of the *internal aging factors.* And again, both the negative and positive factors. Negatively we know that any sustained negative emotional state will function to cause you to age more quickly and problematically. If you want a formula for *growing old faster,* then live in the negative emotions. If you live in stress and anxiety, if you live with a pessimism attitude, or in depression, loneliness, anger, fearfulness, regrets, self-criticism, despair about getting old, etc., you are giving yourself a strong negative dose of unhealthy aging. You will much more quickly grow old beyond your years.

Do you know this? I bet you do, at least *intellectually.* But the Neuro-Semantic question is: Do you "know" this in the way you live? Or do you allow yourself to bask in fear or worry or anger or any of the other negative emotions? Now if you claim, "I can't help it; negative things have happened, what am I suppose to feel about that? Happy?" then obviously your emotions *have* you rather than *you having them.* What's needed is the development of emotional intelligence so that you can take control.

Similarly, if you are getting inadequate sleep, you thereby are decreasing your resistance to illness, lowering the effectiveness of your immune system, and setting yourself up for more of the negative emotional states. If you give yourself to all sorts of worries, financial, health, relationships, etc., you again increase your negative stress which weakens your immune system. If you keep pushing yourself with things to do so that your stress level stays high, so will your blood pressure and your chance for strokes, heart attacks, etc.

All of that is the negative side of things. Those are *the obvious negative aging factors* and the truth is that you can do something about them. You are not helpless in addressing these things, but it does take a commitment to your well-being and a willingness to take action. It may take some coaching sessions to get a hold on how you are the meaning-maker who creates your emotions and who is tolerating negative emotions states.

Now for *the positive aging factors*. These are also well known and there's really no secret about them. For example, the more you access and live from a calm, relaxed and optimistic state, the better your health and well-being. The more you live from the state of acceptance and appreciation, the more you can thrill in the simple pleasures of life and feel gratitude every day, the better your overall well-being and health.

All of that will make you more robustly resilient, flexible, and adaptable to life changes and challenges. All of these will help you to operate from a positive self-image so that you can keep your youthful enthusiasm and a strong will to live. These are all positive aging factors. So also is living in a way that you create loving relationships with family and friends. Living in the here-and-now so that you don't miss today. Develop a daily routine to elicit within yourself a sense of being in control in your life. Additionally, you will want to creatively learn how to live within your means.

Does that seem like a lot of work? Personally I don't think so. Instead of 'work,' I think of it as requiring a lot of *mindfulness*. But then again, living mindfully and intentionally is the key to living more healthily and aging healthily.

HEALTHY AGING
AND STRESS

Earlier I mentioned that *stress is one of the key negative aging factors.* Yet it isn't the stress *per se* that's the problem. In fact, we need stress. We need stress to be alive and to function well. Hans Selye made this point decades ago when he relabeled some stress as *eu-stress* (literally good stress). This is the stress that you and I experience as excitement, as "passion," as "enthusiasm," or even as "love." This is the stress that optimally keeps you functioning well.

We know and experience this kind of stress in any kind of sport. The effort you expend as you rally your speed or strength or endurance to do something that you find exciting expresses a healthy effort. It enables your muscles to grow, your lungs and heart to develop, it enables you to tap into your physical potentials. It's good for you! This is the kind of stress I long for and plan for when I go to the gym. The exercises I engage in push me to exert a level of effort that *uses* a certain set of muscles and in the process, enables the muscles to grow and to become stronger or more flexible.

Imagine a stress scale from 0 to 10. When you are at zero on that scale—*you are dead.* There is nothing going on, nothing is alive, nothing is moving, nothing is striving. And at the low numbers (1 to 3) there is very little stress. You are resting, relaxing, or sleeping (if it's healthy); you are depressed or lacking vitality (if unhealthy). Then there is the range of eu-stress (4 to 6). This is the *healthy range*—the range of stress that you need to be alive and growing. And this applies to the mind and spirit as well as the body. Beyond the eu-stress range is the dangerous range (7 to 10). Here there is too much stress and except for an emergency, this is *not* a range to live in.

What is "stress?" Stress refers to anything that activates the mind-body-emotion system requesting or demanding that we respond in order to deal with whatever is challenging. If the challenge or threat is in the eu-stress zone, things are fine. You have the resources for handling it and you probably love handing it. You find it exciting and enlivening. But above that, the challenge is a threat or an over-load. These are the two messages that kick in the *general arousal syndrome* when the brain gets them. Then, adrenaline and cortisol is released into your blood stream. Then the heart and lungs start pumping away as blood is withdrawn from brain and stomach and sent to the larger muscle units. Then to handle the extreme danger (the threat or over-load) you are ready to fight or flee, or freeze.

If this happens on a temporary basis, *it is acute stress* and designed to help you deal with the emergency and then get back to normal. But if this happens regularly or, worse still, consistently, then you are in *chronic stress*. This will exasperate any illness or disease and/or create different diseases. It lies at the heart of cardio-vascular diseases.

Now as a fact of life, stress is not the problem *per se*. The problem lies in how a person manages it or more accurately, how a person does *not manage it*. And again, the key goes to how you think about stress, about over-load, about adding more and more demands to everyday life, about how you interpret things as threat which are actually psychological issues and not physical threats, etc.

The bottom line is that despite the idea that "stress makes you old," it is actually not stress that does that. It is rather *the perception* of stress that ages you. It is fearing stress, hating stress, living in stress—these are the things that age a person. It is the inability to manage stress well and the lack of resources for handling stress effectively—these are the things that will age you before your time.

Actually, *living in and with eustress* keeps you young in body and in heart. Living above the eustress level (from 7 to 10 on the stress scale)—that is what will wear you out and makes you old. To manage stress— change your frames about things that are not true threats or dangers, but psychological fears. Build up your resources for handling everyday challenges. Develop a dozen de-stressing processes so that you can quickly get stress out of your body. Then you don't have to live with it. Slow down and do one thing at a time. Be fully present in everything you do. These are the things that you can choose to do that will enable you to manage stress and prevent it from undermining healthy aging.

META-STATING FOR HEALTHY AGING

While the *states* you access certainly play a big role in your well-being and health, your *meta-states play an even bigger role.* There are many reasons for that. Primarily your primary or first-level states are nearly always appropriate. After all, all of your emotions are valid and appropriate—*if* they come from correct assessment of the situation. In this, you and I need our fear, our anger, our stress, our sadness, etc. If and when appropriate, these emotions create the energy you need to respond effectively.

What you do not need are *negative* thoughts and feelings as meta-states to your primary states. That's when and how things become unhealthy. Bring *negative* states of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, understandings, etc. *against your experience* (whatever it is), and you put yourself *at odds with yourself.* And that begins the process of neurosis! Consider the following *negative* thoughts and emotions and how they set a frame-of-reference for the first-level experience:

        "I *hate* feeling this way!"
        "Why do I *have to* be this way? It's not fair!"
        "I'll *always* be this way. *Nothing* ever works out for me."
        "Getting healthy is *a matter of luck*—the right doctor, the right medicine..."
        "Some people *just have healthier genetics.* They don't have the struggles that I do."
        "I gain weight just by *looking at* food..."
        "It's *too much work* to eat right, exercise regularly, etc."

When you take a meta-level position to an unpleasant primary state and bring a state of *hate, rejection, non-acceptance, a discounting state, an excuse-making/victim state, etc.* to it—you *outframe* your distress state in a way that *amplifies* your distress. The state-about-a-state that results generates a layered complexity and neurosis. You are meta-stating yourself into illness.

Here the way you use your self-reflexivity is creating a living hell out of what you would otherwise experience as something normal and a bit unpleasant. This illustrates that *how* you communicate to yourself about your primary states can create psychosomatic illnesses. But it doesn't have to be that way. *You can use your reflexivity for vitality and well-being.* If, for example, you apply an empowering state to your distress, you can generate an enhancing state of well-being. How? By meta-stating your everyday first-level states with such healing emotions as—love, compassion, acceptance, serenity, curiosity, hope, purpose, humor, etc.

The subjective structure of many psycho-physiological states resulting in sickness, disease, and psychosomatic problems arise because of the *negative* mental-emotional states that you set. For example, the problem is not that you have a headache, it is rather that you *hate* your headache. The problem lies in how you are interpreting your experience. You are turning your psychic energies *against* yourself—and to your detriment. You are layering your experience with judgment, self-rejection, hatred, guilt, shame, etc. No wonder you feel sick; no wonder you are

aging unhealthily.

In this lies the paradoxical nature of accessing states of joy, pleasantness, acceptance, humor, fallibility, affection, meaningfulness, etc. *about* your fallibilities, hurts, dysfunctions, etc. As you lighten up to cease taking your first-level states so seriously, you are setting a higher level frame-of-reference around things. This creates what we call neuro-semantic magic at higher levels. Here there is the seeming "magic" of *accepting and welcoming a headache* so that the headache vanishes.

> Play with that one sometime. When you experience the ache in your head, instead of cursing it, rejecting it, tightening your muscles and trying to make it go away, just sit back, take a deep breath, and welcome it into your awareness. Notice the kind and quality of the "ache." Do you experience it as tightness, warmth, a pulsing, or what? Where do you experience it most intensely? Where does it begin to fade? How far does it extend? How do you experience a different intensity in it at different places?

The heart of a great many NLP and Ericksonian approaches to states of ill-health involves *outframing*. This means moving to a higher logical level and establishing a frame-of-reference of acceptance, love, purpose/meaning, learning, etc. In Milton Erickson's classic approach to headaches, he first simply accepted its presence and encouraged a welcoming of it. He did this by having a person curiously explore its kinesthetic qualities.

> Does it throb or pound? Do you feel pressure or heat?
> Where do you centrally feel it? Where does it begin to fade out?
> And if each throb is like a kitten stomping its feet—and you imagine the kitten stomping even harder...with more force...

At a higher level Erickson presupposed that the person could become curious *about* the pain. Then by accepting the pain from the frame of curiosity, he wondered how much control can you exercise over the cinematic qualities. Typically, the experience changes.

When it comes to health and well-being, aging healthily, there are logical levels. There are higher level meta-states that can build up a much more healthy mind-body system. At the primary level—you can think and access environmental helps—sunshine, walks, good food, good medicine, restful sleep, exercise, etc. At the behavioral level of your primary state, you can do these things to create healthy habits. At the first meta-state level, you can believe: "I can influence my health and aging by establishing healthy mental and emotional habits." As an identity meta-state, you can believe, "I am a healthy person." At the intentional level, "I intend to live healthily in my eating, exercising, sleeping, etc." Herein lies a key to aging healthily.

How about one additional meta-state? Years ago Bob Bodenhamer found the following quotes in the USA Weekend Magazine , in the *Gaston Gazette* (January 3, 1999) and sent it to me. It came from an Annual Health Report on brain research.

> "Recently, a Dutch psychologist tried to figure out what separated chess masters and chess grand masters. He subjected groups of each to a battery of tests—IQ, memory, spatial reasoning. He found no testing difference between them. The only difference: Grand masters simply *loved* chess more. They had more *passion* and *commitment* to it. Passion may be the key to creativity." (*Italics* added)

The point? To increase your effectiveness and well-being, meta-state your work with love and passion.

MANAGING AGING

In Neuro-Semantic NLP we say that every experience has a structure. Given that, the experience of *aging* must also have a structure. The question is not, "Will you age?" We know you will. The question is, "How will you age?" And to make that question more relevant, "How will you think, emote, speak, and act as you get older?"

First let's talk about the options. You could accept without question all of the cultural idea about aging. You could accept that aging means deterioration, it means being "over the hill," that you are becoming irrelevant and obsolete, your memory is going, etc. That's one option. Another option has a much more healthy orientation. It could mean deciding to age with energy and aliveness. It could mean keeping your creativity and curiosity alive as you study and explore new things. Then there's the most personal question, "How will you engage in the process of aging?"

Aging needs to be managed because if you don't manage it, you will default to whatever cultural programs that you have inherited. And that's not good. Given that we all were born and lived our first 20 years *outside—in* and that many people continued to live that way, the outside—in world of cultural conformity will continue to reign unless you turn that around. So how do you start to *manage yourself as you move through time?* How do you begin to manage your subjective experience of aging?

First, in healthy aging, you keep focusing on "What's next?" not on "What has been?" Instead of spending time looking backwards, if you want to age healthily, *look forward.* This means that you keep setting goals for your living. Set learning goals, set creative goals, set productivity goals, and set relational goals. When you do this, you keep your intentionality alive and active. Then, in turn, your intentionality keeps you alive.

Second, as you set all kinds of goals, it does something else—it *keeps you challenged.* And regardless of age, *you need challenge!* We all do. Challenge keeps life interesting and gives you a purposeful reason to get out of bed each morning. Challenge also keeps you out of the *drone zone* and into the *flow zone.* Without challenge, without meaningful goals and purposes, you are essentially retiring from life, from being alive. And that's a way to guarantee that you will take less interest in things. If challenge is what enables anyone and everyone to experience *flow,* then make sure that you are challenging yourself to be more present, more ready to push beyond your comfort zone at least a little bit.

Third, if you have already turned things around from living outside—in and you have been living *inside—out,* continue to do that. If you have not done that, there's no better time than now for making that shift. Living inside—out means identifying and committing yourself to your thoughts, values, beliefs, identity, etc. It means deciding what kind of person you are going to

be, what kind of values that you will live, what kind of relationships you will create—and then making that happen. [See the book, *Inside—Out* on the Shop at Neuro-Semantics.]

Fourth, *aim for wisdom*. Wisdom does not belong to the young. They haven't had enough experience. Intelligence could possibly belong to the young—if they study, learn how to learn, and develop a learning lifestyle. Intelligence and even brilliance can be the purview of the young, but not wisdom, at least not regularly although it may occur occasionally. Wisdom does require both intelligence as in understanding and also experience. And yet experience by itself, like aging, does not necessarily result in wisdom.

Aging, as in getting older, does not *per se* create wisdom. Yet from years of accumulated experience along with basic intelligence wisdom can emerge. The years of experience generates broader perspectives, more systems thinking, and leads to the ability to connect the right information at the right time for the right context for the right person. Wisdom is a very special kind of state and involves a very unique kind of thinking. {See *Executive Wisdom.*]

Now, as a manager of this subjective experience that we call *aging,* how are you doing? As an Age Manager, have you stepped up to this challenge? Is it time that you did?

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERTISE?

Not long ago I had the opportunity to speak about NLP as a model of modeling. My subject was "Modeling with Meta-Levels" so I referred to the book I wrote on that subject, *NLP Going Meta* (1997). My theme involved speaking about what Neuro-Semantics had added to that subject. Namely, how can we further develop our ability to model experts because we have included the meta dimension into our modeling? Later in the presentation, a young man in the group raised his hand and asked, "So what are your people experts in? That is, what expertise do Neuro-Semanticists have and can demonstrate?"

For some reason that caught me off-guard. At that moment, I did not have an answer on the tip-of-my-tongue. Accordingly, I thought it was a great question because it forced me to stop and do some real thinking and that's because in that instance, I did not have an immediate answer, I had to do some reflecting about that question. Later, I decided that *the resident expertise that we teach, train, coach, and mentor in Neuro-Semantics is the expertise of modeling human experience.*

Yes we train people in how to train, how to coach, how to use NLP as a communication tool, how to parent, how to be great leaders, how to collaborate, how to be resilient, and on and on. Yet above and beyond all of the specific applications, we teach something else—*the structure of subjective experience.* And when you know the structure, you know *how* an experience works. And when you know *how* an experience works, you are privy to how to make it better, how to streamline it, how to replicate it in your life and the lives of others. If the experience is a negative one, you know how to transform it into something positive and enhancing.

While NLP arose as a Communication Model and presented *how* expert therapists like Perls, Satir, and Erickson facilitated change in their communications, that was just the beginning. First came the Meta-Model which explained how "the talking cure" (e.g., psychotherapy) worked to create the "magic" of transformation in people's lives. That was the theme of the two volumes of *The Structure of Magic.* Then came lots of patterns and techniques. In *Magic* the founders called them Meta-Tactics—tactics of matching predicts, challenging incongruency, etc.

Only later did they realize that what they had was actually something much *higher* and much more pervasive—*they had a model for modeling.* So Robert Dilts wrote the book, "NLP, Volume I" and the subtitle was, *The Study of the Structure of Subjective Experience.* So, what is that structure? There are many answers to that question. By the mid-1990s, the NLP structure of experience involved the following:
- Language: words, phrases, labels and the syntax of language.
- Representations: the inner movie in a person's mind.
- Cinematic features or sub-modalities by which a person can edit his movies.
- Neurological patterns: breathing, posture, muscle tension, eye accessing, etc.

- Strategies of representational steps that provide the syntax of an experience.
- Meta-Programs as thinking patterns that determine how one's thinking constructs reality.
- Meta-levels as in Neuro-Logical Levels (1991) and in Meta-States (1994) which provides the higher level structures of the mind.

It was then left almost exclusively to Neuro-Semantics to continue *the study of the structure of subjective experience.*[1] As I continued my study of the structure of subjective experience, several developments occurred.

- First, *Frame Games* (1999): how the meta-levels operates as frames-of-references in the mind thereby defining the experience.
- Then *Matrix Model* (2002): by using the seven most common frames by which we define and structure our experience: meaning, intention, and self (person, powers, relationships, temporality, roles). This offered a systems way of thinking about how the various frames interact with each other.
- Now *The Meta Place* (2023): using *what* we know is in "the mind" as landmarks and sketching out a landscape of the mind. In this way we can picture *how* these landmarks work to create the specific strategies for any given experience.

If there is any singular expertise that characterizes Neuro-Semanticists it is this—*the ability to know, recognize, and work with the structure of consciousness.* Now true enough, most people in this field do *not* engage in formal modeling. Yet they do engage in modeling, they engage in pragmatic modeling as they assist a client in understanding oneself, in achieving a desired outcome, in learning a new set of skills, in becoming the best version of themselves. Their "modeling" is in service of these more practical objectives. And while very few ever write up a description of the model that their client started with or the model that they co-developed, they are working with and able to facilitate *the structure of their mind-body-emotion system.* That's their expertise.

Footnote:

1: In the book I edited with Shelle Rose Charvet, *Innovations in NLP* (2011) there were only two models that extended the "study of the structure of subjective experience" in the 1990s and 2000s, Clean Language and Social Panorama.

From: L. Michael Hall
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THE DEEP SIDE OF NLP

There's a disease in the field of NLP. This disease has probably been around since the beginning, but it really began showing up and doing damage beginning in the 1990s. What is this disease? What shall we call it? Several potential names for this disease dance around on my consciousness:

- *"NLP is not enough."* After the initial excitement of representation systems, eye accessing cues, transformational change patterns, reframing, etc., many got bored with NLP and began looking for something new, something different. Anything new and different! They were probably highly optional and global (in their meta-programs) and simply did not know how to recognize the depth or quality of NLP.

- *"NLP only deals with surface things."* Those who only get a superficial understanding of NLP, especially those who learn NLP in three-days or even seven days, often have no real clue about the depth of NLP. For them, it only deals with the surface of things. So they leave NLP altogether or contaminate NLP with other things wehich they consider deeper— integral (Ken Wilbur), M-Brain (the junk psychology which thinks people have three brains), quantum mechanics (which may be 'sexy' but has nothing to do with the macro level life that we all lead). They also probably do not know how to plummet the depths of NLP and probably lack the quality of thinking that's necessary to do so.

- *"NLP was good in its time, but that time is now over."* Anyone with a prejudice against anything "old"—ideas, books, publications, etc. and who think, "everything written before last year is irrelevant," dismisses NLP as old and out of fashion. For them, if it is old, it is no longer relevant or useful.

The disease I'm referring to is a disease of shallowness and superficiality. It's the same disease that infects people who want to "get rich quick." They want solutions quick, if not sooner. They are impatient and demanding. They want things to be easy and simple and are ready to simplify until the subject is so watered-down, it is unrecognizable. They want things dramatic and magical.

By way of contrast, Bob and I began Neuro-Semantic to "raise the quality, ethics, and professionalism of NLP." That was our original vision and established our mission in the 1990s. To that end, using the Meta-States Model, Bob and I reviewed every single model and pattern in NLP. We ran the basic NLP ecology check on everything we did. Our purpose was to quality control the use of each pattern and model and thereby raised the quality of NLP.

What did we find? We actually found a number of things that were not ecological and that did not meet the tests of being practical, actionable, or even consistent to the NLP presuppositions. One of our first discoveries concerned the true status of sub-modalities. As it turned out that they

are not *sub-* at all, but *meta*. You first have to have a picture, then you can step back and edit it! That led to questioning the traditional belief pattern using sub-modalities—we discovered that it just does not work. Interviewing scores of NLP trainers, we found out that none of them could make it work. That led us to inventing the Meta Belief Change Pattern based on the structure of beliefs (a confirmation of a thought).

We similarly expanded "time-lines" as I identified 16 kinds of "time." We did the same with meta-programs (today 70 have been identified and defined). We re-ordered the un-ordered sleight of mouth patterns and updated it with a much better name, Mind-Lines: Lines for Changing Minds. That led to the seven directions for reframing.

In addition to all of that theorical work, we decided to create a Society of People who would apply NLP to themselves and who would operate by collaboration and a code of ethics. This soon expanded to the ISNS as the community went international. Then over the years, creating Institutes of Neuro-Semantics in a dozen countries, we held people accountable to the ethics and revoked licenses when someone behaved unethically.

As for the depth of NLP—we found that with every development in Neuro-Semantics we were actually deepening NLP in numerous ways. I continued modeling using the Meta-States Model and that led to over 35 modeling projects covering topics that NLP had never touched on. That's because with the meta-level modeling that came from Meta-States, we were able to model subjective experiences that develop over the long-term. When I later discovered the historical role of the Human Potential Movement and NLP's history in it, that deepened the purpose and original intent of NLP—a purpose that we keep alive in Neuro-Semantics today.

As we continued to focus on "the study of the structure of subjective experience" this led us to *thinking* itself. That's because *inside* of communication, relationship, well-being, and everything else human is *thinking*—all kinds of thinking. Yes all of the meta-programs, but also the structure of thinking itself. And then the problematic forms of thinking (e.g., cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies). As a result, we have now developed three *Brain Camps*, one for thinking, one for learning, and one for wise decisions.

When you know the depth of NLP that Neuro-Semantics brings to this field, you will never again need to look elsewhere. What's inside is more exciting, challenging, fascinating, and transformative than any new fad of the month. But there is a price. *You have to put on your thinking cap and engage your mind fully.* Yes, you have to actually *think*. For those who want to develop their mindfulness, the truth is we have not even started to mine the depths of NLP. And mining the depths continues to be our ongoing focus in Neuro-Semantics.

NLP PATTERNS:
MODELS FOR THINKING

While I had studied numerous psychologies for many years, it was not until I learned NLP that I was exposed to the idea of *patterns* and *running patterns.* Nor was it that other psychotherapies didn't have specific processes to use and to follow. They did. It was more the case that those processes were looser in form, more general in approach, entailing a larger overview of this process. NLP patterns were different. They offer a protocol for *how to achieve a specific goal.*

Learning NLP, in fact, is to a great extent, *learning patterns.* It is learning the precise steps of the pattern, the purpose of each pattern, the elicitation question for each given pattern, the processes of the pattern, and how to think about a pattern. When you learn NLP, you learn the Circle of Excellence, the Swish pattern, Six-Step Reframing, Setting Anchors, Collapsing Anchors, and on and on. Each pattern has a specific set of steps similar to a recipe.

Further, each pattern is generally a *strategy* for how to do a specific thing and sometimes the name of the pattern names that specific thing— Decision Destroyer, Change Personal History, Movie Rewind. And most of the patterns arose from getting the strategy for doing a particular thing from one or more persons who were already skillfully competent.

Ten years after I learned NLP, I had the audacity to gather all of the NLP patterns that I could find in all of the books and manuals which I had read. I then put 77 of them into a single source, *The Sourcebook of Magic, Volume I* (1997). That was the first book of its kind. In doing so, I separated out the most basic NLP patterns like getting rapport, anchoring, state accessing, ecology check, etc. since these processes are used inside of every pattern.

What are these patterns? *They are essentially thinking patterns.* If you follow the strategy steps in a pattern you will essentially *learn to think in a specific way to achieve a specific outcome.* You will think in a way that will create a specific resource or solve a specific problem. I didn't know it at the time, but each pattern gave me a new or different way to thinking about a given subject or experience. That's actually pretty amazing! In learning NLP, you learn to think more precisely and accurately.

Consider what happens when you learn the sensory representation systems. You learn that you *think* visually, auditorially, and kinesthetically, and also using your sense of smell and taste. For the majority of people, this is both obvious and a moment of self-discovery. It was for me. I knew I thought visually, but had no idea that my primary rep. system was kinesthetic. For me, that explained a lot. Later, when I discovered that I actually could think auditorially—and that opened up a whole new world for me. Previously (well, 16 years earlier) a music teacher told me I was tone deaf; as it turned out, I was not. It was the case that I had not learned to use my auditory system. That's all.

Consider what happens when you follow the steps of the Movie Rewind pattern. If you follow the steps, you learn to use your thinking potentials and skills in such a way that you recode the way you think. Now your old thinking code no longer forces you to re-experience a traumatic experience. You learn to think objectively—and *just witnesses* fact without your old interpretations inducing a re-traumatization. In this way, you take the emotional charge out of the way you remember things. Now that's quite a learning! And all you have to do is to follow the steps of the pattern. Do it enough times until this new way of thinking starts to habituate giving you another choice.

Perceived in this way, *NLP is most essentially a thinking and a re-thinking model.* It works its "magic" psychologically by *recoding your thinking.* This is especially obvious with the Meta-Model. Here you learn to recognize a linguistic cue (a word or phrase) that is ill-formed and immediately transforms it into a well-formed one. If a word or statement programs you to feel miserable, you catch it before it performs that kind of an induction. You transform it at the linguistic level.

Yes NLP is a Communication Model. That's how we have thought about it from the beginning —a model about how communication works. Within NLP is the "Meta-Model of Language in Therapy." That's what it was originally called. Also within it is the Milton Model of Hypnotic Language. And yes, deeper still to communication is *thinking.* *Thinking* that communicates with precision and specificity as well as *thinking* that induces trance states for all sorts of personal resources.

Now you know why we in Neuro-Semantics have been *deepening the essential core of NLP*, the core that is within and behind all of the models, all of the patterns, and all of the transformational tools. You know why we have established all three of *The Brain Camps.*
- Brain Camp I: Thinking for Humans.
- Brain Camp II: Learning Excellence
- Brain Camp III: Wise Executive Decisions

You also now know why I have been writing numerous books about *thinking:*
- *Executive Thinking* (2018)
- *Thinking as a Modeler* (2018)
- *Executive Learning* (2018)
- *Executive Learning* (2019)
- *Humorous Thinking* (2021)
- *Metaphorical Thinking* (2022)
- *Executive Decisions* (2022)
- *Executive Wisdom* (2022)
- *Predictive Thinking* (2022)

Amazingly, the entire field of Critical Thinking does not know that NLP is a *thinking model* let alone the best critical thinking tool anywhere. That's why I wrote *Executive Thinking* (2018)—to introduce the Meta-Model as the best tool for critical thinking. But there's more. NLP is so much more— which will be the subject of the next Neurons article.

OUR ONCE-HIDDEN, BUT NOW OPEN MASTER IDEA

Every great company or organization operates from a *master idea*. That's what Joey Reiman has asserted, and as someone who "thinks for a living," he should know. Whatever that master idea is, it powerfully gives people in an organization a sense of purpose and direction; it inspires them, invigorates them, defines who they are and what they are about. For Neuro-Semantics and NLP, what is our *master idea?* What is our timeless and passionate idea that inspires our hearts?

Once upon a time, realizing that NLP is essentially a Communication Model, I thought that our master idea was something about communication, about becoming a professional communicator, about people connecting, and about self-communicating in such a way as to "run your own brain." Now while those are great ideas, they do not exactly rock my world, inspire me to go to the ends of the earth, send goosebumps up and down my spine, or ignite fire in my belly. They may be great ideas, but they didn't seem to be *a master idea.*

Then I discovered a secret about NLP that *no one* had told me about. I did search for it. But that secret was *not* in any of description of NLP, nor was it in any of the books about the history of NLP. Then I accidently came upon it. In 2005 while reading about the history of the Human Potential Movement (HPM) and the second generation leaders and how they created a "headquarters" at Esalen, I happened upon a strange fact. Namely, Perls, Satir, Bateson and other "Who's Who" in NLP were the key leaders in the Human Potential Movement. Really! How could that be? That's when the blinders fell from my eyes and suddenly many of the disjointed pieces of NLP history came together and made sense. *NLP arose as a birthchild of the Human Potential Movement.*

That informed me about lots of things. It informed me regarding where the NLP presuppositions came from—Maslow, Rogers, Bateson, etc. It explain why NLP began at Kresge College—a college that would have been named Carl Roger College except Kresge was the primary donor. It identified how the HPM itself was a reaction to the orientation in psychology that focused on "the dark side" and shifted to studying "the bright side" of human nature. All of the assumptions in NLP about human beings and human nature arose from the Self-Actualization Psychology of Abraham Maslow. And as Maslow had modeled fully-functioning or self-actualizing people beginning with Max Wertheimer and Ruth Benedict, so the founders of NLP did the same (well, except that they did not acknowledge the HPM or Maslow or Rogers).

In Neuro-Semantics with this rediscovery, we took this as a rediscovery of our roots, where we came from and what we are about. We used it to pinpoint our *master idea* as a timeless, transformative, and inspiring idea.
        We are about unleashing the nearly limitless human potential that's waiting to be tapped

in each and every person.
We are about enabling the inner journey that releases each person's vitality for living fully and becoming the best version of oneself.
We are about changing the world one person at a time, via one conversation at a time, so that people can become "fully alive/ fully human."
We are about enabling the competence in people to become their most unique selves actualizing their best possibilities.

Eric Fromm in *Human Ethics* described this actualizing in these moving words:
"There is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by unfolding his powers, by living productively; and only constant vigilance, activity and effort can keep him from failure *in the one task that matters— the full development of his powers....* He can make use of his powers only if he knows what they are, how to use them, and what to use them for..." (Quoted in *The Conative Connection,* 1990, Kathy Kolbe, p. 132)

Neuro-Semantics, as the 21st century Human Potential Movement, we carry on what was begun nearly a century ago with Maslow and Rogers. Unleashing potentials—our own and others, the potential of families, groups, businesses, and even nations. This is in our DNA. It's what we do. And we are constantly learning how to do it better. It's our master idea for changing the world and this adventure has only just begun!

Want to Know More —
See the following books: *Unleashed!* (2007). *Self-Actualization Psychology* (2008). *Unleashing Leadership: Self-Actualizing Leaders and Companies* (2009).

SO YOU THINK YOU "DESERVE" SOMETHING?!

In these days of social media we hear a lot of people asserting that they *deserve* various things—better salary, an opportunity, recognition, etc. Many people march and protest demanding something that they think they deserve. But do they? What do you *deserve*? It seems like a simple and an innocent question. It is not. The way the word *deserve* is thrown around today, and the way that question to presented today, makes it semantically loaded and not in a good way. Look up "deserve" in the dictionary and you will discover that the word means:

> "to earn by service; to be worthy of (something due, either good or evil);
> to merit; to be entitled to;" "worthy of reward, award or praise."
> "a reward for what you do, to merit what you received."
> "to have earned as a right by one's actions."
>> Examples: "the referee deserves a pat on the back for his bravery." "People who park like that deserve to be towed away." The laborer deserves his wages; a work of value deserves praise.

Yet while the word *deserve* refers to *earning and meriting something*, today it seems to be mostly used in the sense of unconditional entitlement. When used properly, it is a perfectly good word; when used improperly it is a cognitive distortion. It becomes *a should.* "I deserve..." becomes a *demand for a reward without doing anything to earn or merit the reward.* Yet when used this way, it becomes an injustice whine demanding that the world give whatever the person wants.

Advertisers use *deserve* to sell things. "You deserve a break today." "You deserve Miller's Light Beer." "You deserve to drive the best." These ads imply that you have the right to demand what you deserve and spend to get what you deserve. When politicians use the word *deserve* they seek to raise your dissatisfaction. They imply, "Elect me and I will give you the things that you deserve!" "You deserve free health care." "You deserve a four-day work-week." "You deserve more weeks of vacation."

In spite of all this misuse, let's ask the central question that immediately impacts our lives: *What do you actually deserve?* The answer is nothing, unless you *do* something! If *deserve* refers to earning and meriting, then to deserve, *you have to earn it.* You have done something that merits and warrants that you get it. The US constitute and Bill of Rights speaks about "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The government was instituted to protect these rights. But they are not automatic. You still have to earn them! For *life,* you have to take care of yourself and not do yourself harm. For *liberty* you get to exercise your freedoms and not forfeit them by violating the law and losing your liberty. For *pursuit of happiness,* you have is learn how to be happy, adjust your attitude, and develop your skills. Do you *deserve* to be happy? No, not automatically. You *deserve* it if you do what's required to attain it.

Do you deserve respect? Not necessarily. If you say to someone, "I deserve your respect..." you are making a request, perhaps a demand. Question: Have you demonstrated respect to that person? If not, then it does not sound like you have *earned* that person's respect. Saying you deserve respect sounds like a *should*. Does the relationship—the way each are relating—establish that expectation? Or is it an unrealistic expectation?

Now in an entitlement society, many are mis-using this word. They think they deserve all kinds of things because they want them. It is as if they think, "If I want something, I *should* have, therefore I *deserve,* and therefore I can *expect* to get it.*"* They then make demands on life, on the world, on government, on employers, on other people. "My wants as expectations are your responsibilities." Of course, what that philosophy generates is conflict, disagreement and disappointment.

The truth is *neither you nor I* **deserve** *anything unless we* **do** *something that earns or merits the reward that we want.* The next time someone says, "I deserve X," ask, "And what have you done to deserve X?" "How have you *earned* or *merited* X?"

An extreme example of this non-sense is currently going on by those in the BLM movement. They have decided that they *deserve* reparations for the injustice done to their ancestors five generations back. They themselves were not mistreated. No one did injustice to them. In fact they live in a free society where they could achieve "the American dream," if they put their mind, heart and body to it. Injustice was done perhaps five or ten generations ago. Someone (usually their tribal chiefs) sold their ancestors into slavery to those who back in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries were engaged in slave trade. But they now think that they *deserve* reparations. Question: What have you done that *earns* that recommence? The truth is—nothing. They don't deserve reparations at all.

Deserve is a perfectly good word when used about earning or meriting a reward. But used as a *should, an expectation, a demand* simply because you want it—the word becomes a sneaky *cognitive distortion.* It becomes a form of pseudo-reasoning, a way to throw a tantrum and try to get what you actually do not deserve. It becomes a "guilt trip" for those who don't know what the word actually means.

HOW DO YOU BECOME AN EXPERT?

In the last Neuro-Semantic "Wisdoms," July 8, I spoke about competence. I asked the question, "Who wants to be competent?" and then made several distinctions. The first one is the distinction between *confidence* and *competence.* It is a strange, and to my mind, a weird thing that so many people come to trainings or coaching wanting *confidence.* When we ask, "What do you want to achieve?" They say that they want to feel confident. A great many of them seem oblivious to the fact that you cannot legitimately *feel* confident if you are not actually skillfully competent to do with what you want to do.

But that's the thing. *Confidence without competence means you are fooling yourself.* And it probably means that you are wanting to con others into thinking you can do something which you actually cannot. The problem of "confidence without competence" is that *that is the definition of a fool who thinks he is something he is not.* So first, if you want to feel confident, then *do* what is required to become skillful. Then confidence will naturally follow.

The next distinction distinguishes between *having some skills and being competent.* They are not the same. Question: Can you be skilled and competent at the same time? Yes. That is possible. You could become highly skillful in a particular skill, in fact, highly competent in doing that skill. But if the skill is a part of something larger, then you could have some skills, but not sufficient skills for competency. You could be skillful in scrambling eggs, but that is just one sub-skill of being a competent chef. You could be skillful at fixing a flat tire, but that is just one sub-skill of being a competent auto-mechanic.

The point? One sub-skill within the full range of skills necessary for a particular competency does *not* make you competent. You may be able to organize your thoughts into a coherent order but that does not, in itself, make you an effective public speaker. You may be skilled in asking Meta-Model questions, but that does not make you an effective coach or modeler. Each of those competencies requires more than just the questioning skill.

Actually, most *competencies* do not refer to a single thing or a simple thing. It is involves a lot of things at both the primary level and many more at the meta-level.
> Knowing about the skill: know what, understanding.
> Knowing how to implement the skill: know-how, implementation.
> Ability (capacity) to do X.
> Context where to do X.
> Timing for when and how long.
> Practice, discipline, motivation.
> State: the right state, the right intensity.
> Convincer: person's unique convincer strategy.
> Feedback loop: receiving and using feedback information to keep shaping a response.

Standards to evaluate: values, criteria.
Intention to develop: Intentionality, purpose, one's big why.

No wonder competency generally takes a lot longer than just learning a few skills. Once you know the skills and can perform them at will, then you have to integrate all of the sub-skills into a single unified response and do that until it becomes dependable and consistent. Competence requires a full integration. Anders Ericsson who studied expertise and developed the 10,000 hour rule (10 year rule) said that it does not arise from merely "practicing." It arises from a special form of practice—*deliberate practice.*

This refers to breaking down a skill into its most elemental variables and then practicing each of those variables one at a time until it becomes a behavior that you can do with consistent dependability. That means doing it until it becomes automatic. At that point, it's yours. Every sports-person knows that. Athletes know that you *never get away from the basics.* You keep returning to the basics to keep those fundamental variables fresh and rejuvenated. Baseball plays get together for "Spring Practice." What do they do? They throw and catch the baseball; they practice pitching and batting the ball. Basics!

When you see true *expertise or mastery* and you stand back and observe it, it is awe-inspiring. We stand amazed at the athletic skills we see in the Olympics. We ask ourselves, "How did she do that?" "How did he learn that?" What comes together in one of those performances are a lot of sub-skills that were practiced over and over and over until the competence emerged as something more than the sum of the parts.

How do you become competent and develop expertise? Learning, implementation, and a thousand hours of practice every year. By contrast, many are self-deceived is in thinking that because they "understand" something, they know how to do it. What's deceptive is that between knowing and doing is a gap—the neurological gap of translating from mind into neurology so that you body 'knows' how to do it. True competency requires that. And how you know what we're doing in Neuro-Semantics to help people become experts.

NLP THERAPY:
It's Not Just One Thing

As I've been presenting Meta-Therapy in some trainings this year, I recently came across Lisa Wake's book on therapy. I heard of it years ago, but I had not seen the book prior to writing *Meta-Therapy: Psychotherapy in the Meta Place.* I recently got a copy of her book, *Neurolinguistic Psychotherapy* (2008). That's when I discovered that it presents a "pecular" view of NLP psychotherapy—it is a view that I *kind of recognized,* but it is not exactly the view that I have known or practiced during the past 40 years. It's a good book and covers a lot about psychotherapy and about NLP, but it also has a lot of weaknesses.

What's best about the book is chapter 1 "Founding Principles of NLP." There Lisa Wake covered the NLP presuppositions and connected them specifically to therapy. There's also a lot of good connections between NLP and therapy. Wake mostly focuses on psychological research. As I read the book, it reminded me that one's view of psychology or therapy depends to a great extent on who you read and who you do not.

Now counter-balancing the good, there are a great many things that are simply inaccurate. First of all, there is a lack of understanding the origins of NLP. Reading this book, a reader might come away thinking that NLP first modeled Erickson, and the great majority of NLP comes from Erickson. You would never know that it started with Perls and Satir for two years before the founders ever even heard about Erickson. Wake constantly presents the order "Erickson, Satir, and Perls" whereas the historical order is "Perls, Satir, and Erickson."

Also, not knowing the history, here is an entire book on NLP and therapy with almost no recognition of the Human Potential Movement and the role of Maslow and Rogers. That may have been acceptable once, but in 2005 I revealed that history in articles which are still on the website. I even presented it at the NLP Conference in London in 2005,2006, but there's no indication of any awareness of that. The presupposition "People already have all of the resources they need to act effectively" came from Maslow long, long before Erickson may have repeated it (p. 34). While Erickson would have accepted that premise, it expressly came from Maslow and Rogers and the Human Potential Movement.

Nor did the Meta-Model come from Erickson (p. 88). *It simply did not.* Frank Pucelik and Richard Bandler worked with their Gestalt class for two years developing the Meta-Model from Perls and Satir. They developed it using Transformation Grammar that Grinder brought to the party. And that was long before they were introduced to Erickson. The statement "... the Meta-Model from Erickson and Satir..." completely leaves Perls out and mis-attributes it to Erickson. I wrote about this in 1997 in the book now titled *Communication Magic.*

Then there are the attributions to sources of NLP that has no basis at all. Wake attributes a lot of

constructionism to Piaget (p. 39, 89) and to Jung (p. 48, 68, 109) but neither of them were quoted by any of the founders of NLP in any of the literature from 1975 through 1980. None! So quoting them in this book gives a false impression about what NLP is about and where it came from. My journalist reporting of the history of NLP, *Untold Secrets of NLP* (2018) is a good corrective.

Lisa Wake also has some kind of concept in her mind about "the programmatic and modelling work of Bandler" and how it works. What that concept is, I could not determine from the writing. Regarding it, twice she asserts (without any evidence) that "In this approach the therapist *stays outside of the relationship* with the client and operates from a model of facilitating change in 'how' the client does what he/she does." (p. 7, italics added). This is very strange! It does not fit anything that I even encountered or experienced in all of my trainings in NLP or the work I did with Bandler. In fact, the opposite it true. When I ask a client about *how* he or she *does* an experience like depression or panic, I do that while creating and maintaining rapport ... and rapport at all levels. For me, this description of Cognitive Psychotherapy constitutes a straw-man argument.

Later in the book I discovered her misunderstanding. Like many in NLP, she *confuses* the idea of meta-position with dissociation (p. 163). If she had read any of my five books on *Meta-States,* she would have known better. That is only one of 16 possibilities! Very sad. Actually "going meta" has *nothing* to do with what is called "dissociation." When you can "go meta" or "step back" out of one state, you can step into all sorts of other states—learning, joy, curiosity, playfulness, etc. Going meta into pure observation or neutrality is only one of many choices.

It is my guess that "programmatic and modeling" for her refers to asking a client, "How do you do X or Y?" and somehow she thinks this makes it entirely conscious and cuts out anything and everything that is outside-of-consciousness. I don't know how something like that is suppose to work. In Meta-States, we know that the great majority of higher frames and states are all *outside-of-consciousness*. It's systemic—everything human is both conscious and unconscious simultaneously.

There are several other similar strange assertions in the book.
> "The more unconscious approach involves the therapist as a core element of the therapeutic process and recognises that all behavior and therefore *all change lies within the unconscious,* and it is only through direct communication with the unconscious that change can occur." (p. 7). All change? There is no change at all that lies within the conscious mind?

> "It is mainly Erickson's work that has influenced the neurolinguistic psychotherapist today." (p. 14). If you read *The Structure of Magic Volumes I & II* (1975, 1976) that presents a model of change in therapy and all of the original NLP work about therapy—which occurred *before* they even met Erickson, this is a very strange statement and simply not historically accurate.

> "We therefore make meaning of our experiences outside our linguistic representation." (p. 101). Really? We make meaning *outside* of linguistic representations? Then what about all of the NLP materials about framing and reframing. That's what Erickson is also known for.

Bandler's book on *Reframing* is sub-titled: The Structure of Meaning.

I thought, and had hoped, that maybe the case studies of therapeutic processes would add a great value to the book. But sadly, the case studies are written as abstract conclusions. There are not actual dialogue with clients of the therapeutic processes which are described.

Finally, there are quotations from Chopra and his book, Quantum Healing, also from Quantum Linguistics, and other new age non-sense that, for me, really undermine the value of the book. For anyone who wants to promote the credibility of NLP, and identify its scholarly and scientific standing, this does not help at all. In spite of all of these inaccuracies and weaknesses, there's a lot of value in the book and I do recommend it to anyone interested in NLP and Therapy.

"PURPOSEFUL THINKING"
Well, Almost ... Actually Just VAK Thinking, Again

I began studying Critical Thinking in 2015.   In the beginning I collaborated with one of our Neuro-Semantic trainers. After he dropped out, I created the trainings that are now called *Brain Camp I, II, and III.* After three years of extensive reading and studying in that field, I wrote the book, *Executive Thinking* (2018) having also written scores of articles on "thinking." Just recently I discovered that Richard Bandler began thinking somewhat along the same line after that. I discovered that when I got his book "Thinking on Purpose" (2019). Hearing some promotion for it, I thought that maybe it mighty be further development of the mysterious and wonder-fill phenomenon of "thinking." But, sadly, it did not.

In fact, throughout the entire book, *thinking* is simply refers to as VAK-thinking, the *thinking* that works with into the components of your movie-mind. That's all. It is the 1970s NLP model of thinking as only what we do at the primary level. Bandler has not even included the *levels of thinking* that Bateson and Dilts developed, or the *meta-levels of thinking* that I developed with Meta-States. It is all primary level thinking, and therefore the one and only "tool" is changing the qualities of your pictures, sounds, and/or sensations (to wit, sub-modalities).

If you have read NLP books by Bandler, there's nothing new in this one. Like all of the other books, this one is exclusively focused on the modalities and sub-modalities. It is about good thoughts and bad thoughts (p. 69). It is about adding pleasure to whatever you do. When it comes to beliefs—still failing to recognize that beliefs are meta-level phenomenon, he still uses sub-modalities to alter them, which of course, does not work (97). He thinks of them as images to alter. He also thinks that decisions are "images." "...and notice the image of that good decision" (115). Yet these meta-level abstractions are not pictures, they are concepts.

Meta-Stating: Now there is meta-stating in the book, but it is unrecognized. He talks about seeing a belief (which presupposes a belief is an image rather than a sentence!) And then saying to yourself with absolute conviction, "It is stupid." That's applying the state of "stupidity" to a belief (p. 96). He also does that with "This is smart" (p. 98). He notes that "confidence is not just a state." It's a modifier, but then he fails to realize that because you can be confident about being happy, about being hired, about not being hired, etc., it is a meta-state (163).

The following reveals the meta-state of *knowing about a craving.* "Your feelings don't force you to act. Knowing you crave something should be enough to tell you to not do it." (p. 201). The *knowing* is higher to and about the craving and therefore leads to a higher understanding. Then there is this: "As soon as you laugh at being afraid of something and you're fed up with being afraid of going up in an escalator..." (p. 242). These are meta-states: *laugh* at fear; *fed up* about fear. But, of course, he doesn't know that.

There are inspiring statements about thinking and learning:

> "We have to teach people how to be learning machines; this requires them become problem solvers." (p. 16)
> "If you just think, you can think yourself into problems. It's really easy." (p. 30)
> "The biggest inoculation against our mental problems is a sense of humor." (p. 34)
> "You forgot that the reason you have a brain is so you would have your own thoughts, not someone else's." (p. 42)

There are also some nice reframing which, of course, occur at a level meta to the primary level. I like this one: "When you feel bad exercising, the pain of exercising is weakness disappearing." (p. 104). And this one: "Phones have become like pacifiers now." (p. 158)

About acceptance, he got that all wrong. "... If you accept how you are, you are committing to your stupidity." (p. 242). Here he criticizes those in the Human Potential Movement for urging "accept yourself the way you are." But acceptance does not mean condoning or resignation. Not at all! No one in the Human Potential Movement ever said that.

Bottom line— If you know NLP, you will not learn very much about *thinking* in this book. You will mostly get a good review of Bandler's take on NLP, and especially how we think in the sensory-systems and if you change the cinematic features (sub-modalities) of the images, sounds, and sensations that you use—you will change your thinking.

Thinking on Purpose could have been a breakthrough book. After all, *purposeful thinking* itself describes a meta-state. If Richard Bandler had read and understood the Appendix on Meta-States in *The Spirit of NLP* (1996), he would have known that. He could have then identified the *higher level thinking* which is involved at the meta-levels.

RE-PACKAGING BANDLER
MAKING HIM CUDDLY

In June I saw a new video which has been made about Richard Bandler, it is called *Altered States: The Richard Bandler Story*. It was produced by people in Bandler's group and it is obviously a promotional film. This becomes especially noticeable in the last 20 minutes of the film as the focus goes to a new book that has been produced. My guess is that someone (namely John LaValle) decided that they needed to *humanize* Richard and *re-package* him in order to deal with all of the bad press, the negative stories, and a lot of the not-so-nice facts about Bandler. And why would LaValle be interested in doing that? Because he is "the heir apparent." He will take over when Richard is gone. Now overall the video presents Bandler in a positive light and reframes the negative facts. You can see a lot of use of NLP in how the video was produced.

What's good is that there are a few moments of old videos of Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson which I had not seen. Also some old videos of John and Richard. *But the facts get sacrificed a lot in this video.* There's a suggestive hint that maybe they also saw and worked with Fritz Perls. But, of course, they did not; he died two years before they met or worked together. They used Robert Dilts to talk about the origin of NLP, but of course, *Robert was not there during the first two or three years* (from 1972 to 1975). Robert didn't entered until 1975. He had not been a part of the original group with Frank Pucelik and Richard before John Grinder ever came along.

When you watch this video, you will get no hint or indication that *before* "Richard and John," there was Frank. "Frank and Richard" were the dynamic duo who ran the first gestalt class and the first "meta" people class. And it was into that class that they invited John some later time. But because this video completely eliminates Frank, it is a major deletion and distorts the NLP history about how it all began. At the end of the video, they quote from John's 2001 book to validate Richard. But they did not quote where John wrote *in that book* that there was "a third man," Frank Pucelik, who also was a co-creator. Judith DeLozier also left out significant facts, small things like she was married to Frank Pucelik when they moved to Santa Cruz and that later she married John Grinder.

When it comes to addressing *the murder lawsuit,* the strangest thing about that is that they portray Richard as if he was the victim(!). Nothing is said about why his "best friend" was a known drug dealer, James Morino. How come? What was that about? Nor why James would call Richard to come and pick him up at a bar after a fight (sounds kind of shady). Another unstated fact was that, at that time, Richard was taking a lot of drugs (cocaine, LSD, etc.).   The film presents Corine Christenson, the woman who was shot and killed either by Richard or James, as a prostitute! What they did not say was that this same Corine was also Richard's personal assistant and handled his books, appointments, etc. Richard portrays himself as having

been completely set up for the murder charge and it's presented in such a way as to create sympathy for him.

The film also skips over all of the lawsuits that Bandler brought against people—against Grinder, Anthony Robbins, against the field of NLP, against Andreas, etc. Nothing. Instead the video focused on the death of his wife Paula and then the dating and marriage to his current wife (Glenda). All of this certainly humanizes him and creates a feeling of sympathy for him. This humanizing continued as various people talked about his depression about the loss of Paula, his "stroke," and how so many people "took advantage of him." Yet that really does id not fit with anything I know about Richard, especially the idea of "people taking advantage of him." Really?

There's not a single mention of Richard's lawsuit against "the field of NLP" in 1995 which lasted until Feb. 2000, and which essentially destroyed the field of NLP in the US. There's no mention of the fact that he lost the lawsuit, had a court judgment against him for $600,000. He was to pay to Christine Hall, but he never did. Instead to avoid the IRS, he moved to Ireland.

If the purpose was to make Bandler more human and more cuddly, then it works. If it is to portray the history of NLP, *it is sadly distorts a whole lot of things.* It also deletes even more about the story. Knowing the power of "deletions" to distort one's perception of reality—the film deletes so much that in the end, the video leaves a very distorted view.

To view the video—
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_dAY14wSow

Reference
>   For a more accurate history of NLP, see *NLP Secrets: Untold Stories* (2019). You can even get it on the Shop as a PDF file. https://www.neurosemantics.com/shop/page/6/

Neuro-Semantic News
>   The newest book from Neuro-Semantics: **The Meta Place** is now on the shop. https://www.neurosemantics.com/shop/page/7/

DO YOU HAVE A GOOD MIND?

To succeed at anything—business, relationships, politics, health, fitness— requires that you have a good mind. That's because when you have a good mind, you can figure what is going on, understand and accept reality, and then generate good ideas about what to do. You can do that because you have learned a basic human skill—*how to think effectively.* That's what gives you a *good* mind.

Imagine the opposite. Imagine a *poor thinker*. That person will have troubles defining the current situation, figuring out what to do, accessing resources, and thinking through the consequences. When someone is a *poor thinker,* he falls back on the childish thinking patterns of the cognitive distortions. She over-generalizes, does either-or thinking, personalizes, emotionalizes, blames, has tunnel-vision, etc. No wonder the poor thinker cannot effectively deal with reality and has troubles getting along with people!

Effective thinking enables you to first of all comprehend the current reality so you know what you are dealing with. In effective thinking you begin by openly considering all of the factors and variables before you jump-to-conclusions. Once you effectively define, detail, and distinguish what *is,* then you look for effective solutions and resources. You establish a *well-formed* outcome, problem, solution, and innovation. This is what it means to have a good mind—a mind that enables you to figure things out and create actionable plans for taking productive action.

In this sense, no one is born with "a good mind." *A good mind is developed.* If you have a good mind today, it is because you have developed it. You have learned how to think accurately, precisely, critically, creatively, and productively. That doesn't happen without effort and direction. That doesn't happen without the discipline of learning how to use your brain and "run your own brain." Even basic school education does not guarantee that. And why not? Because even to this day, schools teach kids *what to think,* they do not teach kids *how to think.*

Given that, who teaches people *how to think*? That's a great question and the answer is "Generally, no one." Most people who have learned how to effectively think have learned it on their own. And they usually learned it after some debacle where what they had learned generated more problems and misery than help. So they sat down to *learn how to learn and how to think.* That's when they went *meta* to their thinking and learning and discovered *meta-thinking* and *meta-learning.*

Who teaches *how to learn*? NLP does, although mostly in an indirect way. I mostly learned how to think when I learned NLP. It was one of the unexpected and unintended consequences of learning NLP. That's when I learned that the first level of thinking begins with the sensory-based information I picture in my mind. I then learned that language is the meta-representation system —a system *about* the sensory-systems. Then in Neuro-Semantics we articulated that there are

many more higher or meta-levels of "thinking" coded as beliefs, decisions, permissions, knowledge, concepts, etc. So today, the people who teach *thinking* are most the Neuro-Semantic trainers and sometimes, some NLP trainers.

Teach a person *how to think* and how to effectively manage one's thinking powers, and that's how you create a good mind which can generate good ideas that can change one's life and/or change the world. Yet in reality, that is just the beginning. Success and productivity certainly begin with people who are *good thinkers* who produce *good ideas,* but that is not enough. It is a great start, but only a beginning. We also need *good strategies*—a specific and workable strategy that will achieve a specific objective. That's because without effective strategies, you will not be able to implement your good ideas. A good strategy answers the question, What specifically will you *do* and how will you do it?

Thinking strategically means that you begin with a well-formed objective and then think about the processes required for making that objective real. A wonder goal without the ability to plan intelligently is not sufficient. The problem with not knowing *how*, that is, being ignorant of the how, your brain will fill in your ignorance. David Dunning explains how this works:

> "*An ignorant mind* is precisely **not** a spotless, empty vessel, but one that's filled with the clutter of irrelevant or misleading life experiences, theories, facts, intuitions, strategies, algorithms, heuristics, metaphors, and hunches that regrettably have the look and feel of useful and accurate knowledge. This clutter is an unfortunate by-product of one of our greatest strengths as a species. We are unbridled pattern recognizers and profligate theorizers. Often, our theories are good enough to get us through the day, or at least to an age when we can procreate. But our genius for creative storytelling, combined with our inability to detect our own ignorance, can sometimes lead to situations that are embarrassing, unfortunat e, or downright dangerous—especially in a technologically advanced, complex democratic society that occasionally invests mistaken popular beliefs with immense destructive power."

If you want a *good mind,* then first and foremost, *you need to learn how to truly think.* That means to not assume that "good thinking is natural and inevitable" or that "you don't have to learn how to think to be an effective thinker." Good thinking builds up a good mind; they go hand in hand. The problem is that there are many forms of non-thinking— pseudo-experiences that masquerades as thinking. In *Brain Camp I* we identify seven of these masquerades of *the real thing* as a way to stay alert. Then we cover the 14 essential thinking skills.

For more:

> Start with *Executive Thinking* (2018) then dive into the series of *Thinking Books.* And join us on the next 3 Neuro-Semantics WISDOMS.

WOKE THINKING SICKNESS

While the content of what is called *Woke* claims to care about social justice, it only cares for justice for a few, not for everyone. Originating from the "Black Lives Matter" movement, Woke thinking lacks almost any common sense. The first un-common sense thing that came out of it was the defunding the police movement. Now just a few years later, we see many of the people who jumped on that bandwagon reversing themselves. Why? Because the rate of crime has been sky-rocketing, because mobs of people rob businesses in daylight, and because the hands of police have been tied so that they fear protecting the public

However, above and beyond the ideological contents of Woke is *Woke thinking,* and that's the real problem. Because *Woke thinking* is driven by an ideology, and as with every ideology, that thinking is inherently biased by its unspoken assumptions. Consequently Woke thinking is not scientific, not realistic, and not rational. Rather than true thinking, it is "agenda thinking." When you start with an agenda, in this case a political agenda based in Marxism and Socialism, that's why it is nearly impossible to reason with a woke thinker. Like every ideological thinking, woke thinking doesn't seek the truth, but to prostyle in order to gain followers to the Woke cult.

Now if you use your brain well, and if you think in the way that thinking is designed to be used, then you use it to grasp as best you can the "territory" of the world. Grasping it enables you to map it. That's what *thinking* is—your mental mapping of what you construe is present and how it works. You do that in order to navigate that territory.

If effective thinking puts in touch with reality, it is the means and design of *science.* It is the scientific attitude. When we do science effectively, we discern what is there, how it works, how to manage it, etc. You consider all sides, tests the validity of statements, keep your hypotheses open for adjustment as new information arises, etc.

But *Woke thinking* does not do any of that. For example, in biology we know that there are two sexes and only two. Every biologist knows that. There are males and females and everybody either has a penis or a vagina. That's the sexual facts. For the term "gender," we generally use it as a synonym, although "gender" also carries with it the cultural ideas of what each gender is like, and how in any given culture we raise boys and girls. But today Woke thinking presents a mental map that in no way relates to reality.

Now regarding these facts, people within every culture develops views about masculinity and femininity—beliefs, understandings, assumptions, etc. These views make up *each person's psychology* about males and females as concepts. When these are framed in extreme opposition to each other, while there may be clarity about male and female roles in a culture, there's usually also unnecessary conflict between the sexes. Then men aren't allowed to cry, to be tender, to nurture, to admit weakness, etc. Then women are not allowed ot be angry, speak up for

themselves, establish firm boundaries, say no, etc. Of course, these "problems" are problems of our framing and especially cultural framing, not of reality.

Sexual and gender *identities* are functions of framing and meaning-making. As an *identity*, what you think about being male or female depends on your beliefs, understandings, permitting, forbidding, framing, etc. If you are a biological male and "feel like a woman" *that's a psychological issue,* not a biological one. If you're a biological female and "feel like a man" your psychology is off. Your biology is a given, you are either male or female. If you have a problem with that, the problem lies not in your biology but in your mind and emotions. So trying to "solve" a psychological problem biologically is a living "outside–in" approach, and will not be very satisfactory. And as such, it is a superficial and shallow "solution."

While it is certainly possible to change one's sexual features, something accomplished by surgery, hormone therapy, etc., chopping off breasts and penises and reconstructing sexual parts is irreversible. Because of that, as a psychologist, I say that no child, adolescent, or even young adult ought to ever make that choice. After all, any decision that is irreversible ought to be reserved for a time in life after the brain has full matured —which is in the mid-30s.

And once a biological man has made all of the changes to become a woman, he should never be allowed to compete in women's sports. *Let them invent some transgender league of their own.* Women have fought long and hard for their own leagues and for respect of their sports. That should not be thrown away to men who want to be women. Everybody knows that gives them an unfair advantage and, in the long run, will destroy *women's sports*.

Now when you try to reason with a Woke thinker, to have a rational conversation, you'll discover the sickness of their agenda thinking. Woke thinking seeks to shut up anyone who disagrees. Woke thinking bars conservatives from college campuses and disserters from boardrooms. Why? Because the Woke thinker has a "religion" to promote. That person will argue by calling names, using labels ("racists" is their favorite), generalizations, emotionally associating you with extreme examples—forms of cognitive distortions and fallacies. Their use of language itself is sick, it is the doublespeak that Orwell described in his novel, *1984.*

As Neuro-Semanticists, *we think about how people think* because as a person thinks, so one reasons, emotes, communicates, acts, etc. The inner game of *thinking* governs all of the outer games of acting and relating. That's why we have to address *thinking* first.

DETECTING LOW QUALITY TRAININGS

How can you tell if the training that you are considering is of high quality or low quality? *How can you tell* about the quality of coaching, books, websites, consulting, personal development programs, etc.? These decision-making questions are important especially since training, coaching, consulting, etc. is the primary way most adults engage in *continuous learning and development.*

Since Neuro-Semantics offers trainings, coaching, consulting, etc. world-wide—now in 71 countries, and since we have made *quality* the heart of our practices, here are some warning signs about trainings and the offerings that they may be of low quality.

Beware of the New and Different! If a trainer, coach, or write is enamored with novelty, be skeptical. Some trainings, coaching programs, books, etc. are so enamored with the new, they sell everything as "the latest, the newest, the never-before revealed secrets," etc. What's the problem with this? *There's hardly anything truly new.* Nearly everything called 'new' is a re-working of an old idea. The package may be different, shinier, brighter, more colorful, but almost always, it is not new. It's usually an "old" idea that is solid, reliable, and which people keep coming back to. Yet if the promotor doesn't know that "the new idea" is actually an old idea, the funny thing is how that person actually thinks he has invented something new!

Now because many people associate old ideas with what's boring, to sell something many think they have to dress the old idea as something new or people will not embrace it. Conversely, sticking with a solid idea and a proven practice is often an expression of wisdom. Jeffrey Pfeffer asks, "Isn't bland old excellence a better fate than an exciting new failure?" He also notes that creativity is "mostly sparked by old ideas." That's certain been true of my work in NLP and the ongoing creative development of Neuro-Semantics. Nearly everything "new" which has arisen has come from *going back to revisit Korzybski, Bateson, Perls, Satir, etc.* for a solid "old" idea. And even today, I believe there's still many more treasures to mine from their work, to mine ideas that have only minimally been developed.

How many times is a training or a book presented as "The Next Big Thing!"? The internet thrives on *the next big thing.* Magazines and newspapers, journalists and sales-people are always looking for *the next big thing.* Yet the most dependable sources for excellence in any field is more often than not—the basics. Companies tend to be suckers for *the flavor of the month fad.* And each one is presented as "the silver bullet," the panacea that will solve all problems.

Today lots of the *brand new stuff from the neuro-sciences* are offered as "never before discovered insights that will revolution human development. But in the end, it is not brand new

stuff. It is old stuff repackaged. Over the years we have seen NLP *re-discovered* several times. Suddenly a trainer arises asserting that now "for the first time" the *real* heart of NLP has been discovered and what he has is "pure NLP," "real NLP," etc.

Beware of the Un-Sourced. A few times at an NLP Conference somewhere, someone has come up to me presenting what the person thinks is a "new pattern." Later it turns out to be an old pattern. But the person didn't know it. The person is often new to the field and simply has not had enough experience with the field as such and so just did not know that what he was working on had already been invented. It's one of the reasons I put together the two volumes of *Sourcebook of Magic.* In that way, people can check to see what's already been developed before claiming to have invented something brand new.

Whenever anyone say that they have developed something new, I ask, "Where did you get your ideas?" "Who have you studied and read?" When I pick up any book, I always check the bibliography to see who the author has read. Often, however, the book has no bibliography! Now that's a big sign of low quality work. Anyone who has been to University knows that part of being professional and credible is to *identify your sources.* To not give credit to your sources sets one up for plagerism.

Everybody in the business of spreading ideas, whether a writer, a trainer, a coach, etc. needs to minimally acknowledge sources. That's what all great thinkers do. Sir Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen farther, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." In the past year, several times people have asked me about this or that "new" therapy approach. I asked them, "Who does this person quote?" Or "What psychological paradigm does she use?" They don't know. Sometimes they go to see if they can look it up on the internet, but they can't find anything about the person's sources. It's presented as if the person invented it out of nothing all by himself. That's another big warning sign about low quality and non-professional work. When something comes "out of the blue" and has no historical foundation, suspect it!

Beware of "Fast and Easy." If personal development, change, unleashing potentials, etc. were fast and easy, everyone would be experts, national champions, Olympic medalists, etc. But it doesn't work that way. Development requires understanding, knowledge, discipline, intentionality, effort, patience, persistence, resilience—just to mention a few. Similarly, NLP is *not* fast and easy. Transformation isn't effortless. And personal 'breakthroughs" are rare. What's more frequent is dedicated effort to one's development and deliberate practice.

TALK REVEALS THINKING

"I wish I knew what you're thinking!" Really, would you like to know the inner thinking and thinking patterns of a person? Easy! Listen to how the person talks. His talk reveals his thinking. So does mine and so does yours. That's because the source and foundation of everyone's communication abilities and skills arises from the way they think.

NLP bean with this assumption. It was not even a discovery; the discovery had been done long, long before the beginning of NLP. You will find it in Alfred Korzybski's work in General Semantics. How you think determines how you speak and how you speak reflects how you are thinking— the quality or lack of quality of your thinking.

This idea is also the basis of the linguistic work known as the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis. This states that the structure of a language inherently influences a person's perceptions, worldview, and cognitions. Your language determines your thoughts, your thinking, and your linguistic categories which, in turn, can limit your cognitive categories. Nor was that idea even new at the beginning of the 20th century. In the previous century, the idea was first expressed by 19th-century thinkers Wilhelm von Humboldt and Johann Gottfried Herder, who saw language as the expression of the spirit of a nation.

What does this mean? It means that we can diagnose your thinking by your way of talking and communicating. *When you open your mouth, we can peek into your mind!* You reveal yourself via your words and your language patterns. They are not neutral. Now, does that scare you? It shouldn't. Well, it should not if you have nothing to hide, no one to deceive, and if you are an open human being—open to your fallibility. You not only know that you are fallible, and not perfect, you don't expect yourself to be so.

At the heart of communication is the paradox that *you cannot **not** communicate.* To say nothing is a communication. So when Biden will not answer reporters' questions (which is now nearly all of the time), he is communicating. And when he lies (which is increasingly more and more as he is getting more and more Pinoche's by the press), he actually is communicating in those lies.

For example, on 9/11 he said that he was at the twin towers the day after September 11, 2001 and saw "the hell" of the destruction. But of course, he was not. There's a Sept. 12 video now playing in which he stood up as a Senator in the Senate and gave a speak on Sept. 12 about the terrorist attack. So he was *not* there. He did not see what he said he saw! Did he just forget? Is that part of the cognitive decline that he's experiencing? Or did he see an hallucinatory imagination which he can no longer distinguish from reality?

Question. What does he say when presented with evidence he has been caught in a lie? That's happened numerous times even recently. He denies, he blames, he engages in name-calling, he

goes into storytelling to deflect, etc. And all of that communicates defensiveness about a person's inner world, the world of their mind and heart.

If you use the Meta-Model linguistic distinctions, you can discern how people think. For example, you can discern how people think things are connected. It fits the structure of linear Cause-Effect thinking: "X causes or leads to Y." "Victims" think and talk that way. "He made me so mad I couldn't help myself." "She disgusts me when she acts that way."

You can also learn to discern when something thinks that one thing is *equal to* another thing. This structure fits the linear *equivalence* format: "X is or equals Y." "Abortion is murder." "MAGA republicans are racists." Here differences are confused (fused together) and treated as if they are the same thing when they are not.

These inadequate ways of thinking show up in the inaccurate ways of communicating when you hear these vague and ill-defined statements, you know that the person is *not thinking* very clearly. Her communication is ill-formed rather than well-formed. If he uses lots of the deletion linguistic distinctions, his thinking will be vague, fuzzy, and unspecific. If she uses lots of the generalization linguistic distinctions, her thinking will be over-general, global, conceptual, and lack precision. If he use the distortion linguistic distinctions, his thinking will also be distorted in various ways.

Verbal vagueness reveals problematic thinking and creates a way of mentally mapping that will result in pain, distress, confusion, and all sorts of problems. With such you cannot develop well-being with ill-thinking, ill-communicating, and ill-behaving. For greater self-awareness, begin listening in to your own talk and communications. Use your words and language patterns as indicators to detect the quality of your thinking. Next listen in on the talk of people around you, of people on TV, and those using social media. *How* they talk is revealing of their inner Meta Place if you know what to listen for and how to interpret it. Welcome to the world of Neuro-Semantics.

YOUR TALK:
YOUR PSYCHOLINGUISTICS

To assert that your *talk reveals your thinking* (#40) is to identify the field of study called *Psycho-Linguistics.* While this field uses the language of linguistics and grammar, it is *not* strictly about linguistics and grammar. It is about *how the way you talk reflects your inner psychology.* This describes the very same phenomenon that the phrase *neuro-linguistics* also refers to. It refers to what your linguistics does inside your neurology, how it influences the neurons in your brain and body, and how that puts you into various states.

What does all of that mean? It means that NLP is *not* about linguistics and grammar *per se*, but rather about *the effect of language within the human person.* And while many people get turned off with regard to the Meta-Model of Language, NLP's first model, that is typically because the trainer did not understand it him or herself and did not know how to train it. Accordingly, in many NLP schools, the Meta-Model is mentioned and then quickly passed over thereby conveying the idea that it is not that important. But it is.

Actually, the opposite is true. I could easily make an argument that *the most important model in NLP is the Meta-Model of Language.* Once upon a time, Richard Bandler himself made that argument. He said that "everything that had been created in NLP was created with the Meta-Model." How about that! In fact, it was that statement in 1989 that made me question my own understanding of the Meta-Model. It challenged me because I could not explain how the Meta-Model would have been at the heart of creating everything in NLP. And, I wanted to know.

Consequently that sent me on a several year study of the Meta-Model. It also sent me to my first studies in Alfred Korzybski's *General Semantics* and from that, I collected seven linguistic distinctions from Korzybski's work that should have been included in the original Meta-Model but were not. In adding those, I called the result *The Extended Meta-Model.* That's now in the book, *Communication Magic* (2001).

Now psycho-linguistics or neuro-linguistics refers to one of the most basic and essential mechanisms in human experience—how we think and how our *thinking* generates our "sense of reality," that is, our model of the world. To think is to use various "languages." First, we *think* using the sensory representational systems of seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting. This thinking is without words. Next we add words, that's the meta-representational system and the first words are sensory-based words. Words enable you and I to create categories, classifications, concepts, etc. and these then become our *thinking templates* or perceptual filters. This shifts to a higher level of *thinking*—conceptual and evaluative thinking.

As you do any of these kinds of thinking, *you send signals to your body how to feel and what to do.* In other words, this is how you "program" yourself so that you can do whatever you do. You program yourself for how to feed yourself, walk, run, ride a bike, dress yourself, read, write, do math, use a computer, etc. Your *programming* for how to be, and how to function as you, is a function of your neuro-linguistics and neuro-semantics.

This means that the language you speak is an important determinant of how you think. And as you think, so you feel, respond, speak, and behave. Your linguistics in all of its multiple forms *organizes* your thinking processes. Even a single word can operate an organizing structure for your thinking.

For example, if you mis-use the word "race" to designate different ethnic groups, you thereby program yourself to see and distinguish different "races." It is actually a mis-use of the word because there is only one *human race* on this planet. We are all members of that one and singular race. We are not different *species.* If you talk about "the human race" and include every single person in that category, you have no room for racism or being a racist. Then you will be color-blind as Martin Luther King, Jr. described in his "I Have a Dream" speech. Given this, *all of the non-sense today about racism is a self-generated problem that can disappear very quickly when we change our languaging.*

Amazing, isn't it? Words program the mind. The way you talk organizes what we call your "personality." No wonder Neuro-Semantics, as an upgraded version of NLP, focuses so much on cleaning up your thinking so that you can speak with more clarity and precision and so you can then live with more truth and compassion.

"MIND" AS A VERB

One of the greatest distinctions in the Meta-Model is the linguistic distinction of *nominalization.* When you have one of these creatures, you have a *mystified noun.* It is a mystery because, since it is not a true noun, it is challenging, sometimes difficult, and sometimes utterly impossible to know what to do with it. How different from a real noun which is "a person, place, or object." When you have a real noun, you can see it or hear it or touch it or taste or smell it. Examples of real nouns— your mother, your bed, your toothbrush, shoe, shirt, car, eggs, hamburger, etc.

But then there are the *false nouns.* These are *verbs* which have been *noun-ified.* Take the verb "relate" and when you nounify it, you have "relationship." The verb that's hidden inside of *relationship* is "to relate." It is unspecified, so we have to ask more questions: who is relating to whom, relating in what way, for what purpose, over what time frame, etc.? Take *motivation* and what is the hidden verb inside it? Easy. First we get *motive* then we get *move.* Again, unspecified, so who or what is *moving*? In what direction? What is the style of the moving, toward or away from, slowly or quickly, etc.?

Many, if not most, nominalizations are like that—it is easy to detect the hidden verb and to expose the *real referent.* That's good because if you don't, you will be left with a distorted mental map about yourself, others, life, and/or the world. You will have a mental map that is *false-to-fact* and that will trick you, even deceive you, about things. Psychologists for most of the 20th century were fooled by *motivation.* They thought it was a *thing,* an object, something real, and so off they went looking for it. But it is not a thing! It does not exist as a separate entity. It describes a function—the thinking-and-feeling (meaning-making) function within a person. Maslow got it right when he identified motivation as a function of the driving needs that need to be gratified; he wrote a whole book about that—*Motivation and Personality* (1954/ 1970).

Now for one of the most *mysterious of nominalizations of all—"mind."* We certainly talk about "mind" as if it is a thing, a real thing, an object that somehow exists in our heads. There is a whole field, Philosophy of Mind, in which great "minds" theorize and philosophize about *mind.* Some say the mind is just the brain; some say there is no such thing, "it is a figment of your imagination." Then there are many other definitions, all striving to specify *what it is.* But, of course, that's the thing, it *is* **not** a thing at all!

Fortunately, we do at times use the word "mind" as a verb. Getting on and off of trains or subways you see the words, "Mind the gap." We hear our mothers say, "Now you mind your mother and do what I tell you!" We may hear our parents also say, "Mind your brother while I go into the store," "Mind your manners, you're in church!" There are more: mind your own business, mind your head, mind your step, mind me, mind yourself, mind the goats, etc. There are even "conversational postulates: "Would you *mind* passing the salt?" "Would you *mind* closing the door?"

Now when it comes to *mind* as a verb, what are we actually saying or asking? To "mind the gap" is to *think about and pay attention to* the gap. So with "mind your mother," we know that she means, *listen to and think about what I told you.* "Mind" as a verb means *think, think about, pay attention, focus on.*

Now you know the hidden verb inside of "mind," *it is think.* Yet again, we have an unspecified verb, so we have to ask more questions: Think in what way, think how, think about what, etc.? Now when it comes to *thinking,* there are essential thinking skills: considering, questioning, doubting, detailing, and distinguishing. There are constructive thinking skills that lead to eureka moments: inferring, organizing, creating, and synergizing (systems thinking). Then there are the advanced thinking skills: learning, deciding, discerning, reflecting, and sacrilizing (valuing). (I have detailed these thinking skills in *Brain Camp I* and in the forthcoming book, *Thinking for Humans*, 2024).

What is your "mind?" Well, since we know it is not a thing, it must be *a function,* and given that the hidden verb is "think," what we refer to by the word "mind" is your *thinking functions.* Question: "What's on your mind?" Answer: whatever you have been thinking—your thoughts, your ideas, your constructs. Question: "What's in the back of your mind?" Answer: previous thoughts that you now use as your thinking filters or references. "What does it mean when you say you must be losing your mind? Answer: It means that you are forgetting a thought or not comprehending a thought. "Do you have a good mind?" Now we are asking about the quality of your thinking and if you can think in clear and reasonable ways.

Mind— a mystery especially when you don't know how to de-nominalize. *Mind*— the wonder of human ingenuity, creativity, and innovations when you know that it is your thinking and the quality of your thinking. *Mind*— the result of your thinking. Your mind is your own self-creation! Given that, how's your mind?

WHAT NLP REALLY IS

NLP, as a Communication model, is *not* a therapy model. It is *not* a version of psychotherapy. Nor is it a modeling model, a hypnosis model, or even a model for personal development (self-actualization). So what is NLP? Amazing enough, that is one of the perennial questions that has plagued the field of NLP. This is the question to ask if you want to torture an NLP trainer!

Yes, NLP speaks to, addresses, and provides lots of guidance in each of these disciplines. These are actually *the most essential applications* of NLP. There are many more—parenting, leadership, managements, coaching, consulting, education, health, fitness, etc. These are so much the essential applications that they are commonly, even to this day, *confused* with what NLP really is. That's why some say NLP is Modeling, some say it is Psychotherapy, some say it is Hypnosis, and others say it is Self-Actualization. NLP certain *is* each of these in terms of applications. But what is it at its core? Can we determine that?

NLP is actually much deeper than any of these. Thinking about it as a communication model, then at its heart, it is about how we communicate to ourselves and others to create our experiences (states, skills, knowledge). As NLP identified how these communications work and the basic communication processes (mechanism), we found that it gave us the inner hidden structure of experience itself. And when you know the structure of an experience, you can model and replicate that experience.

Yet unbeknown to most NLP trainers, writers, researchers, and teachers, NLP is actually deeper than just a Communication Model. Nor is this something new that I'm adding to NLP, it has been deeper since the beginning, but hardly anyone noticed. I did not. And I researched it for decades and delved into the NLP models going back to the original sources. Perhaps that's because it is easier and makes more sense to simply say that it is a Communication Model. People understand that. What else would you call it?

When Bob and I packaged NLP for the two volumes of *User's Manual of the Brain,* we said that it is most essentially a Communication Model. Evidence of that goes to the fact that the first NLP model is "the Meta-Model of Language in Therapy" and the second model was the Representational Model that comprises our communications (including Sub-Modalities or the cinematic features of our inner movies). The third model, the Strategies Model about how the communications generates and "programs" an experience. Fourth, the Milton Model of hypnotic communication patterns and how trance states work. Fifth, the Meta-Programs model about how people think in their communications. That's a lot of evidence that NLP is a Communication Model. Yet could it be something deeper? If so, what would we call it?

Could we call it a *thinking model?* What if, deeper than all of the uses and applications of NLP is *thinking?* Yet there's a problem with that. Namely, what is a thinking model? How do you model thinking? Thinking itself seems so primary and irreducible, what would be its components? Perhaps that's why none of us saw that NLP could be defined as a thinking model. But let's go with it for a moment. Suppose we called NLP a *thinking model*? After all, take each of the communication models and let's ask, What lies within and underneath each model? The answer is *Thinking.*

Meta-Model of Language	Linguistic distinctions encoding how we think.
Representational Model	Sensory representations encoding sensory VAK thinking.
Sub-Modality Model	Cinematic features framing how one is thinking.
Strategy Model	Representational steps in how a thinking format is structured.
Milton Model	Hypnotic linguistic distinctions that invite a person to construct thinking about possibilities and in terms of metaphors (metaphorical thinking).
Meta-Programs Model	Thinking patterns that govern ways of perceiving.
Perceptual Positions Model	Thinking patterns from different perceptual positions.
Reframing Model	Thinking patterns for framing different ways of interpreting a word, experience, or person, thinking about meaning in different way.
Meta-States Model	Reflexive thinking patterns that layer thought upon thought to generate more complex states.

One thing this perceptive highlights is that *all 'thinking' is not the same.* There are many different kinds and dimensions of thinking. It also puts a spotlight on the *driving force* inside of communication—the quality of your thinking determines the quality of your communicating. As thinking can go wrong, make mistakes, be fallacious—so can everything that thinking generates. No wonder *change,* and transformation of persons and organizations, require *new thinking in new and different ways.*

What am I saying here? I'm saying that **what NLP is most essentially a Thinking Model.** When you really understand NLP, you know that it is a *way of thinking,* a way of *rethinking,* and a way to do both *critical and creative thinking.* With this in mind, then at the core of every change is *re-thinking.* It is fresh thinking and it is meta-thinking, that is, the ability to *think about your thinking* so that you can make sure it is accurate, specific, precise, creative, and ecological.

Thinking has been at the core of NLP from the beginning, but we missed it. Perhaps we dismissed "thinking" as too small, too obvious, or not distinctive enough. Perhaps we wanted something more sell-able, something more commercially appealing, something that sounded more sexy— communication, change, reframing, modeling, etc.

Now as a *Thinking Model,* NLP (including Meta-States) offers us nearly everything we need to build and articulate a model of thinking. And unbeknown to most of the field of NLP, that's what I've been doing in our *Brain Camp trainings* and in the series of books on *thinking.* It has been a discovery long time in coming, but it is now coming in a training near you. :)

IF NLP IS A THINKING MODEL—

I have proposed that deeper than a Communication Model, or a model about modeling, psychology, personal development, etc., NLP is most essentially at its core *a Thinking Model* (#43). Viewing NLP from this perspective changes several things about NLP. It changes numerous things that we can claim for NLP, how to sell NLP trainings, and perhaps even the future of NLP. Let's start from the premise of the title, *If NLP is a thinking model, then what?* What inevitably follows if that is the case?

1ˢᵗ) NLP enables you to think better. Even the very idea of "thinking" suddenly becomes much more specific and actionable. I discovered that when I first studied NLP. Learning about the sensory representational systems, namely, that we *think in* images (visual), sounds (auditory), sensations (feelings, kinesthetics) along with smells and tastes, I discovered that I had almost completely ignored the auditory channel. Why? That was due to a misbelief I picked up in college, namely, that I was tone-deaf. Having lived with that mis-understanding for 30 years, I simply paid no attention to that system. Now suddenly I discovered a whole new realm for information coding. I was not tone-deaf!

When you know about the VAK sensory systems for *representing* information, *you have many more specific channels for thinking.* You have multiple ways of enhancing your internal snapshots and movies about things. There's scores of cinematic features (sub-modalities) that you can now use to enrich what and how you think. It's actually quite amazing. It makes actionable the multiple intelligence model of Howard Gardner (see *Frames of Mind,* 1983).

2ⁿᵈ) NLP enables you to be an effective critical thinker. If the VAK model enriches your internal coding of information so that you can "think" with much more richness, then the Meta-Model of Language empowers you to learn the essence of critical thinking. The discipline of "critical thinking" is about thinking more clearly, precisely, accurately, and rationally. To do that, the Meta-Model specifies 21 linguistic distinctions to pay attention to so that your thinking will be "well-formed" and not suffer from the ill-formedness caused by deletions, generalizations, and distortions.

If that sounds complicated, it really is not. Nearly all of the *deletion distinctions* are already intuitive in you as a native speaker. When you hear, "He rejected me" you intuitively know that the verb "reject" is not specific. So you naturally ask, "How did he reject you?" The *generalizations* and *distortions* are partly intuitive, yet most of them you have to learn to recognize them. When you do recognize the linguistic distinction, then ask a question. That's what the Meta-Model is—*a set of distinctions and questions to get a speaker to be more specific and precise.* How important is that for any communicator? For any leader, parent, therapist, coach, teacher, etc.?

When I began doing research in the field of Critical Thinking (yes, there is a whole field!), I discovered that *not a single book in that field referenced NLP's Meta-Model.* Not one! So I wrote the first one, *Executive Thinking: Activating Your Highest Executive Potentials* (2018). Why? Because the Meta-Model is the most direct and simple way to learn how to be an excellent critical thinker.

3rd) NLP enables you to be an effective creative thinker. As a model, the Meta-Model not only allows you to think and communicate more precisely, it enables you to see the very structure (thinking structure) that formulates an experience. Every experience has a structure and that structure entails how a person thinks. Discovering that structure, which is what the NLP Strategy model does, as well as the Meta-Programs, now we can *create* and/or model expertise that already exists.

In the history of NLP this happened as an accident. It was not planned. All that the founders intended to do was to *find out how* Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir, two brilliant therapists, were able to achieve tremendous results in psychotherapy. So as they listened to how they *talked,* they inferred what they must be *thinking*, then from that they created a whole list of "patterns" for replicating their expertise. Those patterns became the *content* of NLP training. They reveal *how* a therapist would lead a client to a new way of thinking and experiencing.

4th) NLP enables you to solve problems at the thinking structural level. From that "accident," the founders realized that the solutions and cures were not based on the "content" of what a person thought so much as on the *process of how the person shifted in thinking.* That's why, they explained, many different approaches and therapies all work. But therapists of those schools are wrong in thinking that it is because of the belief system in the therapy, it's the *shift of thinking* underneath or within the content.

It was in that way that NLP was recognized as a *meta-discipline* from the beginning. The "magic" was not in Gestalt, not in Family Systems, not in Hypnosis, or any other model, it was in the *internal structure.* Unknown to the founders, this corresponded to what Korzybski said, "Structure and structure alone is the essence of knowledge." Then, out of this discovery, arose the focus on modeling. When we re-code NLP as a *Thinking Model,* are many benefits result. I'll speak of more of them in the next Neurons posts.

The Israel–Hamas War
A PSYCHOLOGICAL SOLUTION

The superficial, biased, and non-journalistic press would have us believe that the war is between Israel and Palestine. But that is actually not true. Palestine did not attack Israel, Hamas did. As an extreme terrorist group, Hamas attacked the Festival in Southern Israel, killing 260 civilizations, captured some 200 hostages, and beheaded babies. At the same time, Hamas sent 5,000+ missiles into Israel. No wonder Israel responded by sending bombs to where Hamas' missiles originated. Since the beginning, Hamas has sent 7,000 missiles into Israel and another Terrorist group, Islam Jihodist, fired a missile that hit a hospital in Gaza killing three dozen Palestinians. (Then Hamas blamed Israel for it which the mainstream media picked up and repeated without checking the facts. Only now are they correcting that mistake.)

Of the three main players in this war, *Hamas is a terrorist organization* which is using Palestine to try to achieve its agenda of destroying Israel. In spite of years of attempts to create a two state solution, to enable Palestine to be an independent state, it was Hamas who rejected those solutions. Most recently they rejected the Abraham Accords. Why? Because they are *extremists.* They have taken their religion to an *extreme position* and in doing so have become *totally and rigidly intolerant.* That's the problem. When anyone takes any religion or philosophy to an extreme position—they become an *intolerant cult.* They become dogmatic, rigid, and irrational. You can't reason with them.

In extremism thinking a person assumes that he is *absolutely* right, cannot be wrong, and "being right" can engage in any behavior no matter how savage, cruel, or criminal to achieve their outcomes. This is true for extremism in any and every group. Hamas just so happens to do that with Islam, as did Isis. The problem is not Islam, it is *extremistic thinking.*

What then is the solution? *Tolerance.* For there to be peace, there has to be the willingness to tolerate differences and to allow the other to be. What does it take to tolerate what we do not like or appreciate? *Acceptance.* It is *acceptance,* as a way of thinking and as an attitude, that enables us to *acknowledge reality and facts.*

This is what Hamas, as a terrorist organization, cannot do and will not do. Acceptance. From the Israeli military perspective, stopping Hamas will be the solution that Israel will opt for—as an act of self-defense. From a psychological perspective, the solution will be for the Palestinians and the Israeli to *accept and tolerate each other's right to exist* as separate and independent nations. When the Palestinians accept and tolerate Israel, there will be no Hamas (or other terrorist organization to replace them). When Israel accepts and tolerates Patestine, they will

grant them full autonomy and the right to self-determination. Then there can be peace and mutual respect.

But without that basic *acceptance,* there will be no peace. Individuals on both sides will look for revenge. They will quote different versions of their history to justify that they are "right," that they have the "high moral ground," and that they therefore (somehow) have the right to reek revenge on the other group. That is the structure for ongoing, never-ending violence and war. That is what has gone on repeatedly since the end of World War II and the establishment of Israel as a nation. And it does not work.

What will work is acceptance. Now *acceptance* is a psychological state—that is, a state of thinking and feeling, a state of mind-and-body. Acceptance is also a spiritual state. It is a state of willing to be the *creature* rather than the *creator.* When you accept, you take things as they are, you acknowledge them. You may not like them, you may not want to condone them, but you *acknowledge what is.* Only by acknowledging what is can you then begin to work toward change. You accept that it's raining, then you grab an umbrella.   You accept that there's a traffic jam, and you turn on some enjoyable music or engage in a meaningful conversation.

Acceptance is inward peace and leads to contentment, not because the world is not perfect. It is not! You experience contentment because you know who you are as a *creature* within the world, not the creator. You are here for a little while, then you pass on. While you are here, accept the conditions that you find and then, from a state of acceptance, seek to make things better. That's the ultimate solution for making the world a better place.

Rejecting what is, hating the conditions, wanting revenge on any "bad things" that happens —that's a great way to spread the violence and perpetuated more bad things. That sets up a cycle of revenge, hatred, war, atrocities, brutality, criminality, and "man's inhumanity to man." Good luck with that approach!

The cure is *a healthy and robust acceptance* that leads to tolerance, respect for human beings, and forgiveness. Lots and lots of forgiveness so that we can "put the past behind us" and move forward to being the kind of persons we can be at our best.

The Israel–Hamas War
GETTING OVER THE PAST

If the only way you can get over the past is to *fix the past,* then no one will ever "get over the past." Freud began psychotherapy from the assumption that to deal with current neuroses in people, they had to *go back to the past.* They had to recall their memories of the past and correct their understandings and/or come to terms with whatever happened. *But that does not work.*

Such psycho-archeology doesn't work for numerous reasons. First, even when you "know" that something happened, that in itself does not fix things. There's thousands of people who have completed years in therapy who "know" what happened and still suffer because it doesn't change anything. Second, whatever you remember probably did not happen the way you remember it. Memories are notoriously unstable. Today we know from neurology and the neuro-sciences that memories are constantly changing ever so subtly and without our awareness. Memories change every time you recall something and every time you we learn something new. Further, and perhaps most important, *the past is gone. It does not exist.* So there is no "fixing" of the past.

What we call "the past" are our memories and interpretations and various perspectives of what we recall. The same is true for families, groups, and even countries. The "past" is not what happened, but our *interpretations* of what happened. No "historical" record is true or right. It is a person's or a groups "remembered history." Such memory is both selective and biased.

A form of perpetuated neurosis is to *live in the past always trying to fix it, correct it, make it gel with what you think and believe and want today.* The truth of the matter: *The past is done and over with.* It is gone. And using your version of your "remembered truths" to force someone else to surrender to your version will not fix things. The healthy choice is to *accept* life as it is and *move on.* The healthy choice is to let go of the past, accept that there are multiple versions of it, and focus your energy and attention on *moving forward.* It is to ask, "What can we do today to make things better?"

That is *the Psychological Solution* that I presented in the last Neurons (#45). After publishing that, several friends and loved ones in the Middle East wrote attempting to educate me on the "true" history of the Palestinians. I even received emails about the "true" history of Israel. All such efforts are *ultimately beside the point*—if we are to move toward peace in the Middle East. To every one of the email messages, I said I do not want to spend time debating what did or did not happen, who started what, when, or how. That is an endless debate that goes nowhere, and certainly doesn't resolve the current conflict. And even if there is a "right" side, so what? What does that accomplish?

The far more practical question is the psychological, behavioral, and pragmatic question. *What are we going to do to move forward?* That's what I do in the therapy context. I want the suffering person to get out of "living in the past," come into today, and start building a life for tomorrow. That requires *acceptance.* He has to "let the past go." He may never "understand" what happened or why. And if he is convinced that he was unjustly treated and needs someone to own up to that fact, he thereby puts his mental well-being at someone else's disposal.

Acceptance is the key because only through accepting where you are today, and what you have as resources that you can tap into, agreeing to disagree, can you move forward. So with nations. Only by *accepting each other as fellow human beings, can we move forward.*

Acceptance is what allows us, once a war ends, to acknowledge that bombing each other is not the answer. As long as Hamas has the goal of "driving the Jews into the sea," and "destroy the state of Israel," there will be no peace. That objective has to change to one of, at least, *tolerating each other.* Israel has made no declaration that the Palestinian people must all be destroyed. What they have said is that now Hamas, as a Terrorist organization, must be destroyed. Even the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said that "Hamas does not represent his people." He made a distinction between the Palestinians and Hamas.

Acceptance enables us to say that "what has happened *has happened*" what matters is where we are today and what we can do today to create peaceful relations. The opposite is non-acceptance. The opposite is arguing and fighting over "the past," and trying to get the other side to submit to our views. *That is not a strategy for peace.* It never has been. That's a strategy for violence. It doesn't work between a husband and a wife; it will not work between countries.

Acceptance is the only thing that can then enable *forgiveness.* And it is *forgiveness* that empowers a person—and a country—to let go of the past, let go of hatreds, angers, betrayals, and everything else that we fight about. Acceptance and forgiveness was what Nelson Mandela preached and led in South Africa which prevented a civil war after he was elected. Is it easy? No, of course not. *Does it work? Yes.* And it is the only thing that does.

So after the war, I urge all NLP and Neuro-Semantic NLP trainers, go to Palestine and teach acceptance and tolerance. Go there and establish an NLP center wherein they can then enable people to learn trauma recovery, resilience, resourcefulness, love ... and acceptance even for one's enemies. That is the long-term psychological solution that will bring about peace in the region.

The Israel–Hamas War
ARAB COUNTRIES—
SAVE THE PALESTINIANS

When Palestinians were urged to get out of Gaza, go south, get away from the places where Hamas sends rockets, I assumed that Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations would come together and create a pathway for the Palestinians to find safe harbor until the war is over. But no. Instead I was shocked to hear that Egypt had closed the border and would not let them in. I didn't understand why.

One explanation I heard was that Egypt already had too many refugees. Whether that's true or not, the flood of refugees from Syria didn't stop the countries north of Syria when thousands poured out across that border into other countries. I then wondered why the other countries were not calling for the refugees to come to them. Then I heard the former Ambassador to the United Nations say that the Arab countries do not want the Palestinians because *they cannot vet them.* They cannot tell who is part of the Hamas terrorist organization (by the way, Hamas has been declared a terrorist organization by the US govrnment and many other governments since 1997; I didn't invent that one!). She said that the Arab countries don't want to take the chance of bringing in a lot of terrorists to their country.

As I considered that, it struck me that *creating a safe haven for the Palestinians* is just "a problem to solve," that's all. Perhaps the other countries could simply detain all of them so that they are safe and away from the war. After that they could interview them for *extremism* (because that is the problem). Any well-trained NLP person could figure that out. Interview them for black-and-white thinking, for over-generalizations, for either/or thinking. That would be a place to begin. Someone thinking with those thinking patterns would not be engaged in humanitarian thinking, compassionate thinking, or solution-focused thinking.

Any well-trained NLP practitioner knows how to interview someone regarding beliefs and values. They could interview about emotional states, degrees of hate, prejudice, care, compassionate, forgiveness, etc. Vetting people could occur *after* they are in a safe place.

Then yesterday I read an email which attempted to *explain why* other Arab nations will not open their borders to the suffering and fleeing Palestinians.

"Here's the actual reason. Arab countries will *not* permit Israel's plan to evacuate

Palestinians from their land. We know the zionist plan by heart. It's the same ongoing plan since 1948 when homes were forcefully taken from Palestinians and settlements have been expanded and more land stolen continuously since then. Palestinians will not leave their land because they know the agenda."

Even on the surface, that statement makes no sense. It sounds like a Logical Fallacy to me. To ask for *the borders to be open* and Arab countries provide a temporary place for refugees is equated to "letting Israel evacuate Palestine!" *If this is true* it essentially says, "As an Arab country, we are putting our ideology above people. Let the people suffer and die rather than provide them a safe haven." Really?

Let's see. For all of the outcries about the killings, deaths, and brutality of Israel's bombing of Hamas, they would prefer the Palestinians to become martyrs to an ideology than provide safety??! That's not care! That's not compassion! That's not a humanitarian response to the suffering. That is valuing an idea/ ideology in someone's head *over human life.*

While I still do not know why, the psychological solution is still this: *"Open your borders. Create a safe haven for the Palestinians until the war is over."* Once you have a place where they have food, water, shelter, where they can be safe, *then vet them*. Then distinguish those who are terrorists in their hearts from those who just want to live their lives in peace.

Then after the war, let's introduce good healthy NLP training for Palestinians and all who have suffered. Traiing them first in *trauma recovery*— to get the hurt out of the mind, emotions, and body. We can do that! We have the models and technology to achieve that. Next, we can train people in *resilience.* I developed a Resilience Model using Meta-States in 1994 and it has proven effective for the past 30 years.

Next, we could train people to be personally and socially resourceful—capable of being an "agent" in one's own life and empowering others, and not as victims. Next, with that inner power— we could train acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness as personal resources for getting over the past.

All of this is possible if we have the vision, the courage, and the willingness. There are Arab NLP and Neuro-Semantic trainers who can do this, who are skilled in being able to make this happen. When the war is over, and Hamas is out of the way, let's do this! I am certainly willing to go and offer trainings in trauma recovery, resilience, and meta-therapy.

> *Afterword:* Some reading my posts have accused me of hating the Palestinians and siding with Israel against them. Anyone who draws that conclusion does so *in spite of what I wrote.* So more bluntly: *I am for the Palestinians!* And for the Israelis! What I'm against Terrorist Organizations such as Hamas, ISIS, etc. I'm against hatred, intolerance, prejudice, revenge, killing, brutality, justifying revenge, etc.—everything that violates human dignity and value.

A PEAK INSIDE MY THINKING

If you have been following the news since the outbreak of the Hamas–Israel War three weeks ago, you know that there are hundreds of articles and videos presenting all sorts of *political arguments.* From the political point-of-view, there are apologists arguing for the right of Hamas to do the Oct. 7 massacre, the right of the Palestinians to send rockets over into Israel, the right of Israel to defend itself, by bombing the hell out of the Gaza strip, etc. I have seen a dozen videos about the "historical argument" about who has the right to the land and who does not.

When I wrote, **A Political Solution** (Neurons #45), my thinking went like this: Whatever happens in the War, and whatever happens politically, I have really no influence about that. Hearing Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, say that Hamas does not represent "his people," I distinguished three groups in the conflict: Hamas, Palestinians, Israelis. Of course, there are other groups: Hezbollah, Iran, the US government, Iraq, etc. But my purpose was *not political,* it was *psychological*.

Psychologically, when the War is over, and things are back to some kind of "normality," *there will be a whole lot of hurting people.* That's my concern. There will be refugees displaced from their homes, there will be lots of deaths to mourn, a new political structures has to be built, and on and on. What can we then do about any of that?

My thought is that first we offer healing in the form of trauma recovery, resilience, resourcefulness, good grief processing, etc. The next thing, the long-term thing, is to start to get people to accept life conditions, tolerate other people (rather than kill them), and forgive. In Neuro-Semantics and NLP we are fully equipped and ready for trauma recovery and resilience. We know how to do that. We can also train, coach, and consult people on owning their personal power and becoming more resourceful in re-building life, not as victims, but as victors within their own lives.

But if we want to begin planting the seeds for a future *without ongoing bombing of each other and terrorist acts and war—*then we need to begin *empowering people to transform.* How do they need to transform? They need to move from hate to love; from intolerance to tolerance; from non-acceptance and rejection to acceptance. They need to move from revenge killing to releasing the past and getting over it. They need to move to thinking about the future and living together without war. It was to that end that I wrote the first articles on **A Psychological Solution.**

Could everybody *hear* that? Obviously, not everyone. Many were too emotional, too angry, too

afraid, too upset, frustrated, too much in a state of revenge, too unforgiving, etc. Some made simplistic ethnocentric decisions, "Anyone I care about or agrees with my religion is a good guy, everybody else is bad and evil." Some were personalizing too much, others were over-generalizing, doing either/or thinking, polarizing, emotionalizing, etc. Their thinking was dominated and controlled by Cognitive Distortions. I don't blame any of them, not even for the accusations that some hurled at me. I knew that it was *their emotions talking* and that they were talking out of hurt and angry states. It's human nature to do so.

And it is also *human nature to rise above that!* We can do better. That's what we teach in all of the Self-Actualization Trainings. We are made for something so much better than hate, anger, fear, revenge, etc.! We can transcend that and we have the power to create a brighter and better future. That's what I want to say. Let's move toward a better way for all people getting along.

I wrote the second article, **Getting Over the Past** (Neurons #46) to address the "historical argument." As a psychologist, I spoke to it first as to individuals, then I addressed it as applicable to a group. The historical argument is completely destructive individually. People live their whole lives upset, angry, scared, rageful, revengeful, etc. because of some childhood trauma constantly demanding that someone *change the past.* Or, that the traumatic past somehow justifies them in being angry, a victim, revengeful, or demanding. It does not work for individuals. It does not work for nations.

We have to move on. In listening to the "historical argument," the pro-Palestinians argue about 1947/ 1948 saying it was their land. Others argue that it was never their land, that 1881 the Jews started to return to a barren land and they were the ones who built the cities and fields. Others go back centuries before, to the 7th century. Then others go back to Moses, 3,500 years ago when he brought the Israelites to the land. In the end we are left with more questions, not fewer. What history really counts? Whose memory is the real one? It is an endless argument that can never be solved to everyone's satisfaction. Psychologically this argument is a Logical Fallacy, a red herring. *Solving that will not change anything today politically.*

That brings us back to today and what we will do when the War ends. In terms of *the psychology of control,* in terms of *responsibility to/for—* all we can do (since we are not the political leaders) is to do what we can to *help people recover from the trauma, become resilience and resourceful,* and transform so that this kind of thing doesn't happen again.

To that end, I hope that we can persuade Arab NLP and Neuro-Semantic trainers to go to the Palestinians with these offerings. We have never had a Palestinian NLP Center. I believe we will need one for the future. Israel already has an NLP Association, so they can take care of that. I have proposed this to the NLP Leadership Summit and dozens have responded saying, "count me in." When the day comes, I, for one, am ready to go and offer our Neuro-Semantic trainings at my own expense.

What does L. Michael Hall Really Think?
After writing the previous blog, we had an extended discussion with the ISNS Leadership Team. I added the following. My writings on this subject have led some to assert numerous false things. Among them are things that I'm told that I believe and intend(!) which actually I do not. That led me to wonder, "How could the writings be mis-interpreted *that much*?" Several on the team helped me understand some of the *twisted framing* that some are using to distort what I wrote, thereby preventing people from clear understanding what I actually wrote.

For example, some said that I was writing to promote Zionist propaganda and to take Israel's side in the war. Not only am I not on Israel's sidem I have not even thought about "sides." "Sides" presuppose there's a good side and a bad side. I find that such either/or thinking not only over-simplifies, it perpetuates the conflict as it sets up a false polarization. *If I'm to take sides, I'm on the side of human beings getting along, living in peace, and not bombing each other.*

Now because I'm a psychologist and not a politician, I focus on *the psychology of thinking and languaging.* For years, my focus as been on enabling people to do critical thinking so they can communicate clearly, precisely, and rationally. That's why I focus on facts, not fantasies. That's why I emphasized the fact, We cannot change the past. So living in the past, demanding it be changed perpetuates suffering and does not lead to healing. Living in the past and staying angry, revengeful, and hateful about the past solves nothing. Pointing out some facts about Hamas also does not mean that I think Israel is blameless in the conflict. I do not.

As a psychotherapist, my focus has been on *creating the kind of life that we all want in the future* and what we can do in the future when the war is over. I have written about the importance of trauma recovery, the development of resilience, emotional mastery, and resourcefulness. I have written that we have to fight against hate, revenge, rage, and intolerance. Conversely, we need to promote acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness. Yes, I know that those in the war right now are not in the place to forgive—not right now.

Now because I think Hamas ought to release the hostages and agree to a ceasefire, some have *falsely assumed* that I'm against the Palestinians and against Islam. I am not. I am for the Palestinian people and for Moslems. If I had my way, not a single additional Palestinian would die or be wounded from this day forward.

What I care about are the people in Palestine who are the ones now being traumatized as Israel continues their war against Hamas. I care that they are caught in the middle of the bombing and are suffering tremendously as people are dying and being wounded, as homes are being destroyed, etc. They live in fear and dread. Yet one day, they will need the healing touch of compassion to help them recover from this actual trauma.

Others, however, who do not live in Palestine, they are actually not suffering from the war; they are not experiencing the bombing, the devastation, the daily struggle for food and water. Does it affect them? Sure. Yet they are experiencing a different kind of trauma– *vicarious trauma.* Actually, nothing bad is happening to them. Instead they are watching the war on TV, and in social media, and *traumatizing themselves* about it.

How are they doing that? They are doing this by personalizing and emotionalizing. They are doing this by catastrophizing and over-generalizing. This obviously makes their lives miserable; and as it is stressing them out, it is reducing their ability for clear thinking whereby they could be more helpful and healing to those in the actual trauma. Theirs is not a true trauma. It is a vicarious trauma. And the healing for that is very different from the trauma recovery for those in Palestine. To be healed from vicarious trauma, they will have to identify and let go of the cognitive distortions in their thinking.

What do I think? I think we need to move beyond the cycles of hate and revenge; I think we need to establish cycles of tolerance and cultivate love for all people. As it will take time, it will require loads of patience, persistence, and commitment.

REVERSING HATE

The problem is hate. At the heart of every war, the problem is not *love;* it is not compassion. It is not understanding; it is the opposite of these. It is hatred, disgust, fear, anger, prejudice and intolerance. Strangely enough, this is what the media stirs up day after day. It is also what the riots are stirring up—*hatred and intolerance.* But that is not the answer. *Hate is never the answer.* Now if only John F. Kennedy could speak!

> "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future. *Forgive your enemies,* but never forget their names."

Hatred begins when we teach our children that those on the "other side" are our "enemies." Once you categorize someone as "Enemy," then you evoke all of the negative and ugly emotions about the enemy—fear, dread, threat, anxiety, anger, rage, disgust, intolerance, etc. Then, once you have evoked that *ugly state of hatred,* you can then de-personalize the other side. That, in turn, enables you to do terrible things to the enemy. After all, if he is sub-human, then he is not human. He is a monster, a demon— he is evil itself. Now nothing is too savage or brutal.

That's the strategy for de-humanizing and de-personalizing any group of people. We see it in the riots that are currently occurring, and all of the anti-Semitic and anti-Palestinian slogans being thrown about. In this way, the protests and riots in the major cities around the world *are making things a lot worse, not better.* They are fueling the passion of *hate.* They are representing things in an either/or, black-or-white map that makes people feel *self-righteous* on each side.

Isn't it amazing that none of the protests are *promoting love or compassion of one's fellow man?* None are promoting acceptance, tolerance, or forgiveness—the very things that would make a difference. These are counter-acted by the promotion of intolerance, prejudice, non-thinking judgments, accusatory language, etc. And rather than any of that helping, it is going to make things worse, a lot worse.

The Love Solution
Reversing all of this means moving out of these hateful, intolerant states and into *states of love and compassion.* Radical!? Yes indeed. To make that change requires a truly radical transformation in attitude and belief, and yet it is an absolutely necessary one. Nelson Mandela knew hatred. Prejudice and hatred put him in prison for 27 years. Yet he wrote the following:

> "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."
> "Courageous people do not fear *forgiving* for the sake of peace."

Nor was this just talk for Nelson Mandela. When elected President, he established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that focused on *forgiveness.* He knew that any long-term solution

would involve acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness. That's what I've been urging for Israel and the Palestinians. I don't expect it to happen tody in the midst of the war. But when the war is over and things are back to some normality—what if what Mandela initiated in South Africa could be replicated in Israel and Palestine?

The protests marches and riots which we are seeing around the world are calling Jews vile names and calling for the genocide of the State of Israel (for eliminating Israel which is Hamas' declared goal) is hate, not kindness or tolerance, let alone love. Everyone engaged in such protests are promoting more and more *hate and hatefulness*. That will not solve anything.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was another person who knew and suffered from prejudice, hatred, and intolerance. And he knew that *more hatred and violence was not the answer*. He, like other great leaders, knew that only *non-violent, peaceful protests, and a forgiving heart was the answer*. He did not preach hate, but love.

> "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies."
> "Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, *violence never brings permanent peace.*"

Getting to Love
In spite of the fact that loving forgiveness may be a long way off, we should nevertheless aim for it as our long-term goal. Our real enemy is not the person we have learned to hate, it is *the way we have been thinking about each other*. It is falling into cognitive distortions and cognitive biases that prevent us from *thinking respectfully* of each other. We are far too quick to over-generalize, emotionalize, personalize, catastrophize, awfulize, etc. We are far too biased to assume that our group is totally right and justified and the other group is totally wrong and unjustified.

That's why quoting history and arguing over "who started it" and "look what we have suffered for so long," only perpetuates hatred and intolerance. No war or conflict has ever been resolved by convincing the other side that they are "historically in the right." That only increases self-righteousness and victimhood.

It is *such extremist thinking patterns* that is the problem and why the long-term psychological solution to these political problems brings us back to the importance of *critical and creative thinking skills*. We start with the ability to *consider* each other's argument, ask *questions, doubt, detail, and distinguish*. That will then enable healthy conversations, discussions, and debates. That will cut out the media's sensationalizing and over-generalizing that distorts the facts. Let's aim for loving forgiveness as the long-term solution.

From: L. Michael Hall
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Opinion Piece
A Psychological Solution #6

THE PROTESTORS HAVE IT WRONG

There is something completely missing in the chants, signs, and words of those protesting the war—namely, *the lack of Critical Thinking Skills*. These skills are necessary for clear and accurate thinking, to recognize a true "fact" from a conclusion, evaluation, or interpretation. These skills lead to rational thinking and reasoning. Among these basic skills are the following, but lacking these *critical thinking skills, the protestors protests have simply got it wrong*.

•   *Considering* each side's view before judging it.
•   *Asking searching questions* to flush out the actual details.
•   *Skeptically doubting* information regarding its source, its credibility, etc.
•   *Detailing specifics* and making critical *Distinctions.*

First, They do not Distinguish
Protestors *confuse* Hamas with the Palestinians treating them as if they were one and the same. *They are not.* One refers to the population of Palestine; the other is the governing group; a group which even the Egyptian government has been identified, from time to time, as a terrorist group. One are the civilians, the other are the fighters (soldiers). When asked about using the tunnels to protect the Palestinians, Hamas leader recently said that the tunnels are to protect Hamas, not the Palestinians. The civilians can't go there. If Hamas makes this distinction, so should we!

The protestors fail to distinguish **who** *wants civilians to die.* Israel certainly does not; every time a civilian dies, Hamas publicizes it to get a win in the media war. It's Hamas who *has an ulterior motive for wanting civilians to die.* We all saw that when a rocket mis-fired and hit the parking lot of a hospital. Within minutes, Hamas announced "Israel bombed the hospital and killed 500."

Protestors do not distinguish civilian hostages from soldiers. They should be marching and demanding the release of the 240 hostages. They should march shouting that Hamas stop using Palestinians as "human shields." These are crimes against humanity. I am taking the side of the Palestinians, not Hamas.

Second, They do not Provide Details.
A calm, clear mind simply accepts facts as facts, whether they support my side or another side. So *detailing specifics* is crucial. Regarding details: the hospital itself was not hit; 500 were not killed; and Israel did not fire the rocket. Hamas did win the media battle about this due to the media's hunger for a sensational story. They grabbed it and ran with it. The New York Times published what Hamas announced and it spread like a wildfire, inflaming protestors around the world. Count that one up as a win for Hamas' propaganda! *When the facts later came to light,* New York Times ran a retraction—it was not Israel, but a Jihad terrorist group in Gaza who sent the rocket. But the damage was done. Did Hamas apologize for the error? Of course not.

Protestors quote Hamas saying there were no beheadings on Oct. 7. Then on Oct. 29, Anderson Cooper in a CNN documentary, "The Whole Story" actually showed pictures of young women beheaded. Even on Oct. 7, *while engaged in the massacre at the Kobbatz, Hamas soldiers* took pictures and posted them on social media show them burning children alive, etc. Ah, details!

Third, They do not ask Searching Questions
The media is almost always guilty of over-exaggerating to get a juicy story. Only later do they run a retraction which few see. Their motto: first sell the news, then maybe make corrections. No wonder there are so many *cognitive distortions in the news:* exaggeration, over-sensationalism, catastrophizing, personalizing, emotionalizing, name-calling, insults, etc.

Here's the problem with cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies: uncritical thinkers do not know how to *question and doubt* these. Because most people have *not* been taught how to think, most are fooled by such propaganda. Not knowing how to do *critical thinking,* they are not able to recognize when *thinking* or *reasoning* is full of deletions, generalizations, and distortions.

When I listen to interviews with the protestors, they speak from *an absolutist mental state*; they have no doubts, no questions. They speak by shouting, yelling, chant insulting and ridiculous chants, talking-over, and never take a moment to *consider* the perspectives of the other side.

Therapy for the Protestors
The protestors need mental therapy to heal their minds for the way they think! They need training in *how to think critically,* how to use the Meta-Model to make distinctions and to ask questions.   Learning these linguistic distinctions, you learn to ask specific questions to get details and distinctions so you turn ill-formed and vague statements into well-formed statements.

Those who use the media to propagandadize, manipulate and twist language to confuse minds. They do not want people to *think.* They want people to *believe without questioning.* They do not want people to disagree with them; they want people to submit to their ideology as they do their thinking for them.

People who don't know critical thinking skills will inevitably be led by the nose to believe all sorts of irrational lies. It will be easy to inflame them by fabrications. Psychological warfare is *a war for the mind*—for the thinking and emoting of people. Many in the media know the captivating power of over-sensationalized headlines and news alerts. Their "communications" are essentially propaganda designed to promote some ideology. Long has been the day when fact-based journalism prevailed. Sadly, that has all but disappeared. All of this leads to the importance of learning critical thinking skills and why we teach them in Neuro-Semantics.

> **More about Critical Thinking skills?**   See the NLP Meta-Model, *Communication Magic*; *Executive Thinking; Brain Camp I,* and on *The Shop,* The Neuro-Semantics of Facts.

THINKING ABOUT THINKING
WITH NLP

Isn't that a great title? I wish I had invited it, but alas I did not. Joseph Yeager invented it and then wrote a book by that title, *Thinking about Thinking with NLP* (1985). It's an excellent book —insightful, playful (full of humor), and full of practical applications. I got that book the next year (1986) just as I was entering into this field.
> "NLP is the science of thinking about thinking." (p. viii)
> "... Think of thinking as continuous and fluid ... *choice* is a convention of thinking, not a given of human nature." (p. ix)

And while it is a wonderful book, it is also an incomplete book. In fact, given what we know today, it is very incomplete! In spite of all of the good things in the book, Joseph did not even come close to the idea of NLP as a *Thinking Model* (Neurons #43, #44). Well, in 1985 NLP was only officially 10 years old (1975) and Meta-Programs and Sub-Modalities were only then in the process of being developed. Joseph also wrote it years before the discovery of the Meta-States Model (1994) wherein I modeled the most unique kind of thinking and consciousness that we humans have— self-reflexive consciousness.

Now as a *thinking model,* NLP did *not* make the mistake of making "thinking" dichotomous to "feeling" or "emoting." NLP is much too holistic for that! When we talk about *thinking,* we include within it feeling and emoting. The fundamental channels of thinking, the sensory representational systems of the VAK include both. Generally, visual and auditory representations drive the thinking part and kinesthetics drive the feeling and emotional part. This is the basic structure of facilitating experiences using NLP.

If that doesn't immediately make sense, or ring a bell for you, consider what happens in any and every NLP training and/or coaching. A person wants to *feel* more relaxed, more joyful, more confident, more curious, etc. What does the NLP trainer do? She first grounds the experience of work asking VAK questions, "How do you picture this?   What tone of voice are you using? And how are you feeling in your body—your breathing, posture, muscle tone, etc.?" Once this *thinking* is elicited, then the NLP-er will ask the person to make the thinking features of the pictures brighter, the tone more upbeat, etc. Then, "What effects does this have on your emotions or emotional states?"

The visual and auditory qualities also drive the kinesthetics. Sometimes the kinesthetics are used to amplify or turn up the bodily sensations. Then to enrich it further, words are elicited. "What do you say to yourself?" "What *could* you say to yourself that would make this experience more joyful?" "What tonality would you use?"

All of this highlights that in NLP *we think with our whole mind and body.* Thinking is visual, auditory, kinesthetic (which includes smells and tastes) sensory systems. It also includes linguistics for our mental categories (our meta-representational system). NLP, as a *holistic thinking model*, involves no dichotomizing or polarizing of thinking and feeling.

Neurologically, when we *think* not only are various cortexes activated in the brain, but neuro-pathways are activated from brain to all of the body. All of the many different nervous systems are activated (autonomic nervous system, immune system, sympathetic nervous system, digestive nervous system, etc.). That's why, taking cue from Korzybski, NLP is as holistic and systemic as you can get, hence, *Neuro-Linguistic Programming.* We "program" or construct strategies and experiences into our very neurology. Then, as "neurons are fired together, they wire together" (Donald Hebb). Now the program, whether it is for reading, riding a bike, getting dressed, driving a car, solving an algebra problem, etc., that program is readily available to us as a developed resource.

As a *Thinking Model,* NLP specifies *how* such programming works in human neurology and how it is coded linguistically. We are a neuro-linguistic and neuro-semantic class of life (Alfred Korzybski). What this means is that unlike the field of Critical Thinking or the field of Creative Thinking, NLP is so much more. Again, that's why it is a *meta-discipline.*

When you next add the meta-levels of thinking to all of this—then you have an even fuller picture. As you think about your thinking, you develop higher levels of consciousness. This meta-thinking shows up as beliefs, decisions, learning, understandings, conceptual models, etc. Within each of these we develop all sorts of *thinking hierarchies*— belief systems, hierarchy of values, increasingly more abstract understandings of patterns and the "laws" that govern a discipline.

NLP began as a thinking model, even though the founders didn't realize it, or think about their work in that way. Today Neuro-Semantic NLP continues the original discovery by modeling the many ways that thinking functions in our mind-body system.

Why is all of that important? Because *everything human depends upon, and arises from, thinking.* Thinking is the key to everything we deem important. As the ultimate cause; it is your ultimate power. Consequently, if you can get to *the thinking* of someone, whether a client, an expert, or yourself—you can identify the structure of pathology, excellence, challenge, etc. and therefore that person's way of functioning. You can learn it, bring healing to it if need be, and/or replicate it. That's because it is a model of thinking itself.

DO YOUR OWN THINKING!

There is thinking, which everyone does and which is inevitable, and then there is *real* thinking, which is everyone does *not* do, and which is *not* inevitable. *Thinking* is an art, it is an education, it is a discipline that requires skills and competencies. All that's required for *inevitable* thinking is a functional brain on the top of your shoulders, one that is not brain-dead. Nearly everyone has that and so nearly everyone "thinks." Yet because there are numerous non-thinking states, you can have a brain and not use it. There are *7 kinds of non-thinking*: automatic thinking, reactive, borrowed, superficial, agenda, "knowing," and expectant (*Executive Thinking, Brain Camp I*).

Imagine that—a working brain which is *not engaged so it actually and truly thinks!* The state of non-thinking is not only possible, it is far, far too much the case with most people. Why is that? Because *thinking is hard work.* If you have ever struggled to understand a subject in school, with reading a difficult passage in a book, or the mechanics of how something works, and afterward felt exhausted, mentally drained, and if you rubbed your heads to ease the tension you feel, then you know that sometimes, thinking can require a lot of cognitive effort.

Famous people have often spoke about the effort of thinking. For example Peter F. Drucker once said: *"Thinking is very hard work. And management fashions are a wonderful substitute for thinking."* John Dewey wrote a book at the beginning of the 20th century, *How We Think,* and in it he defined thinking in a way that still shocks most people: *"The origin of thinking is some perplexity, confusion, or doubt."* It is the surprises and disappoints of life that we don't like or can't figure out, otherwise known as "problems," that trigger us to think. No wonder some people do not like to think and do whatever they can to avoid thinking!

Not only do senior managers in organizations *substitute* "management fashions" for thinking, there's another substitute you should know about. Carl Jung wrote, *"Thinking is difficult, that's why most people judge."* Now we are back to non-thinking—making a reactionary and prejudicial judgment rather than thinking. Then you don't have to put in the work of actually thinking something through.

When Albert Einstein thought about *thinking,* he noted something which many of us have said about schools. Namely, schools should not only focus on *what* to think, but *how* to think. Most do not. Einstein said, *"Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think."* True thinking is not inevitable, you have to *learn* how to do it. You have to *learn* how to use your mind to think, and thereby become *mindful,* that is, consciously aware and alive.

A fascinating thing about thinking is that **you have to do it, no one can do it for you.** Now it is true that you can learn from someone and take on his thoughts and think her thoughts after her. Because of this, we all can benefit from the quality thinking of those who came before us and we

do not have to start from ground zero. I can read from Aristotle. Then, what he learned and discovered thousands of years ago, I can *think those same thoughts, try them on, and make them mine.* We call that *learning.* It is the process by which I can come to *understand* what someone else has already figured out or discovered. But again, **you** *have to do the thinking to transfer those thoughts into your neurology, nervous systems and brain.* No one can do that for you. Nor will those thoughts get inside you by osmosis.

We can also learn to be excellent *thinking partners* to each other. This was the discovery of Vygotsky when he described how a more informed person can *scaffold* the learning of a less informed person thereby accelerating the development of the learner (*Executive Learning).* But again, the learner has to do his or her own thinking.

What happens when you do your own thinking? Obviously they learn. You come to know more and when you integrate that learning, you can do more. You can become more skilled and effective in doing things, more self-confident, more independent, more able to stand on your own two feet. You become empowered. As you use your mind to think and develop your *thinking powers and skills,* you becomes more self-determining and able to discern truth from falsehood. And all of that *unleashes your potentials.*

Now you know **what** we are striving to do in Neuro-Semantics. As we teach the Meta-Model, the Meta-Programs model, the Meta-States model, etc., our larger objective is to *enable people to access their ultimate power—their thinking powers.* This makes people more intelligent, more rational, and more informed. And because we want *everyone to do this,* it facilitates everyone in becoming more democratic, more respectful, and more tolerant and accepting of others

In enabling people to become excellent *critical thinkers and creative thinkers—*we want and encourage people to **do their own thinking.** This downplays the need to conform your thinking to anyone else's. This makes redundant any need to have a creed and force people to submit their minds to only the "politically correct" thinking. In this way, we work to develop *thinkers who can engaged in healthy conversations, debates, and dialogues.* They do not have to agree, in fact, if people are truly thinking, they probably will not agree. There will be lots of differences. That is not only okay, it is to be expected. It is desirable.

The professions that we focus on and develop in Neuro-Semantics (and NLP) are *thinking professions*: coaches, consultants, therapists, leaders, managers, etc. To be highly effective at any of these professions—you have to be a clear, accurate, precise, practical, creative, and critical thinker. You have to know how to challenge ill-formedness in linguistic structures (the Meta-Model). You have to know how to challenge the cognitive distortions, biases, and fallacies (see *Executive Thinking; Thinking for Humans*). You have to be able to detect and work with thinking and perceiving patterns (Meta-Programs, *Figuring Out People*). Is it a lot? Yes, you bet it is and in Neuro-Semantics we have lots of training programs to make this a reality. Here's to you ***doing your own best thinking!***

I WANT NO CLONES!

Whenever I write, what I always end up writing is *an opinion piece.* It can be none other. And even though I explicitly noted that I was writing an "Opinion Piece" in a few recent articles, that is all I have ever written. It is also all I *can* write. Why? Because I can never write absolute truth. And for that matter, no one can. That's not within our prerogative as human beings! If anyone thinks he can, well, he has a deep psychological problem. All we can write is from *our perspective* and out of our *human fallibility.*

When I write, I aim to do the best I can. I seek to write using my best knowledge, my best research skills, my best thinking skills, and my best intentions. I hope you do too when you write. *And when I write, I don't want clones!* I want thinking men and women so that we can then have indepth conversations that get to the heart of things. That's what I've been developing in Meta-Coaching since 2000. Actually, when I write articles or books, my goal is not to get you to agree with me—*it is to get you to think.* What you conclude is always your business and your conclusions do not have to agree with me. Actually, from time to time, I find that I don't even agree with me—with my previous self. What I wrote at a certain time, while it may have been the best I could do at that time, I later found that it had certain flaws, and so I updated my thinking and my writing. (I often tell the story of finding four significant errors in the first volume of *Meta-States*—mistakes that I corrected in subsequent editions.)

What I want is intense dialogues where we can make an argument for or against something that we care about (and passionately care about), and then examine *the quality of thinking which goes into those arguments.* I want fierce conversations about things that matter where we can together identify and clean out any and all cognitive distortions, biases, and/or fallacies that contaminate our thinking and concluding. I want conversations with people who know how to stay calm, cool, compassionate, and respectful even when we radically disagree. Above and beyond agreeing, is being able to *help each other think critically and creatively,* because if we can do that, then we can together solve the big problems that face humanity. And then, everybody wins.

It is intolerance, rigidness, and dogmatism that stops healthy exchange of ideas. That does no one any good. Where there is intolerance, the conversation comes to an end. Actually intolerance prevents a dialogue from ever beginning. Now people push for conformity of thinking.

> "You must see things my way. If you don't, then you are bad and you may be my enemy. If so, then I have the right to attack you and use any means to force compliance to my ideas."

If the step after an intellectual intolerance is dogmatism and demanding compliance, the step after that is violence, physically hurting or attacking people who disagree. Now we are back in

the "Dark Ages" where we are trying to solve differences with inquisitions, torture, and wars. Interesting enough, we are not all that far removed from the Dark Ages. In many ways, we are still living there.

When people learn how to truly *think*—to openly, curiously, and critically *think*—then we can talk about *anything*. Nothing is off the table. After all, our talking is externalizing our thinking and our thinking is the heart and soul of our meaning-making. We are making a map using our intelligence and experience and skills and hopefully, to the best of our ability. We are not dictating a new set of commandments.

When we share out thinking with each other, we are thinking out-loud in the presence of others. Now we can bounce our ideas off of each other. In that way, we allow our meanings to flow through them and their meanings to flow through us. That's the literal breakdown of the word *dialogue— dia (through) and logos (word or meaning)*. And it is through effective and respectful dialogue that we can come to know and understand each other. That's what every client in coaching wants, needs, and expects.

So, let there be no clones! Let's put away any goal such as *seeking to get others to conform to our thinking*. That's not a winning formula. After all, we can all be wrong on something and when we are, increasing the numbers of those who agree with us does *not* get us closer to the truth, and in fact, may blind us to our need to think and re-think. Let's define success as *thinking individuals talking together* who share differences in perspectives and solutions.

THE BOTTOM LINE:
ARE CIVIL CONVERSATIONS POSSIBLE?

We all know that NLP is a communication model. It is also a linguistic model and specifically, a *neuro*-linguistic model—we study how language affects neurology. When you study NLP, you study the Meta-Model and learn how words work to create experiences, emotions, and sense of reality. You study Representational systems and learn the "languages of thought." When you study the Strategy model, you learn the organizational structure of subjective experience and how to enhance it. When you learn Meta-States, you learn how to detect and set up the higher level beliefs as frames that manage subjective experiences. When you learn Meta-Programs, you learn how your higher level thoughts (meta-states) create your perceptual lens.

That paragraph summarizes NLP and tells where Neuro-Semantics begins. Neuro-Semantics takes things further by studying the meta-level structure of meaning and meaning-making, the Self-Actualization Quadrants that synchronize meaning and performance. You study the Matrix model and/or the Meta Place, and you learn how to think systemically as you recognize the landmarks of the mind. You study Meta-Coaching and you study the structure of compassionate challenging to unleash your potentials so you become "fully alive/fully human."

Now in all that we have in NLP and Neuro-Semantics—what is its essence? Answer: *Conversations*. After all, that's the essence of *communication*. When you and I commune, or have co-union with someone, there is a meeting of the minds. Your thinking and my thinking come together so we can learn from each other, understand each other, and commune with each other. We may or we may not agree, but at least as we respect and care for each other, we come to understand each other.

When *Coaching* became a thing (1992), thousands of people suddenly realized that everything actually comes down to *conversations*. There are outcome conversations, clarity conversations, decision-making conversations, change conversations, experiential conversations, and on and on. Interesting enough, the first book I wrote in the field of Coaching was *Coaching Conversations* (2002). After that, we developed a set of *coaching conversations* for personal coaching, a set for group and team coaching, a set for executive coaching, transformational coaching, political coaching, etc.

Why? Why all of this focus on *conversations*? Answer: *Conversation is how we relate to each other*. In *Communication Magic* (1997) I wrote that "communication" and "relationship" are two sides of the same coin. To communication is to relate; to relation is to communicate. You can't have one without the other. *Conversation is also the heart of therapy* (healing). It is the heart of civilization (collaboration and science). It is the heart of leadership; the heart of management;

the heart of parenting, etc. In all of these, what are we doing? We are *having a conversation.*

Now isn't that amazing? Leadership, management, parenting, therapy, consulting, education, etc. may seem radically different experiences—yet at the heart of each of them are *conversations.* That's why learning how to truly and effectively communicate—have a conversation—is what unleashes individual and collective potentials. But there is a challenge: Effective conversations do not occur naturally. No one is born knowing *how* to do this. We have to learn how to have effective conversations with each other. Merely opening your mouth and start talking is *not* the same as having an effective conversation. It is often the problem.

What does this mean? It means we have to *learn how to think effectively and we have to learn how to think **with** each other.* This is not easy. To do that, you have to learn to *listen*— consider, ask questions, detail specifics, and make distinctions. And listening is another significant barrier for most people! They have not learned how to do that. Merely having ears and picking up words from others is not enough.

Given that quality listening and thinking requires significant training and learning, there is another barrier. Namely, the non-thinking states: reactivity, automatic thinking, borrowed thinking, shallow thinking, agenda thinking, "knowing," and expectations. These *pseudo-thinking states* are extremely common. These are the cheap substitutes for true listening and thinking.

What Does It Say About Us?
Now if we, as the human race, cannot have a calmly rational and respectfully caring conversation about the things that matter most to us (e.g., religion, politics, sex, finances, government, philosophy, etc.), then *what are we saying?* What is implied in our *inability* to talk with each other about certain topics?
- We are saying that we can't remain civil, decent, respectful, caring, tolerant and human with each other!
- We are saying that some of our ideas (mental maps) are so semantically loaded that if someone disagrees with us we are ready to become ugly, violent, and hurtful!
- We are saying that our ideas (beliefs, values, understandings) are so sacred, so divine, so absolute, that anyone who denies them is bad, evil, and probably a demon from hell!
- We are saying that we have the right to condemn, blame, accuse, get nasty, get ugly, become intolerant, dogmatic, and engage in boycotts and blackmailing if our views are not recognized by all!
- We are saying we value our ideas over being civil with one another.

Obviously, our focus in Neuro-Semantics is to learn how to have *great and wonderful and humane conversations.* Then we can get along, collaborate, build better civilizations, and unleash human potentials. And if we can spread this far and wide enough—we can eliminate wars. Imagine that!

THE ART OF DETECTING
A CLOSED-MIND

If your *mind* is your central mechanism, your ultimate power, for dealing with reality (which it is), then *you will naturally want to have an open mind.* And if you don't want that, then recognize that it is essential if you are to "deal with reality." Think about the very first thinking skill—consideration—you cannot perform that skill if you don't have an open mind. *Consider* requires an open mind and, simultaneously, as you practice it, it develops an open mind. You can't *consider* something if you do not open your mind and give an idea a chance. You give it a chance by representing it visually, reproducing it auditorily, and kinesthetically trying on the words and the conceptual frames of the idea.

What stand in contrast to this *openness*? Answer: All of the non-thinking skills and states: reactivity, automatic thinking, borrowed thinking, superficial thinking, agenda thinking, "knowing," and expecting (see *Executive Thinking, Brain Camp I*). All of these unhealthy thinking styles close down consideration so that you do not even given an idea a chance. And when consideration is shut down, then so also are all of the critical and creative skills. After all, if a person will not consider, then there can be no questioning, doubting, detailing, and distinguishing. That shuts down all critical thinking.

Now certainly you have experienced people with closed minds, haven't you? When was the last time you encountered a closed mind? You try to sell to a friend your idea about a certain movie, but he will not even consider going to it. You ask a banker for a loan, you know that your credit score and assets are sufficient, but no. The banker turns you down flat. You say, "You haven't even actually considered it." But no, her mind is closed.

Theoretically, why would a person not even consider an idea? What would explain that refusal? The answer is *intolerance, dogmatism, and know-it-all-ism.* The person refuses to open her mind to an idea; he refuses to even tolerate an idea. And why? Because they have already decided on some meaning, a meaning which simply precludes your idea. Their previous learning and knowledge functions as, what's described in the field of learning, "proactive inhibition." It stops any new considerations cold in its tracks.

If an open mind is a mind open for business, then a closed mind is a mind *closed for business.* Where there is an open mind, there's a sign on that person's heart, "Open! Come on in." When you enter, you are warmly greeted, welcomed, and they ask you, "How can we help you?" Conversely, where there is a closed mind, you see a different sign, "Closed." It could be, "Closed for the night." "Closed for he Season." Or even, "Closed: Out of Business."

A closed mind says, "Go away, we don't have any room or place for you." It says, "No solicitators" and it may add, "Violators will be prosecuted to the further extent of the law." A closed mind is also not a friendly mind; it is not a mind that's interested or curious. With a closed mind, you can protect your beliefs from the danger of additional or new facts. With a closed mind, you don't have to learn anything new or different. And without new learning, you can remain the same, you maintain or are stuck in, the status quo. Now you will be untroubled by new ideas or challenges. That's the upside of a closed mind.

The downside of a closed mind, however, is one that's much more devastating. With a closed mind, you don't grow or develop. Instead, you arrest your personal development and become stuck at a previous stage, and you probably trap yourself in numerous cognitive distortions that of which you are unconscious.

I was asked recently, "Why have you been putting so much emphasis on critical thinking skills?" Part of the answer lies in the prevalence of closed-minds. That's because *critical thinking* is partly defined as an open mind to facts, truth, insights as well as the ability to think clearly, accurately, and without bias. In a world as divided as ours, we need more and more open minds who can have civil conversations, realizing all along that no thought is a fact, it is just a thought —a mental construct about something. And as fallible human beings, we are often wrong, something that does not frighten an open mind.

HONEST DISAGREEMENTS
IS THERE SUCH A THING?

We sometimes speak about having an *honest disagreement* with someone. Truth be known, every couple has to learn how to have honest and respectful disagreements. If they don't, the loving relationship will not last. If they don't, they end up sleeping with the enemy. That we *disagree* about our understandings, the way we interpret things, the decisions we make or want to make, the things we do or think that others should do—this is everyday life. Nobody fully and completely *agrees* with any other person. The only way that could occur is if someone submits to a brain lobotomy! Short of that, it is human nature that we disagree.

Given that, the issue is not *that we disagree,* the issue is *how we disagree.* And the question for our sanity, the preservation of our relationships, and even the survival of the world is— *Can we disagree respectfully?* Can we each maintain our point-of-view about something and treat each other with respect, kindness, even love? Or must we now become enemies? Must we try to harm the other person? Boycott their businesses, try to make them fail, slander them on social media, etc.?

If we look at the history of the human race, there is very little hope for a positive answer. With the history of inter-personal conflicts, inter-family feuds, and the history of countries at war— all we have proven is that *we know so very little about how to live together in peace and harmony.* And it happens all the time. Something happens, and individuals who have been life-long friends suddenly can't talk to each other in a decent or civil way. They are angry, resentful, anxious, bitter, and unforgiving. They want to get the best of the other—they want revenge. Couples who once were deeply in love are now each other's mortal enemy.

What is an honest disagreement and how would it work? It is a disagreement about something that each person cares about, feels strong about, and *thinks* that they are right **and** yet they grant that the other person also *thinks* he or she is right. And they *accept that.*

"And they accept that" is the amazing part. Instead of fighting that, instead of condemning and judging the other for thinking differently, instead of trying to slander and hurt the other, *they accept it.* And how on God's green earth could they possibly do that? Ah, here is where NLP and Neuro-Semantics offers something truly magical:
> They accept each other as persons, as human beings, because they know that *all thoughts are but mental maps— flawed, fallible, and human.* They know that "the map is not the territory."

And knowing that *the map is not the territory,* they grant each other (and everybody for that

matter) the right to their own thinking, perspectives, points-of-view, opinions, and beliefs. They also know something else: *Everyone lives and operates out of their mental map and can do none other.* So instead of condemning the other's thinking— they engage in the thinking-together process called "communication" and dialogue until there is a meeting of the minds.

More often that not, if men and women of good will, respect, and love come together and use the best *thinking tools* that we have, they come first to an understanding of each other and second to a way to unite the varying viewpoints. They will keep trying on each other's perspectives, "take second person perceptive" to *consider* how the other person is thinking. And if they can't? If they can't, then they *agree to disagree.*

Now it is easy to write that, to say that, but it is far more difficult to *live that.* That takes more learning and personal development. Learning to *agree to disagree* means that, at this moment, we cannot find a meeting place for the minds. So instead of becoming enemies, we agree to put the differences on hold until new information arises, new research occurs, hidden facts come to light, etc. *Agreeing to disagree* means that we focus on treating each other with respect and dignity and not put our ideas, ideology, beliefs, religion, etc. above or before how we treat other human beings.

I THINK, THEREFORE I WRITE

I do a lot of things as I live my life, yet at the core of everything, I write. And I've been writing for a long time. It began when I was 14. That's when I wrote my first paper that had nothing to do with school. I wrote out of the sheer pleasure of writing and out of discovering what I thought. From hearing, learning, reading, studying, and talking, I began an adventure known as *thinking.*

Yes, I had superficially "thought" before I was 14, but mostly I was *thinking the thoughts that were given to me to think.* They came from the textbooks the schools provided, from listened to the teachers explain facts, ideas, principles, and understandings. Yet all of that *borrowed* thinking and learning. At first, the learning was not something I "thought up." Someone else, or many others, had originally thought it, and then wrote it down. Eventually it had become the school curriculum. And that is how we all learned when we're children. By learning we inherit the wisdom of our culture, our elders, our traditions. It grounds us in the various subjects. And ideally, along the way, we *learn how to learn.* We learn how to think.

My first *thinking*, as I remember it, began when I was 14. After I had learned enough about a particular subject, I was then able to *reflect on it* and actually do my own *thinking* about it. I did not know it at the time that I was engaging in the essence of thinking—"working an idea over in your mind" (John Dewey). As I *considered* the subject, I began *asking questions* about it. Then I did a most radical thing, I started *doubting* that things were exactly as I had been told they were. So as I dived into the subject even more, I was able to *detail* facets and make *distinctions* that I had never made before (the five essential or core thinking skills).

Now while I no longer remember the specifics of what I was learning, I do remember *the experience itself.* As I used my *mind* in that way, the effort of mentally turning an idea over and around, and upside-down and considering it from multiple perspectives, I felt like a little scientist exploring and experimenting in a lab. It felt great! It was as exciting and as much fun as physical sports or exploring in the woods or building a tree-house. And I wanted more.

From that first experience of engaging in some actual and true *thinking,* I began to write. At first I wrote everything out in "long hand." But that was also the year I took "typing" in school and shortly thereafter I learned to write on a typewriter. But there was a difference. Unlike the typewriters at school, this was a mathematical typewriter with extra mathematical symbols (my dad was a mathematician). In that way, I began to learn how to *think and write simultaneously.*

Now if you have learned how to *think and write at the same time,* then you know this experience. You are writing about something and as you write, *you discover what you thinking.* It's an amazing experience. I have often sat back and looked at a page in the typewriter, or today, on the

screen, and thought, "Wow! I didn't know that I knew that!" Then sometimes, just sometimes, I'll be writing and what comes out will be a string of words describing something that creatively came together *as I was writing* so that when I end the sentence and look at it— *it is an entirely new learning.* I didn't just write what I knew, but didn't know that I knew, I wrote something entirely new. As an act of synergy, somehow things come together in a way unexpected and that represents an actual discovery. If you're a writer, you know what I mean. If you're not, it is one of the real joys of writing.

Over the years I have always used *writing as a method for learning.* In college, I would take notes, type the handwritten notes, and use them for reviewing. I continued the same whenever I read a book—I would jot down notes and then use the book to type out notes. When I took my NLP training, I took notes on a small lap-top, and then would go back to write out the notes in full. That *accidently* is how I wrote my first NLP book, *The Spirit of NLP* (1996). Yet in 1989 I wrote that manuscript for myself! I did not write it to be a book, I was just consolidating the notes that I had written. It turned how others wanted to read it as well.

The same occurred for years as I published a monthly journal. It's name changed over the 18-years. It began as *Wineskins,* then became *Metamorphosis,* and finally *Meta-States Journal.* After the Neuro-Semantics movement took off, I began a weekly newsletter or blog, *Neurons,* not to represent any official "word" for Neuro-Semantics, but simply as "here's what I'm now thinking." Often, I write articles to "test" ideas. I will put an idea out and see what kind of response I get.

Every once in a while someone will disagree and ask to write a counter to it. That happened with John Grinder and then later with Steve Andreas. I welcomed that. So I would publish their counter arguments and then write a reply to it. You can still find those "debates" on the website ([www.neurosemantics.com).](www.neurosemantics.com)

That brings me to the writing I did when the Israel–Hamas War began. As a psychologist, I decided to write about a psychological solution. I studied the facts and perspectives from all sides and then presented my thinking. It was just *my thinking.* It was not an official statement of Neuro-Semantics. It was not a creedal declaration or a manifesto that others were required to accept. It was just my thinking at that time given the facts as I could detect them.

I state this because of the misunderstandings. Some thought I was declaring "God's truth from heaven." I have no idea where they thought that I, or anyone else, could actually do that! Some thought I was speaking for everyone in Neuro-Semantics. But given that we encourage everyone to think and decide for themselves, there is no "official" Neuro-Semantic press releases like that. Others thought that if I took such-and-such position, then they could no longer be associated with us. Some wrote to me stunned, "How dare I think such things!"

The truth is, we are all fallible human beings and *thinking— real thinking and learning—* is our only tool for relating to the world, to each other, and even to ourselves. So *let there be thinking* —lots of thinking, and diverse thinking*.* In the end, it is just thinking—a map and not the territory.

MAKING THE THINKING CHOICE

Given that "mind" is not only a noun (actually, a nominalization), it is also a verb (#42), *mind is not a thing* (as an object, entity, or substance), *it is a function.* Mind is what you *do*—and what you do is *think.* When you "mind the gap" you are *thinking* about the fact that there is a gap. When you "mind" your mother, you pay attention to, listen to, and comply with what she says.

With a mind, you have *thinking power.* While you can think passively by just perceiving things, and let in all kinds of thinking, *true thinking is a choice.* It is a choice wherein you expend effort. This means your ultimate consciousness is *a volitional consciousness*. And because you can choose to avoid thinking, to not focus your attention, you can choose to not do the work of thinking. Lots of people do precisely that. You can also let your thinking powers deteriorate, weaken, and become nearly useless. Yet when you default on thinking, and drift in a will-less passivity, the result is that you end up evading the adventure of life and the true joy of activating your potentials.

This is the problem with all of the social media platforms—they encourage you to adopt a policy of defaulting on thinking. Instead they encourage you to think what is Politically Correct, and to disparage any thoughts that disagree with their conventional wisdom. The end result—if you reject the work of thinking, all that's left is to become a zombie. Once you abandon your thinking powers, all that you have left are your emotions—how you feel. So you now substitute your feelings for your mind and with it, your ability to detect reality. This is the pathway to neurosis as Nathan Branden (1969) noted:

> "One of the chief characteristics of mental illness is the policy of letting one's feelings —one's wishes and fears— determine one's thinking, guide one's actions and serve as one's standard of judgment. This is more than a *symptom* of neurosis, it is *a prescription* for neurosis. It is a policy that involves the wrecking of one's rational faculty." (p. 71)

To surrender your mind to others, to an ideology, to what's politically correct (PC) is to choose to *not* think. It is to seek to be unaware, to give up your humanity, to sell your cognitive potentials and self-actualization short. And all of that is a loser's route.

If your childhood home was convolutedly complicated or dysfunctional so that understanding what was going on, and what it meant, would require a degree in psychology, sociology, an philosophy— it was probably easier to give up even trying to understand. It is easier to turn off your mind and retreat into dreams and fantasies. And because emotions are so strong—fear, anger, guilt, confusion—it's easy to get lost in an emotion. Yet in doing that you develop the habit of not thinking.

When you surrender your mind to emotions or to the social environment, you cannot develop an

adequate contact with the world outside, or for that matter, the world inside. When you give up real thinking, you are left with no tools by which you can make contact. In the long-term this will deepen your sense of helplessness and hopelessness. We see this in poverty-stricken communities, in lots of the college protests currently going on, and even in corporate America. Regardless of the context, people have give up the ultimate human choice—the choice to use one's mind to do actual thinking. Instead, they default to the non-thinking uses of the mind—

- automatic thinking
- reactionary thinking
- shallow thinking
- borrowed thinking
- agenda thinking
- certainty
- and expectations.

The solution is to develop your mind's capacities for thinking. It is to identify and cultivate all of your mental powers. The good news is that we now have modeled "thinking" and "mind" so that we have specified three major thinking categories (essential, eureka, and executive thinking skills) and 14 thinking powers. This, in turn, enables you to deliberately practice these thinking skills until you develop them as key resources in your mental capacity for thinking.

The Essence of Thinking
      1. Considering
      2. Questioning, Exploring
      3. Doubting
      4. Detailing, Indexing
      5. Distinguishing
The Eureka of Thinking
      6. Inferring
      7. Organizing
      8. Creating
      9. Synergizing
The Executive Development of Thinking
      10. Learning
      11. Deciding
      12. Discerning
      13. Reflecting
      14. Sacralizing

THINKING: WHAT AND HOW

Here's an astounding fact. Just as you can go through all 12-grades of school (elementary, middle, and high school) and never learn to actually *think* or *learn,* you can also go to University, even graduate with a degree, and still *not know how to think* or *how to learn.* Amazing, isn't it? Well, amazing in a horrible way. And how horrible is that?

Now, learning *what to think*, yes that's important, but what if you learn the wrong stuff? What if you learn something that is already outdated or that has been made redundant? What if you are only learning the prejudices and biases of your teachers and those who control the pursue strings of the university? Then not only is your learning irrelevant, it may also be actually destructive to you and others. Every religion, philosophy, and school teaches you *what to learn*—actually they have a vested interest in that. What they are often afraid to teach you is *how to learn and how to think.*

This has become clear recently in US Universities that have adopted one particular presupposition. While it is an assumption that is over-simplistic to the point of being ridiculous, yet it is *what* so many colleges and universities are teaching. Namely the idea that—

> "The world is divided into two kinds of people—oppressors and the oppressed. Oppressors are bad people and deserve whatever they suffer; the oppressed are good people and have the right to take revenge on oppressors no matter how horrible or Hitlerian the revenge."

Now anyone who has *the ability to think* can see through that idea as pure non-sense. First, a thinker would immediately recognize that this is *Either–Or thinking* and how it dichotomizes the world and over-simplifies to the point of being ridiculous. Numerous times Maslow wrote, "Dictotomizing pathologies and pathology dichotomizes." If only the world was that simple! If only people were that simple! But alas, neither the world nor people are. Instead anyone or anything that *oppresses* does so to some degree, a degree that occurs on a continuum. There are degrees of oppressing from very little to a lot. And those who are oppressed can be oppressed a little bit or a whole lot.

Second, a thinker knows that any relational term like oppressor/ oppressed indicates that it is a relationship in which both parties plays a role. That's the way it is with *relationships—everyone plays a role to some degree.* Each is responding and each has a degree of response-ability. Again, the world is just not that simple.

Third, a thinker would also recognize that no matter what anyone has suffered, what misfortunates has befallen someone, no mistreatment allows, permits, and authorizes that person to now do the same. A first bad deed does not give permission for others to do a second bad

deed. If something is bad— wicked, evil, inhuman—than it is bad for the oppressed to do as well. Being mistreated does not justify reeking revenge. Revenge is not justice, it is more injustice. The dynamic is the same, just the actors have changed. When our kids say, "But he hit me first!" we don't say, "Well, okay, go ahead and hit him back just as hard." At least if we are civilized human beings, we don't teach our kids to think and act that way.

If you know *how to think through something, how to think straight,* that is, logically and rationally, the whole notion that "the world is made up of oppressors and the oppressed" is irrational. In NLP language, it is an *over-generalization* that arises from having deleted critical information that results in this *distorted* premise. If you know the Meta-Model of Language, you would be able to ask questions about what's been deleted, generalized, and distorted and that would let you know that the statement is an ill-formed belief.

Similarly, if colleges and universities were teaching the students *how to think* and how to learn, if they were teaching *critical thinking skills,* how to reason logically and rationally, most of the so-called "protests" would not be occurring. Young people would know better. And that they do not seem to know better, this is an example of the failure of schools in teaching people *how to think.*

Solution? NLP trainers training the NLP Meta-Model. Neuro-Semantic trainers training Executive Thinking and Brian Camp I, II, and III. The solution lies in enabling people to learn how to unleash their critical and creative thinking skills.

BEWARE:
WHEN YOU THINK WITH WORDS

How much of your thinking is done in and with words? Can you think without words, that is, apart from words? While linguists have not given us a precise percentages about this, we know that most thinking is done with, in, and through words. I would guess it is somewhere between 90 and 95 percent.

When you think, you think almost exclusively in words. While you can entertain thoughts in any of the sensory-systems (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic, gustatory, olfactory), such thoughts are usually simple and direct. Perhaps someones asks, "Do you remember the dog that you played with as a child?" and you, for a moment, *see* that dog in the theater of your mind. You may even be able to hold on to that image, perhaps see it as a movie rather than a snapshot. Now if you wanted to, you could play around with the image. "Can you make his hair orange?" But that's about it when it comes to thinking without words.

Yet with words and language you can do so much more. Once you have a reference that you represent, then you can create all sorts of categories, concepts, and understandings. You can classify the dog by breed, as animate and living, as intelligent, etc. As a meta-representation system, language allows you to think deeply, expansively, and thoroughly. With words you create the uniquely human world of conceptual abstractions—and that's where all of us mostly live.

You think in words and with words. You use words as *vehicles* to transfer thinking and as a *code* to encase a thought. Language, as a set of symbols, both enables thinking as well as constrains thinking. Some words constrain your ability to think certain things. And without language, there are all kinds of things that you can't even think as in "entertaining an idea." That's why when a given language lacks certain words, people will have all sorts of problems thinking certain things. Postman (1976) wrote, "A distinction that cannot be made in language, cannot be made conceptually." (p. 242).

Now one of the most amazing things about words is that *they are not real.* For many people, that is an absolutely shocking statement. They still think that words are real. And when you make that mistake, you will then probably also think that "words can hurt you." They will then talk about "verbal abuse." They will talk about some words as in "bad words," and "evil words." But that's a fundamental mistake. Words are not real. "Dog" is a word, but it doesn't bark or bite you. "Cat" is a word, but it cannot scratch you. Words are symbols that stand for some reference other than themselves. And because *words are vehicles for thinking*, they do *not* contain meaning. You and I use words as symbols to communicate to each other our ideas. Yet

meaning is in *persons*—in you and me. We are the meaning-makers. We use words to construct meanings.

That's also why there are words and phrases that do us a great disservice. That's because they promote and enable dysfunctional thinking. And with words, to wrongly use a word is to encode an idea that —in that context— is not only wrong, but can be hurtful and problematic. How does this work? It works as you take a word or phrase and use it to send a message to your mind-and-body. What your body does with the word then depends on whether you just think it or whether you believe it.

If you *just think,* then you will do no semantic damage to yourself. It remains just a thought and nothing more. It is something that you entertain and play with in your mind. But if you believe it, then you *send a command* to your nervous systems to actualize it. You are communicating to your body, "Try to make it real." "Try to activate whatever you can from within to translate that word to the outside world."

This is the structure of the placebo and the nocebo processes. Believe a voodoo curse on yourself and your body will make it real. Believe a doctor's prediction about your situation, and for wow and woe, your body will orient itself in that direction. *Believing makes it so in your body.* Believing does not make it so in the outside world, only within your nervous systems—which it sets up as a self-fulfilling and self-organizing prophecy.

Words can be transformative, life-giving, and/or pathological in your mind-body system. So be careful as you think with words—as you read words. Reading often operates as a self-programming process. So as you avoid the bad stuff, focus on reading only the good stuff.