

Chapter 9

How Is Your Therapy Going?

Have you ever been asked how your therapy is going? Did you know this is one of the more difficult questions to answer. Why? Because feeling better is not always proof your therapy is working. Sometimes it can even mean your therapy is failing. How can you know then? It turns out there is a recognizable pattern which occurs during healing. An uphill climb during which we struggle between wanting the benefits of healing and not wanting to suffer. Facing this struggle in fact is one of the main tasks of therapy. And learning to see it as it's happening is one of the best ways to know therapy is working. This then is the topic we are about to explore, in this chapter of Plain Talk about Talk Therapy. The road to breakthroughs.

“I Feel So Much Better”

Most people go to therapy because they want to feel better. Duh! And why shouldn't we want this. After all, feeling better is a sane, healthy, and logical goal. Unfortunately, no one can feel better without first doing the work. At least not for long anyway. Good therapists even warn us about this right up front, by saying things like that in order to feel better we're going to have to struggle a bit. You know. Dig up the past. Dredge through the present. Things like that.

So do we agree to do this? Of course we do. Or at least we mindlessly nod

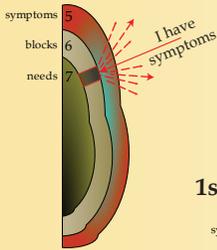
Making a Breakthrough

(according to Emergence Personality Theory)

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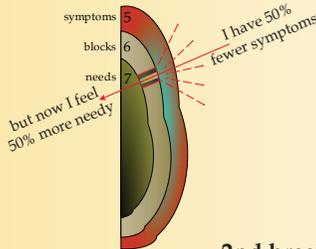


a block

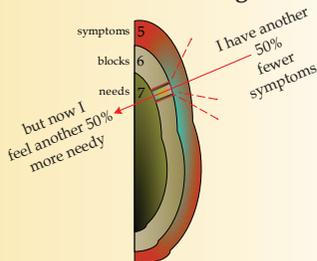


When you make a breakthrough in therapy, you move through symptoms past the block to neediness. Over time, you attempt to back out but the symptoms return so you return to working on the block.

1st breakthrough



2nd breakthrough



Each successive breakthrough then heals one half of whatever is left of the block until the block is insignificant and no symptoms reappear.

yea, yea, all the while secretly hoping the therapist will make this happen, if not painlessly, then at least quickly. The thing is, no therapist can bypass human nature. Thus, while it's fine to hope life may gift us at times with a bit of painless healing, for the most part, therapy happens like the old "change your oil" television commercial. You know, the one that ends with, "you can either pay me now or you can pay me later."

Voiced as advice from a therapist's seat then, this translates into, "you can either suffer now or you can suffer later." In other words, you can either do the work of healing in therapy or you can suffer through an unhealed life. Either way, Buddha was right. You will have to suffer. Like it or not.

Why all this negative sounding talk about suffering? Simply this. Talk therapy hurts. Period. Not every second, mind you. Nor every hour even. But many times, it does. Especially when you are getting close to an unhealed wound. At which point your symptoms start getting worse. And while many folks, therapists included, can at times mistake this worsening pain for something going wrong, the truth is, the closer you get to an injury, the more life gets tough for a while. How tough? At times, it feels like a bad dream in which you've taken a wrong turn into hell. At others, it feels like heart ache served up flambé on a flaming foo foo platter.

All kidding aside, the point I'm making is, being in talk therapy requires you to hurt at times. Sometimes, even a lot. Moreover, we can either do the best we can to endure this pain or do our best to live with an unhealed life.

What about the idea that "time heals all wounds" though? Is there nothing to this old cliché? The truth? There is no truth at all here. Nada. Nothing at all.

Why say it then if it isn't true?

Because time does tend to *bury* our symptoms. Which makes it appear to us our wounds have healed. They haven't. But we'd so like to believe they have that we just go along with this farce.

Sadly, for many folks, their entire time in therapy is focused on achieving these kinds of outcomes; finding better ways to bury their wounds. And they do feel better for doing this. For a time any way.

So where do wounds go when time or therapy buries them? Mostly they get buried beneath layers of distancing logic and philosophical nonsense. Or beneath hundreds of bags of potato chips and couch potato numbness. Either way, when it comes to the idea that time heals all wounds, this is just an urban legend. A rural legend as well. And the real truth is, this never happens. Time does not heal wounds.

So why do we believe it does then? Because as I've said, there are many instances wherein time can act like a desert wind blowing sand over the footprints of an injury. This happens a lot in fact. And because we see no evidence,

we mistakenly believe time has healed our wounds. How nice.

Ah, were it only so easy. Unfortunately because these symptoms are never the wounds themselves but only the evidence of our wounds, having our symptoms go away does not prove we have healed. All it really proves is that we no longer have visible symptoms.

Well if the symptoms are not the wound, then what is it?

In essence, it's a situation wherein life once startled us, and in doing so, programmed us to relive this startle each time we relive this situation. Each time then, first time and every time afterwards, being startled empties our minds and renders us blind. And scared. Or angry. And tense. And worse.

Suddenly going internally blind does tend to bring out the worst in us.

This aside, my point is, if we want to heal, then we'll have to suffer a bit. And if we choose to heal in therapy, we will hurt. Not every minute. Nor in every session even. But a lot more than we would probably agree to do were we to know ahead of time how bad therapy can hurt. The thing is, if we can endure this pain, it can really pay off. How? Well if it leads us to a breakthrough, then we never suffer this badly again. At least, not from this particular wound. Why not? Because a breakthrough restores a good portion of our sight. After which we never face this fear blindly again.

This in fact is how you can know if the therapy is working. You can know it is working when you make breakthroughs.

So what is a *breakthrough*?

The truth is, it's a lot more complicated than simply saying we finally feel better. Again, it's not simply that time has rewarded us for our suffering. Nor is it simply that our symptoms have gone away, although with breakthroughs, they do tend to decrease significantly. If not right then and there then at least within the days and weeks immediately following.

This still does not describe the nature of what happens to make these symptoms go away though. What exactly happens? To see, we first need to talk a bit about the nature of wounds. At least the part which causes symptoms to appear in us. What causes symptoms. And what are we breaking through? You're about to see.

What Are We Trying to Heal Anyway?

What causes our symptoms? It turns out there is a simple fractal which can visually reveal this to us. And thanks to Emergence Personality Theory, this fractal is a pretty easy one to understand. Before we take a look at it though, let's first briefly review the basics of this theory.

What is **Emergence Personality Theory**? Emergence Personality Theory is the first non linear theory of personality, the first to be based entirely on fractals.

Here, personality is said to begin with the birth separation moment, during which the first of the many fractal structures of personality is formed.

What is this structure like? It is a nested set of four layers which biases us away from the pain of disconnects and outward toward the painlessness of personal non existence. This is why it is sometimes pictured as the inner four layers of a set of ten Russian nesting dolls, and sometimes as the inner four layers of a ten layered onion.

Essentially then, Emergence Personality Theory posits personality as a developmentally occurring system of interdependent, nested, fractal layers. Ten nested layers in all. Each of which functions much like a view point from which to see and sense ourselves and our world.

Now if you picture the ten dolls still all nested together (something like how I've drawn them in the upper right corner of this chapter's diagram), from this perspective, all you would see is Doll Number One's perspective, the state of *personal non existence*. How does it feel to see life from this perspective?

Basically, this is the state in which we keep everything inside. Or in other words, the state in which we have yet to open up. Even to ourselves. How do we do this? By doing things to zone out. So much so in fact that even when we have an injury, from Doll Number One's perspective, we see nothing to worry about and feel nothing's wrong. And this is not too difficult to imagine really. After all, we have yet to open up and so, all we see is what shows on the outside.

Almost all therapies get people to open up Doll Number One. And when they do, we get access to Doll Number Two's view point. What is life like from this doll's perspective?

From Doll Number Two's perspective, we see life through the eyes of the philosopher, therapist, politician, and religious person. Which means what exactly? Which means we get to see life a lot more clearly than Doll Number One sees it. At least as far as having something in common with other human beings. The thing is, the view from this barely open place is more about making generalizations about life than anything genuinely personal. Theories and rules rather than personal choices.

In a way, we could say that from Doll Number Two's perspective, life is something to be explained and understood. With cool, logical detachment. In essence then, from this view point, we try to make sense of life by looking at our suffering from a distance. Which is why this doll, Doll Number Two, can use *punishing questions, explanations, and excuses for not punishing* as the route to understanding her suffering and wrongdoings. And the suffering and wrongdoings of others. All the while never realizing that to explore suffering with cool logical detachment means we can totally miss the more human, warm side of life.

A lot of cognitive behavioral therapies are Layer Two view points. Cool,

logical explanations for the suffering is life. And while they are indeed an improvement over the zoned out non existence of Doll Number One, nonetheless, at this point, we still have a great distance to travel before we reach healing. A journey which can only lead inward. One layer at a time.

Open the next doll and what do we have? *Time limited punishments*. Sounds worse, doesn't it? And in a way, it is. Thus, from this doll's view point then, injuries and wrongdoings should not be explained away. Rather, they should be punishable by some measure of temporary suffering. Jail sentences. Institutions. Not speaking to each other for a week. Anyway you cut it though, someone has to pay. At least temporarily. In other words, unlike Doll Number Two who thinks the way to deal with the suffering in the world is to look at it logically from a distance, Doll Number Three thinks this is avoiding the truth. And that when something painful happens, the wrong doer needs to suffer. Nothing permanent, mind you. But something painful nonetheless.

As for whether this is actually a step in the wrong direction, while many people would see these urges as less sane and civil, in truth, these folks are taking a step in the right direction. In the direction of being more honest and real about their suffering. Which is why this kind of opening up moves us closer yet to healing.

Open up the next doll and what do you see? You see inside of Doll Number Four. The doll of *eternal punishments*. Eternal punishments! Whoa! Sounds like insanity, doesn't it. It's not. And it's perfectly human to feel this way. As in, "you hurt my friend and you should burn in hell forever!" Whoa. Forever is a long time; yes?

Again, many people, including a whole lot of therapists, see this step forward as a step backward. Or at least as that people are getting less civilized. And more crazy. And they are. At the same time, honestly admitting we feel these kinds of feelings is a whole magnitude more truthful as far as what we really feel about having been injured. As in, we get injured. We act badly. Or at least, we feel urges to act badly.

The thing is, when a therapist gets us to the level of Doll Number Four, we are really making progress. Is it messy? Yes. And even a bit scary at times. After all, we don't know much about this side of ourselves. Why? Because we mostly spend life in Layer One or Two. Nice, calm, civil detachment. Pleasant, yes. But light years away from where we need to go to heal.

So yes, seeing this hell come out of us can be a real mind blower. This is what we really feel inside. "Maybe I don't really want to know." Still, this scary person is the real "wounded" us, and being more honest about what this feels like can only be a good thing. If, of course, we are talking about doing this in therapy and not out there in the real world.

What comes out of the next doll then? The *symptoms* themselves. Thus, from Doll Number Five's perspective, it is way past the time for making excuses and cutting remarks. Here, we cannot escape from the pain of our wounds. Life hurts. And because by now we have admitted that logic is nothing more than a band aid, we have no way, at this point, to imagine what is causing this pain. Nor do we really want to go back to using distancing logic. After all, this logic has already failed to help in a lasting way, and our heartfelt foxhole prayers have led us to here.

At this point then, we ask, "Why? Why me?"

Of course, if you understand how the actual nature of wounds and healing, you know that all this suffering has been leading us toward healing. And because we hurt so badly in the Layer of Symptoms, and because we know logic and punishment can't give us what we need, we realize we must dig deeper into ourselves, by opening up the next doll. Doll Number Six. Which is where we will find the real cause of all symptoms.

What really causes symptoms? To see, we need to open the next two dolls together. Doll Number Six, the doll containing our *visually blocked needs*. And Doll Number Seven, the doll of *unmet needs*.

What do we find if we look at how these two dolls fit together? It's simple really. We'll find the mechanism by which all symptoms get created. Visually blocked needs. In other words, if we cannot see a need we cannot meet it. Thus *blocked needs cause our symptoms*.

Does this sound too simple to be true? If so, then consider this. If you have a need, but cannot see you have it, what do you think will happen? Well obviously, if you cannot see a need, you will not meet it.

And if you do not meet a need for a long enough time, what will happen then? Of course, you'll see visible evidence for that this need is still unmet. The visible evidence we see? Why, our symptoms, of course.

Thus symptoms are the visible evidence for that we have unmet needs. Needs which we have not met because we have been unable to see them. And why haven't we been able to see these particular needs? Because we were once startled into blankness while in the presence of these needs, causing the energy of being startled to be associated with these needs. In essence, this renders us unable to see these needs because whenever we sense them, we relive the startle. Which makes us go blank and renders these needs invisible.

This then is the nature of what we are trying to heal in therapy. The programming which is contained in Doll Number Six. The nature of which is that we were once startled while in the presence of these particular needs, which programmed us to relive this startle whenever we feel these needs come up again.

Thus Doll Number Six contains this programming. And Doll Number Seven

contains our needs. And because Doll Number Five is inside of Doll Number Six, our visual access to these needs is blocked. Thus they remain unmet.

Doll Number Five then contains our symptoms. Why? Because Dolls Number Six is inside of Doll Number Five. Thus the entire nature of symptoms is that they are the visual evidence we have unmet needs.

Is this beginning to make sense? Symptoms are not wounds. They are only the visible evidence we have wounds. Which makes wounds more like holes in our ability to see our needs. And symptoms more like what we can see around these holes.

The thing is, if you know this, you realize that unless we see symptoms, we have no way to know we have these wounds. And if no one teaches us the nature of the actual wounds themselves, we mistake these symptoms for the wounds. Which, because they make us suffer, we feel the need to get rid of.

This then is why most talk therapies focus on helping people to get rid of symptoms. Why? Because symptoms are the suffering we can see. As opposed to our impaired visual abilities to see our unmet needs. Which is the actual source of this suffering.

Because symptoms cause us to suffer though, it seems only logical we should try to get rid of them. After all, if you get rid of these symptoms, you will feel much better. Right? The thing is, this kind of feeling better we get from symptom relief never lasts. Why not? Because all it accomplishes is that we get rid of the visible evidence we a wound. The wound still exists.

In the end then, therapies which focus on symptom relief actually make things worse. How? They act like a desert wind which buries the visible part of the trail. A trail which if followed could lead us to the real cause of these symptoms. An visually blocked need. Unfortunately, because human nature has programmed us to want pain relief more than healing, when we see our symptoms getting worse, we think our wounds are getting worse. They are not. But it sure feels this way.

Please know that I am not saying we should ignore our symptoms. In fact, symptom management is a necessary part of all healing work. Including talk therapy.

What makes it necessary? The fact that if you hurt too badly to focus in therapy, you cannot possibly endure the pain of opening up. This said though, the truth is, if your therapy does not make your symptoms get worse, then you have no way to know if you are on the right path. The path which, if followed to it's personal end, will eventually lead you to what has been causing your suffering. Visually blocked needs.

Now if you take a closer look at the three groups of open dolls in this chapter's diagram, what you'll see is a picture for what this process looks like, starting

with that the real work in healing occurs in just three dolls; Doll Number Five (symptoms), Doll Number Six (blocked visual abilities), and Doll Number Seven (needs).

Now if you look more closely at the doll group on the left, what you'll see is a picture for what it is like to have an injury. What is it like? As an experience, it is simply that there is a need we cannot see. Why not? Because we once experienced a mind emptying startle which left us programmed to go blank each time we relive this experience. Or anything close to this experience.

Thus, in the example I most frequently use, the wedding group picture flash camera startle, once the flash blinds us the first time, we, from then on, wince each time we anticipate the flash is about to go off. And by wince, I mean our minds go blank and our bodies tense. All this in anticipation of being blinded by the painful flash.

Moreover, this wincing happens even when the flash never goes off. It is from the first time on programmed into us to react like this. Even if we merely imagine it happening.

And the need beneath this that we do not take care of? In this case, it is to look away. You see, we cannot keep our eyes open and have a blinding light come at us. And in truth, we shouldn't submit to this. However, like many cultural behaviors, we see this as nothing harmful and mildly uncomfortable when in truth, this blocks our ability to look away from bright light for the rest of our lives. At least, to preemptively look away.

In a way then, when we get injured, we become defenseless and defensive. And even when we can bark at people to stop hurting us, we remain unable to put into words what our real need is. We simply cannot see it. And while we do remain capable of doing all the things the outer dolls can do (blame, punish, explain ourselves, etc.), none of these things ever address the real cause of our suffering. Even when they temporarily make us feel better.

At best then, unless we heal the startle which prevents us from seeing our needs, all we can do is to learn to better manage our symptoms. By learning more and better ways to blow sand over the symptoms.

Here then is what we are looking to address when we try to have a breakthrough. We are looking to address the startle response that being injured programs into us. Why? So that we restore our natural ability to see our needs. At least in this one area of life.

Making A Breakthrough

So what actually changes in us after we make a *breakthrough*? Before we look, I first want to ask you to consider how amazingly intuitive our language can be. What I'm saying is, so often, when we discover the true nature of some-

thing in human personality, in hind sight, we find that the words we have been using were more accurate than we ever imagined. Even though we had no real knowledge of what was happening.

Case in point. The word, *breakthrough*. We all know already that when we make a breakthrough, we have taken a significant step forward. After which, we feel and act better and different. Did you know though, before reading this, that these references to progress in talk therapy were literally true; that we literally do break through something?

What do we actually break through? Yes. I know. I've already told; the startle response. However, to get a more detailed picture for what actually happens, you'll need to take a look at what is different about the middle group of dolls (the after a breakthrough doll set) when compared to the left group of dolls (the before a breakthrough doll set).

What is different? We literally breakthrough an invisible wall in Layer Six, a startling blankness which got programmed into us during a painful event. This startling blankness literally creates a wall which blocks our visual access to some particular set of needs. Not logically, mind you. But visually. In other words, we may even know on paper what we need. But going blank prevents us from taking care of these needs.

What causes these blocks? As I've been saying, we got startled once. Which, when it happened, caused our minds to go blank and tense up.

Not too sure why you would go blank? Well think about it. Can you ever get startled without your mind going blank and without your body tensing up? Of course not. This is simply not possible. And if you've ever been startled by someone sneaking up behind you, then you know this. Your mind will empty and your body will tense up *even when you simply imagine this is happening*.

Another example would be the post car accident block. What I'm saying is, if, while driving a car, someone once cut you off, then a similar block will exist in your mind. And because this programming now exists in your mind, your mind will empty and your body will tense up *even if you only imagine being cut off*.

Of course, God forbid you've been injured this way and then this imagining happens to you while you are driving. Can you see how this could make you vulnerable to having another accident?

What makes the mind empty like this after being injured? It's simple really. Whenever we experience something which exceeds our capacity to consciously process, we go blank. At least, in that few split seconds of time. And this happens to us simply because we all have limits to what we can consciously take in. Which means we all are vulnerable to being startled. It's just a part of our nature.

The thing is, while it is part of our nature to be startled in these situations, being startled by merely imagining these situations is never normal. What I

mean is, while being startled is simply nature's way of protecting our minds, similar to how electrical fuses protect our homes, it's not normal for us to leave these fuses switched off after an overload. Which in a way is what happens to us after we get injured.

In a way then, being startled the first time blows a fuse in our minds. So badly in fact that this fuse gets damaged. After which it blows even when we imagine this kind of event.

The thing to realize here is that being startled is never a normal response *until after* we have been injured. Before this, we do not wince. And to see this as true, consider this. Consider how babies react when they get tossed into the air. How do they react? They laugh and ask for more.

Have this baby once be startled by falling though and this baby will tense up and go blank for the rest of his or her life. Every time he or she thinks it is going to happen again. Which then ends the possibility he or she will have fun being tossed into the air. Rendering them unable to enjoy things like amusement park rides, skiing, and tobogganing.

This then is how we get programmed by the startle in painful events. We get suddenly surprised by something we did not expect could overload our circuits. Which then programs us to expect this overload each and every time.

Notice the way I just phrased this sentence; *each and every time*. Thus, even picturing this overload might happen to us again will cause our bodies to tense up and our minds to go blank. Involuntarily. Against our will. Even if we never experience this kind of event again.

My main point here though is that we do not get startled by something unless and until we get injured by it. After which we relive this startle every time we imagine this event might happen. Which in essence means each and every time we picture whatever we saw right before the startle.

What about when we heal then? What changes in us when we make a breakthrough?

In essence, part of this startle response goes away. Roughly half of it, in fact. Which then allows us to see roughly half of whatever need this startle had been preventing us from seeing.

How does a breakthrough happen then? Essentially, the therapist gets us to slow the action down, right in the critical moments just after the startle. Once we play this part of the movie in slow motion then, we can see what actually happened right after this painful life event. The essence of which is that everything turned out okay. It wasn't nearly as bad as we thought it had been. All this the result of our being less startled by this event.

Know I've literally used this information to heal a wide variety of injuries in people, everything from PTSD to learning disabilities. For instance, some-

times people get startled watching horror movies. Which leaves the charge of this startle attached to something they saw in the movie. A shower curtain, for instance.

A shower curtain? Yes. A shower curtain. The shower scene from Hitchcock's movie, *Psycho*, remember? And lest you think this could not possibly cause anything significant to happen, consider this. I, at twelve, got injured by this scene and argued for my whole marriage against having a shower curtain. Abusively, no less. What did we have? A shower door.

In a way then, making a breakthrough is a lot like being shown how a slight of hand trick works. In other words, before the magician shows you how the trick is done, you get fooled every time. You literally get startled into blankness by your inability to follow what is happening. After he shows you how the trick is done though, by showing you the trick in slow motion, no matter how fast he does it, you will always see the trick. As it's being done.

This same thing is what happens to us when we make a breakthrough. We literally see the critical moments of the life event in slow motion. Which then removes the startle provoking overload. At which point you regain your visual access to whatever needs you were not addressing. Needs you never even knew existed. Things like speaking up for ourselves when we are being yelled at. Or not responding to things by yelling at people.

So does the whole block heal when we make a breakthrough? The bad news is, only about half of the startle goes away. Which means that about half of the needs we could not picture remain inaccessible. However, the good news is, because we can now see a part of what was startling us, we never hurt as badly again. And we also have an easier time healing the rest.

Now at the risk of you calling me, Mr. Redundant, I'd like to summarize these ideas for you. Please bear with me.

Having a wound is like having a wall in our mind. A wall of visual blankness which having been startled creates in us.

On the inside of this wall is a particular set of needs. And on the outside is what happens to us over time when we do not take care of these needs. The painful experiences we call *symptoms*.

When we make a breakthrough, what we break through is this wall of visual blankness. After which we can see about fifty percent of whatever needs had been previously blocked.

With each successive breakthrough then, we heal even more of this visual wall of blankness. And the math works out to be about half of whatever wall is left each time we heal.

Breaking through a wall of visual blankness. Sounds a lot like what we have been calling it. A *breakthrough*.

This Chapter's Session Notes

So does our suffering end after we make a breakthrough? The good news. A lot of it does. Forever, in fact. The thing is, being able to see what we have been needing to do for ourselves is no guarantee we will know how to do it. Thus, even when we do finally see our needs, we still need to learn how to meet them. And being as most of our injuries happen before age seven, learning how to take care of these kinds of needs often feels like you have been sent back to first grade. Or like you must start learning from scratch.

What about the third set of nesting dolls then. The part of the diagram all the way on the right? I'm afraid I've already given you too much to process. And rather than trying to pour more into a bowl that is already overflowing, I'd rather continue our discussion in the next chapter. After you've taken a good long break.

Now consider once more what I've just told you. A breakthrough heals about half of the startle present in an injury. Which then allows us to visually experience not only what happened in the aftermath immediately following the original event but also what we have been reliving. The thing which has been causing our symptoms. Our unmet needs. We also get to have a running start on healing the rest of this injury, and we'll breakthrough about half of whatever is left of this wall each time we therapeutically revisit it.

Even after only the first breakthrough though, we feel significantly better. A whole magnitude better. Why? Because we now know we can heal this injury. Which gives us hope and courage and strength.

We also begin to learn how to better take care of ourselves, and this too gives us more hope and courage and strength.

Of course, seeing these previously unmet needs then introduces a whole new kind of suffering into the picture. The neediness a baby feels when he or she does not know how to meet their needs let alone voice them. What do we need to do then? We have to learn to face a human beings worst fear of all. The fear of asking for help. Which is in many ways the thing we human being's fear the most. The most feared thing in the Universe in fact.

What makes this the most feared thing in the Universe? As usual with me, it's a long story.

Until the next chapter then.

I hope you are well,

Steven

