

I am successful in helping the person I am working with being that. There are times when I feel these understandings very strongly in myself and those are exciting and exhilarating times, and at those times I feel success in conveying that to the individual. At other times I am not quite there so I just do a mediocre job of conveying that, or unfortunately I just have to rely on the words rather than the substance. I know this to be my life work.

I: Since we are now conducting an interview rather than therapy, some further words from you would be very much to the point. Would you insert a little mini-lecture here on what all this is about? Expand a little bit about your understanding of being here and what it is all about?

A: Your question produces in me excitement. It produces within me at this moment an excitement without content. At this moment I feel my mind and my intellect to be relatively blank, I feel comfortable enough in this situation to be largely accepting of this. There is a sense that I have at this moment of not wanting to push or pull at anything in order to go anywhere or prove anything. I am a lot more comfortable at this moment at allowing what seems to feel like I could call it a nothingness a relatively blank period. There is some embarrassment which I am largely accepting

I: Thus far it is a model demonstration of serving your present state of mind without pushing yourself to produce, however admirable the fact that nothing is coming, I still would wish for a little mini lecture what is your theoretical understanding of this issue of

A: It is rather self contradictory isn't it.

I: How so?

A: If I truly allow myself to have my now, you are asking me to verbalize it and to make formulations about it is not fitting in terribly well with my now. I can appreciate that this is not satisfying to you because you have some purpose in mind.

I: I only know that that your life has been deeply touched by the formulations about enlightenment and the way to enlightenment the way IT is, some formulations about reality from this modern guru regarded as another Ramana Maharshi of our time, so I would ask what those beliefs are, you were being very true to them by living them rather than talking about them, but I suppose some of this can be formulated and passed onto the reader of a book about gestalt as something to have in mind as relevant.

A: I have to begin by saying I feel frustration in undertaking this. The major point seems to be that ego is an illusion that in some meaningful sense Abe does not exist. Abe is a constellation of conceptualizations which interfere with living fully. One of the ways it interferes right now for instance is a very powerful impulse on my part to stop the god darn tape because I am aware the tape is going and it produces in me on the one hand a wish to comply with your request to make some formulations about the enlightenment process referred to. It is also true that the frustration I am having at this moment is characteristic not

only at this moment but happens over and over to me because it is the nature of the my struggle with these ideas. I do not know to what extent it is relevant; it seems relevant to me but you know I have given several presentations on this subject that I call explorations in mysticism. Today is something like April 24 1988, let us see what we have here ... oddly enough and frustrating enough I do not find it possible to give these lectures by myself... Each time I have begun, and its been twice, I have another lecture coming up this week, each time I have done it I find it necessary to copresent with this friend and colleague of mine, Steve, who seems to have gone considerably further in exploring these matters and who has gone much deeper into these experiences. So what happens is that with him by my side as he recalls these experiences and refers to them something in me is so awakened that I become interestingly enough a more facile expositor and theoretician about these things but in order to do it I need him.

I: In the same way that you like to work best in coleading groups.

A: Yes, there is a striking parallel there. There is a frustration and it gets on my nerves and I think rightly so; there is some stuck point in myself and I like to think that as my development continues and my understanding deepens I will indeed be able to do more and more of the gestalt work and the presentation of these ideas by myself as I assimilate them more deeply and I feel more at home with them. But that is where I am now.

I: You have said the most important thing, you did not need many words to say that you believe individuality doesn't exist, that the ego doesn't exist. It is an old idea, it is a central tenet of Buddhism; and Krishnamurti has been a very original presenter of this idea as a way out. I understand being fascinated by a metaphysical truth, particularly when this is formulated by somebody who has a gut-experience of it. I wonder what it has done to your work. Does this sense of the reality of egolessness, of the illusion of the I, is this something that has applied to your way of working with other people?

A: I believe it has. I sure as hell wish I could do a better job of demonstrating it, of being expository about it. A little example comes to mind of my saying to someone no so long ago; after all, every experience that we have is only another opportunity for self-discovery and for self-knowledge.

I: In other words to the extent that you have been working yourself in understanding yourself moment after moment there has been some kind of contagion in the invitation to others not only to be aware of their perceptions and emotions, but to develop a subtler awareness of what it is to be present.

A: That is enviably well put.

I: If you envy my words I envy your willingness not to fake your lack of words. I am admiring how exemplary you are being in not filling up the space with intellectual brilliance, and certainly you have read many books and heard many lectures and worked a lot and could do it but you are being very loyal and speaking out of your gut.

- A: True, it is a loyalty that is accompanied by a touch of chagrin.
- I: It reminds me of some lecture by Erv Polster that I did not attend but Jim Simkin told me: how on one occasion he stood up in an audience to lecture and said "I realize I have nothing to say to you". And that was it. I think it is through actions like that that the gestalt spirit is being carried forward.
- A: It is a beautiful story. One of the things that it illustrates in my opinion is the kind of courage that it takes to step out of the ordinary social conventions. It is not an easy matter after all if one has been asked to give a public talk to reach such state of momentary authenticity and honesty and to defy convention at that moment and say although my assignment on this program is to give you a talk and to say something and to illuminate your understanding. At this moment the more important thing for me is authentic being and my authentic being at this moment is silence.
- I: Well you certainly did the same, except for a few words that were really enough to bring the issue into the printed page.
- A: This is in some ways funnier than I could have anticipated.
- I: What do you think is missing, that you would like to add to this interview?
- A: What I would like to add is this. I relish those moments when I am working as a therapist and listening to whatever conflict or struggle or pain or sense of deprivation that the patient is expressing at a given moment; I relish those moments when I can sit and listen, with the feeling that I have known those kinds of pain, I have experienced them, I have had a degree of success in confronting those problems and to some extent resolving them, and in my way of just sitting and listening and being with the person to, in some way, transmit that feeling of confidence that no matter what the pain, no matter what the confusion there may be a way out. And when one does that genuinely, naturally there is a great power to that.
- I: I am interested in your having said "naturally". Do you set out to do such a thing or does the very fact that you are confident that a person will get over the pain just as you did, do it? There is also in that a kind of wordless contagion. It can be amplified by words but what does it, I think, is the experience itself, of trusting the other person.
- A: Words can help, there are many times when I say "I appreciate how badly you feel at this moment" and I somehow sense, "this is my best judgement, that working together we can find our way out of this pit"... But one also needs to avoid the trap of arrogance. It's all very well to offer hope in one's demeanor, but to suggest, even indirectly, that all is resolvable, is shallow and not honest.
- I: I find that very useful to hear for I tend to under-acknowledge, under-express. What you just said sounds so ordinary, but still I can appreciate it as a gem of a therapeutic technique, which works when it is not merely a technique but the expression of lived truth. Anything else?
- A: Only the sense sense which I think I have come close to expressing, as we have talked that 15 minutes or 60 minutes from now, I will remember a lot of fine

things I might have said. What I sense at the moment is that the way you say "anything else" suggests that perhaps our little talk is coming to an end, somehow I don't want it to end.

1. I said "anything else" because I saw you absorbed in thought, not in the sense of having concluded a statement, but while I was saying it I felt uncomfortable about those particular words. I remembered the joke that once Jim Simkin told me about a jewish lady who says "what's new?" Her friend replies, " I am growing a pennis", and lifts her skirt to show her. The other lady says "hummm" and then "what else is new?"

GIDEON

It surprises me that having become acquainted with Gideon Schwarz quite late in my career as gestalt therapist that he has played such an important role in my development as a gestaltist. I think I can safely say that our relationship has been unique for each of us. I suppose primarily we've been buddies. For my tastes, there haven't been enough guys around whom I could phone and say let's hang out, take a walk, have a coffee. Usually getting together involves some purpose or project and is quite time-limited. Fortunately we both like to dawdle so the hours can while away.

A paper of mine on "The Fear of Happiness" fell into his hands and he phoned to say he liked it. That led to lunch and gradually into being mutual therapists. It's not as if the friendship were totally smooth sailing. A number of bumps. But certainly we've done each other a world of good in getting thru some of life's scrapes.

There are probably few gestalt therapists left whose work is as "pure gestalt" as that of Frits and Jim. Most of us have opted for combining it with approaches from other schools. Gideon's is pure. I'm reminded of a technique which I urge on my students. I ask them to "work without a program", i.e., there's no particular problem or conflict which demands attention. You just start from where you are, you share your present-moment experience, and surprisingly you're off to the races. Amazing uncoverings, recognitions, appreciations, understandings of "being" commonly occur.

And that spirit characterizes much of Gideon's gestalt work. It must be that his interest and delight in just observing what a person is doing constitutes a rich canvas for him. So there is little need for inquiry, for background, for history, etc. All of us gestaltists "know" this, but it's another matter to feel deeply at home with this and to have no need to "lean" on other sources of material. Perhaps this

notion of "at home" with the bare behavior and being of the client best describes Gideon's forte. As if to say that any morsel thoroughly chewed will release a lot of nourishment. So like jam, he is masterful at observation and extremely creative at designing appropriate roles, exercises, scenarios. As a result, his work often develops into imaginative dramas which resemble Fritz's work.

Here's what happened with me one time: I think I was working on my intellectual striving, my need to be smart. He suggested that I let my lower jaw go slack and talk like the village idiot. I threw myself into it with a will. With amazing suddenness I stopped, mentioning to him that I needed to be quiet. What had happened was that inexplicably I found myself in outer space, zooming among the stars and planets. It was uncanny, inexplicable; at first exhilarating, then scary, lonely. "What if I make a joke and there's no one to laugh?" To my everlasting, everlasting chagrin I took myself out of this fantasy and "reported" what had been going on. Gideon's face grave, his manner serious, quiet. I felt terrible that I had not "stayed with" this experience and plumbed it thoroughly. I had seriously cheated myself. I forget Gideon's words, but they were to the effect that this was too serious for mere words. He was right. And his forbearance to comment, to ask, to explain was a fine reflection of his appreciation of the "sacredness" of my experience. So this man who is a teacher, who has great facility with words and abstractions, who so much enjoys talking was, on this occasion, silent so as not to dilute my experience, not to criticize my self-interruption, not to take the focus off me. Often I have felt his good taste and judgment expressed in his not-saying. I have learned from this.

FRITZ: his character and his legacy

When I am asked about Fritz's MOST basic legacy, so many things come to mind that it is a challenging task to choose. Interestingly what comes forward for me is a statement of his at a workshop about how deeply satisfying it was for him to "watch formerly dead people come to life and be real". Elaborating on that he would point out -- at times when peoples' juices were flowing and fights might easily be ignited -- "When everyone does his thing, the sparks are sure to fly." And that summarizes a great deal about him. He was so charismatic that in his presence sparks were sure to fly. And yet this same scrappy fighter, seated at the dinner table in the evening at Esalen, the sun low in the sky and reflecting in his blue eyes -- I recall the many times when friends and I would gaze at that face from a distance of several tables away -- and gasp with pleasure and awe at the melting softness that we saw there. This movement, this fluidity was well-expressed by a favorite saying of his. ~~Apparently~~ With his hand open he'd say, "This is not a hand"; with his fist closed he'd say "This is not a hand"; "THIS (alternately opening and closing his hand) is a hand."

In my memorial tribute to him shortly after his death, I quipped that I wouldn't know where to send this message, because characteristically he would be "shuttling" back and forth between the "two places".

"Growth and excitement" was the subtitle of his major work. The struggle between growth forces and forces of stagnation, between positive and negative, between life and death was certainly basic in his system and is even represented by his own drawing of life and death interpenetrating -- a drawing which appears on an early edition of his autobiography. Now there is no great originality in this. Freud has his Eros and Thanatos; Jung has his individuation and the ~~the~~ forces

of the shadow. But -- and here may be the crux of the matter -- there is a world of difference between telling an exciting story, or listening to an exciting story versus being an exciting story. And here is the existential component of Fritz's contribution. You don't get much nourishment out of eating a menu. And Fritz got his dander up at observing the whole field of psychoanalysis busily eating menus, albeit those menus contained unquestionably gourmet items. His genius, his insistence, his passion for bringing the individual into the living moment -- with that food to chew on you could easily see that the menu was slim pickings.

As an example of creativity and spontaneity in action, I would like to recount an incident which has escaped mention among the myriad colorful tales about Fritz. There were some fifteen of us sitting in a circle as usual in his house. He suggested that we could here and now produce a group poem by simply focussing on present experience, by giving some attention to the rhythm of our words, by saying a few lines and passing the ball to the next person. It seemed a terribly daring thing to do -- it might easily fall flat as a pancake. But we took up the challenge and as the lines were passed from person to person, the room took on the sacred feeling of a cathedral. I remember saying "...and now I feel I cannot prose.." Lastly Fritz took his turn. His face and voice took on that meltingly soft quality I've referred to and I can remember only his final words: "...and konking out with love."

There it is; it speaks for itself. But I can't help asking (rubbing it in?), "Can we imagine Freud or Jung or Klein or Kohut taking part in such a drama with ^{their} ~~his~~ students?"

In the history of psychotherapy there is no reason to believe that Fritz Perls will achieve anything like the eminence of Freud or Jung. But this very fact is a reflection of a tragic pattern which has become unconsciously imprinted in the modern soul, namely the separation of intellect from action and feeling. Fritz's message claimed that this was a far more serious illness than we knew. Thus when it came to providing a model of a vital, dynamic, 3-dimensional person, all of the psychoanalytic community would have done well to study at his feet.

JIM SIMKIN

Jim was deservedly loved and valued for many qualities even though there was something about him which tempted one to poke fun at him. I think it was his rabbinical aura of authority, of having the last word, of a certain ponderousness. But he was no one's fool, and once when a group member furiously accused him of being pompous he arose and trumpeted, "But I am pompous."

Fascinatingly, with this kind of honesty he could not get "stuck" in his work with a client. For if he were stuck, he'd simply and disarmingly say so, and then the very "stuckness" became the figure and --with beautiful paradox -- the excitement and interest of the moment. Now the stuckness or dilemma might or might not get resolved, but either way the spark of honest-to-goodness vitality was right there. And if the work went slowly or even "nowhere", so be it, it wasn't his job to pump blood into the participant but -- as he liked to describe himself -- to be a mid-wife helping the individual to find and pump his own lifeblood.

His powers of observation were legendary, his memory for nuances of verbal expression quite extraordinary. A seemingly innocent question such as "What do you experience in your left hand?" might well lead to a complex exploration which would unearth central themes of the psyche and -- to everyone's surprise -- release strong hitherto buried feelings.

Like his mentor, Fritz, Jim could be very tough and very tender. Personally I was often put off by what I felt to be his over-readiness to ^{be} righteously exasperated. But, looking back, I'd have to acknowledge it was authentic, spontaneous, and --having gotten it out of his system -- he could move past it.

I remember a particular bit of unabashed tenderness on his part which few men would permit themselves. A middle-aged psychiatrist was feeling regressed and mentioned ~~it~~ a fantasy of sitting in

Jim's lap. Without the slightest hesitancy, with total willingness, Jim spread wide his arms, indicating beyond the shadow of a doubt that his lap was there for the using. The client was inhibited and backed down. Jim sadly --and acceptingly -- shrugged, implying unmistakably, "You've unfortunately cheated us both of a fine moment." It was that kind of warmth, that kind of solidity, that depth of humanity for which he was more than loved; he was revered. And it is a part of the Jim Simkin phenomenon, in my view, that the reverence he kindled was sort of surprising. Because he ^{was} not extraordinary as a person. He was pretty much an ordinary guy. But so very very much an ordinary guy.

And so when I did a little piece about him for his "Festschrift" it was a damn good feeling to entitle it "My Friend Jim".

David Paul Jones

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