

TOXIC AVERSION TO REALITY
By Richard Jones

The e-mail from my friend is long and disturbing. About 3 months after the death of her mother, my friend has developed a particularly nasty cancer. It's her second cancer scare in the last 10 years. Although her doctors give her a 20% chance of beating this one through traditional cancer-fighting methods, she, true to her unconventional spirit, is determined to go a different route.

She is seeing a Naturopathic doctor to address diet and supplement concerns. She is going to a psychotherapist to try to access the offending issues from her past. She is visiting psychics and medical intuitives. She is practicing Qi Gong.

And then, for me, the kicker: midway through her long health update, which she has sent to many friends and family as an ongoing, inspirational diary of her process, she asserts that although she has been diagnosed with a dis-ease, she is not sick. And this is where it gets interesting.

Because, of course, she *is* sick. And while her attempt to re-frame her situation in a positive way seems well intentioned, even laudable, beneath its socially sanctioned veneer lies a deep reality that is not being seen; a reality that the statements in her health update are trying to hide.

The truth is she is sick with a disease that could kill her.

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Very often, we in North America use techniques of positive thinking to mask over our problems, much like the mother in the Australian movie *Strictly Ballroom* who, in the face of all her personal problems, announces again and again, more and more desperately each time, that she has her happy face on today. This is positive thinking gone crazy. It is thinking that is actually keeping her *away* from reality. This is where I think my friend has gotten misdirected.

Linguistic gymnastics is very common today, of course -- from the real estate ad that characterizes the sagging foundation and leaky roof as a handyman's special, to the self improvement guru who asserts that you don't have a problem, you have an opportunity! And with everyone from Oprah to late-night Anthony Robbins infomercials to Michael Jordan and Dr. Phil singing its praises, you'd think it was pretty much a done deal: thinking positively, re-framing your negative think into positive think, developing a can-do attitude, is the only way to go.

But according to the landmark research being conducted at the Institute of Integral Psychoanalysis in São Paulo, Brazil (where I am studying for the next 2 years), the *reality* of our situations must be seen in order to truly solve -- not just bury -- the problem. An optimistic attitude that covers over and helps us avoid seeing the actual problems in our lives is deluded and even dangerous. To use a rather mundane example, if your house is on fire, it's not an effective strategy to console yourself with the fact that there are still some rooms that are not burning.

My friend has gotten sucked in to a tantalizing trap. Simply re-framing her situation in an attempt at neuro-linguistic reality shifting is creating a delusional state that is

separating her from the reality she needs in order to solve the problem. The reality is she is sick. Saying she's not sick will actually *hurt* her chances of recovery, not help.

What Dr. Norberto Keppe, the great Brazilian social scientist, psychoanalyst and founder of Integral Psychoanalysis, has discovered is that we actually have an aversion to seeing the reality of our situations because we all conduct a struggle against the consciousness that our situations bring to us.

*Psychological and organic (physical) symptoms are really a type of perception that arises to prod us to pay attention to what is happening in our life. And yet, incredible as it may seem, a veritable arsenal of medicines and hospital procedures have been created precisely to hide what these physical and psychological symptoms are trying to reveal. As a result, consciousness – the most important element in life – is eliminated.*¹

Add to this arsenal the myriad rationalizations and convoluted explanations we use to explain our situations and you have quite a brew of things that leads us away from the consciousness about what is really going on in our lives. Keppe is non-equivocal about this:

*We become ill precisely because we do not accept consciousness – which also brings us awareness of wrong attitudes and problems. We have therefore created tremendous opposition to wisdom and understanding, with the result that human beings and the society they have built have become sick and riddled with flaws because of faults they are unwilling to see. I can say without a shadow of a doubt that pathology, illness, is the attitude of opposing consciousness.*²

Many times, we use positive thinking or affirmations or re-shaping our thinking or mouthing platitudes and homilies (remember Annette Bening in *American Beauty* – *I WILL SELL THIS HOUSE TODAY?*) to layer over the deeper causes of our problems and anxieties and crises. This is a recipe for disaster.

We get nowhere by avoiding our problems, even by such omnipresent methods as positive thinking. Repressed or avoided difficulties have a habit of jumping up and biting us in the rear later on. And the bite can be painful. As Keppe puts it:

*Unwillingness to become aware of problems is an attitude that causes damage to the individual and to society, making both vulnerable to the problems they do not want to see.*³

And with the seriousness of the life-threatening problems we are facing – and my dear friend is facing in a direct and personal way – we owe it to ourselves to listen to what Keppe has to say.

References:

1. *The Origin of Illness*, Norberto M. Keppe, Campbell Hall Press 2002, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey
2. *IBID*
3. *IBID*

The Origin of Illness is available at www.analyticaltrilogy.com or by calling (201) 541-8595
