

# The Other Side of the Story

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## Abstract

**This article considers “the other side of the story” from a historical and social-psychological perspective. Specifically, it describes how our inability to digest the Holocaust continues to influence present-day history in Europe and the Middle East. The author discusses how stories, lies, and propaganda can shape our understanding of reality and demonstrates how telling our stories and listening to those of others can enhance understanding and communication. Elements of a dialogic psychotherapy are presented with wider implications for life as dialogue.**

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## How Stories Change

Did you know that two thirds of all Germans born after World War II believe that the older members of their families were either victims of the Nazis or heroes and resistance fighters?

Professor Harald Welzer (2001a, 2001b) published these findings in

a research project of the psychology department at the University of Hannover on the transmission of historical awareness. The project focuses on how German families talk about the Nazi era and which images and ideas about the Third Reich are passed in conversation from one generation to the next. The . . . interviews . . . show that today’s grandchildren are as well informed about the Nazi era as anyone could wish.

The problem is not lack of knowledge, but the way that knowledge is transmitted. Documents, photographs and figures are used to prove that the National Socialists were criminals, the Jews were victims and

the Holocaust was the greatest crime mankind ever committed. But things come across quite differently in the families: The Nazis were other people; one’s own family always opposed them. The Holocaust was terrible, but one did not know any Jews anyway; and if one did, they had “left the country.” If they stayed, one had helped, protected and hid them. . . .

The way most people steadfastly maintain that they did not approve of the persecution of Jews and knew nothing about their extermination is interesting enough. Even more remarkable is the way that grandchildren turn their grandparents’ stories into tales of opposition and heroism, even when they have been told something quite different. (Welzer, 2001a, paragraphs 3-5)

The study contains many . . . stories which get so distorted as they are passed from generation to generation that anti-Semites turn into resistance fighters and Gestapo officers into people who protected Jews. (paragraph 9)

The cause of these surprising findings is paradoxical: It is precisely the fact that the grandchildren have been told about the past. The very knowledge that National Socialism was a criminal system generates the urge to position one’s own grandpa and grandpa within that system of horror as people who either had nothing to do with it all or, better still, as people who never tired of doing what they could to alleviate suffering. That is also true of those youngsters who are particularly well-informed. “That my grandfather could have been a part of all those things exceeds my powers of imagination.”

From a psychological point of view, knowledge of history here clashes with the obligations of loyalty that families instill in their members. Second, the image of one’s grandfather, whom one usually knows as a lovable, caring and harmless

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*This article was originally presented as a paper at the German Transactional Analysis Association [DGTA] Conference in May 2002 and again at the NVT/AEATA/ITAA Conference in Utrecht, The Netherlands, in July 2002*

individual, gets projected onto his entire life. He must always have been the way we know him now. Third, the image of the Third Reich that is transmitted in families is quite different from that taught in schools. Family memories mainly revolve around how the Germans had to suffer—from the war, the bombs, imprisonment, terror and being spied on. In families, these themes are passed on, not as historical knowledge, but as personal truths.

Thus the image of the National Socialist era generated in families is like a parallel universe alongside the facts of history taught in schools. The process whereby anti-Semitic grandparents are transformed into resistance fighters in the eyes of their grandchildren is known in the research as “cumulative heroization.” (paragraphs 10-12)

The situation in Germany today is a good example of both integration and dissociation: The historical facts are integrated as general knowledge and are at the same time dissociated with regard to a person’s own family. In other words, the historical facts are in Adult awareness, while the “family facts” in the Parent ego state are quite different.

I think that this process started immediately after the war, when the Allies settled their accounts with the losers: A few prominent perpetrators were tried in some exemplary trials—such as those in Nürnberg and Frankfurt—while the remaining Germans were “denazified,” which amounts to the complete whitewashing of that whole generation. Therefore, many people did not really have to deal with what happened. In this way, German postwar society was divided into perpetrators and victims. The perpetrators were excluded—one dissociated from them, and it was suggested that they must have been in some way inhuman—while all the others were decent Germans. A little while later, Hannah Arendt (1963/1994) postulated “the banality of evil” in her report on the Eichmann trial to show how ordinary citizens became perpetrators by following orders. Either way, evil was dissociated, both in its banal and its monstrous forms.

The shame of Germans over what they had done was too great: How could a father tell his

son that only a few years earlier he had joined in the racial madness of the crowds and that in blind obedience had participated in the planned extermination of a whole people? Instead, perpetrators, followers, and bystanders preferred to justify their behavior with comments such as, “We did not know, these were hard times, we were ourselves victims, we were starved, we were in fear of terror and in danger,” and so on. No real working through occurred for most of the German people.

And this, I believe, is one of the reasons for the renewed rise of the extreme Right in Europe, with a potential for fascism: People did not truly reflect on what they had done, seen, or decided not to see during the World War II era. In this way the old unresolved past is coming up again, because most people have not personally dealt with “the other side of their story.”

In 1959 Adorno showed how Nazism had intensified a collective narcissism beyond measure. Although the Nazi regime was eventually replaced, of course, the old identifications and collective narcissism of the Nazi era have never been destroyed. They continue to exist in secret and out of people’s awareness. This unconscious existence heightens their effect (Adorno, 1959/1971, p. 19).

The Middle East is also being caught up by the shadow of Europe’s past: Dan Bar-On, professor of psychology at Beer-Sheva University in Israel, has shown how the Zionist movement in its early days created the image of the Israeli hero as an antithesis to the persecuted European Jew. Bar-On (2000/2001) writes that Israelis were supplied with a “recruited identity” (p. 112) in which there were no provisions for weakness and suffering. Soldiers needed to be sure of victory and to have no doubts about themselves or their mission. This recruited identity demanded that the traumatizations from the Jewish diaspora had to be denied, which, according to Bar-On, explains why “a society which consisted mainly of refugees, was able to ignore the fate of their fellow (Arab) refugees for so long: They were perceived as a threat to their own independent existence” (p. 226). Bar-On further speculates that Jews in Israel “partially shifted their internalized and held-back aggressions from

the Nazi period (and previous persecutions) towards the Palestinians” (p. 225). This would indicate that there is a “direct interaction between the unresolved German-Jewish conflict of the past and the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict of the present” (p. 226). In a similar way, Bar-On thinks that “the Palestinian violence during the long conflict with the Israeli Jews also reflects a shifted aggression, which was internalized during previous phases of suppression and humiliation by external powers (the Turks, the British, and other Arab countries)” (p. 228).

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Jews and the Palestinians do not understand and get on with each other. They do not grasp the effect of the other side of the story: not of their own story and not of the others’ story. Instead, they each remain caught up in a monolithic identity in which they are only able to see themselves as good and the others as evil. As long as people are caught up in a monolithic structure, they are bound to become “prisoners of hate” (Beck, 1999), incapable of seeing and feeling the other side of the story.

### Stories, Lies, and Propaganda

Prisons of hate are constructed by skillful demagogues, some of whom may be necrophiliacs in the way described by Jacobs (1991). I would even speculate that their necrophilia indirectly contributes to their success. Since the nature of their perversion is so repulsive, they are often masters of covering up their hidden agendas; they are masters of deception. And it is the covering-up process that leads them to be so successful. Demagogues know how to persuade underprivileged crowds to join their destructive movements. These seducers know that, above all, people need to belong, need a meaning and a sense of purpose. Hoffer (1951/1989) wrote, “Hitler knew that the chief passion of the frustrated is ‘to belong’ ” (p. 42) and that “the permanent misfits can find salvation only in a complete separation from the self; and they usually find it by losing themselves in the compact collectivity of a mass movement” (p. 47). “No faith is potent unless it is also faith in the future. . . . They know how to preach hope” (p. 9). Staub (1989) summed up this process: Mass movements provide

“doctrines and promises that offer hope, a vision and a sense of significance“ (p. 237).

History is full of examples in which demagogues found followers who marched to their own destruction with great enthusiasm. How is this possible? Demagogues usually employ the same tricks. Seeing through those tricks is also an important aspect of understanding the other side of the story. This is why the role of deception, lies, and propaganda must be addressed.

Hoffer (1951/1989) showed how demagogues systematically glorify death:

It is only when we see ourselves as actors in a staged (and therefore unreal) performance that death loses its frightfulness and finality and becomes an act of make-believe and a theatrical gesture. It is one of the main tasks of a real leader to mask the grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or light-hearted dramatic performance. . . . Hitler dressed eighty million Germans in costumes and made them perform in a grandiose, heroic and bloody opera. . . . In the practice of mass movements, make-believe plays perhaps a more enduring role than any other factor. (pp. 66-67)

I want to illustrate this with a few current examples. On 7 April 2002 the German newspaper *Neue Zuercher Zeitung* reported on the aging man of Palestine, Yasser Arafat:

In the past few years, the myth that the talented storyteller and actor Arafat had created about himself was more and more destroyed. Arafat’s real name is actually Mohammed Abderrahman al-Kudwa; he adopted the new name at the beginning of his political engagement. For years Arafat claimed that he was born in Jerusalem in 1929; then the French author Christophe Boltanski discovered that Arafat was born in Cairo, where his father was a successful textile merchant. . . . Therefore, Arafat’s family did not belong to those who had to flee or who were expelled during the war of 1948. He also did not come from the noble Hussaini family, as many a biographer likes to claim. (Bergmann, 2002, p. 28)

Arafat is a master of make-believe when he leads hopeless and disenfranchised young people to believe that they are being martyrs for their country: “Behind him one could see his usual entourage, next to him his gun. In his usual mixture of courage, theatrical talent and real concern for his people, Arafat declared that he was ready to die as a martyr” (Bergmann, 2002, p. 28).

Of course there is also no lack of propaganda from the Israeli side, and it is only when the propaganda on both sides is replaced by a true and sincere dialogue that a real peace process can evolve.

Osama Bin Laden is also a maestro of show business. On 11 September he and his followers engineered a carefully orchestrated horror show, with phenomenal viewing figures and maximal effect.

Again, I want to quote Hoffer (1951/1989): “The quality of ideas seems to play a minor role in mass movement leadership. What counts is the arrogant gesture, the complete disregard of the opinion of others, the single-handed defiance of the world. Charlatanism of some degree is indispensable to effective leadership” (p. 116). This is exactly what Charlie Chaplin (1940) ridiculed so brilliantly in his film *The Great Dictator*.

But how can one deal with this side of the story? Can one enter into a dialogue with a fanatic, with a psychopath? Is it possible to enter into a dialogue with such individuals on their side of the story?

Hoffer (1951/1989) thought that this was not possible because the true believer “cannot be convinced but only converted” (p. 86). Rather, the fanatic is not in touch with himself, he has given himself up to find meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging by symbiotically connecting with his fellow believers. He

hungers for the deep assurance which comes with total surrender—with the wholehearted clinging to a creed and a cause. What matters is not the content of the cause but the total dedication and communion with a congregation. He is even ready to join in a holy crusade against his former holy cause, but it must be a genuine crusade—uncompromising, intolerant, proclaiming the one and only truth. (p. 87)

### Dialogue with the Other Side

There is, however, a good deal that we can do before fanaticism sets in, and we must strive to do everything possible so that politics produce good realities and “stories” that meet people’s needs, fears, and dreams. Good stories, however, while built on historical truth, contain a hate-free vision and are based on “prosocial value concepts” (Blumenthal, 1999, p. 149). Good stories include others and further diversity. What we need, therefore, is an integrative approach to the other side of the story.

One interesting and relevant approach is the TRT process (“To Reflect and Trust”), which was started by Dan Bar-On (cited by Gruendler, 2002). This is a process of dialogue in which people work with the method of “story-telling.” At first, children of Holocaust victims and children of perpetrators went to these groups. In later years, Palestinians were also included. Each participant told his or her personal life story to the group while the others listened and then gave feedback. Miriam K., a young Israeli woman who was a descendent of Holocaust victims, described her experience this way:

“When the first Palestinian talked about his life, his past and the painful reality of his present life in the West Bank, I noticed I was defensive. I felt embarrassed, shocked and annoyed. . . .” [Later,] she told her story again, but this time she felt her identity as victim beginning to crumble: “When the next Palestinian spoke, something in me changed. It was another story about persecution, fear and unbearable degradation. I could not believe what I heard. How could this happen? The more I heard, the more I shocked I became. I was ashamed to be a Jew. I could not bear the thought that my Jewish countrymen inflicted so much pain and were so gruesome to these people. I wanted to defend their actions, to explain that it was part of the Israeli need for security to protect themselves against terrorism. But I could not even convince myself that these reasons were good enough. I was exhausted and wished I were somewhere else. . . .” Miriam K. and her partners in the dialogue, one of whom

was Sami Adwan [a Palestinian], experienced, by listening to one another, expressing and enduring one's own pain together, the growth of a new mutual understanding. "As the days passed and we heard more and more terrible stories from both sides, I felt that the walls (were) beginning to tumble. We cried together, comforted one another, and it felt as though we were building bridges." However, this understanding was still extremely fragile, and it seemed threatened when a Palestinian woman questioned whether the Holocaust had ever happened. Then Martin Bormann, a believable witness, told his story: The Palestinians were evidently spell-bound. The whole situation seemed unreal: Jews tried convincing Palestinians about the meaning and truth of the Holocaust while the son of a notorious Nazi perpetrator gave the facts. More than a year after the TRT-dialogue in Hamburg, Miriam K. describes what she had felt at the time: "Once again my view of the world was shattered. In my opinion, Jews were always the victims, but I don't believe this any longer. The workshop in Hamburg had catapulted me out of this victim category and I had to find a new place for myself. I am grateful to our conflict group for the courage and openness it showed in sharing its pain." (Gruendler, 2002, paragraphs 14-16)

In this way, a productive dialogue became possible.

A similar process of dialogue is practiced in South Africa's "Healing of Memory Process:" Perpetrators and victims encounter each other in the protected framework of a workshop. Each tells his or her story, because "every South African has a story to tell about the apartheid years. It is the story of what we did, of what was done to us and what we failed to do" (Kayser, 2001, paragraph 50). Perpetrators, victims, and bystanders have the opportunity to tell their stories, express their feelings, apologize, and experience forgiveness. This process is for the benefit of all parties: Perpetrators and victims work together from a perspective of a "common humanity" (paragraph 93). This process thereby differs distinctly from legal procedures in which offenders are being punished and excluded from the rest of humanity—or even executed.

These are models that integrate the other side of a story into our lives. They help us to deal with both sides of the story—with rather than against one another. The process of dialogue changes our perception. We see the other differently. Our identities are no longer rigid and monolithic; they become dynamic, dialogic.

Martin Buber (1923/1996) described this phenomenon in his book *I and Thou* as follows:

The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude.

The attitude of man is twofold in accordance with the two basic words he can speak.

The basic words are not single words but word pairs.

One basic word is the word pair I-You.

The other basic word is the word pair I-It. . . .

Thus the I of man is also twofold.

For the I of the basic word I-You is different from that in the basic word I-It. (p. 53)

When we regard identity as a dialogic phenomenon, then we no longer maintain a static image of the other. We do not see him or her as an object, but as a person with whom we are speaking or dealing. We are fellows; we are with one another and not enemies. We share our common humanity. We do not regard another people as a monolithic block. When we are in a relationship, we cannot see ourselves as goodness personified and the others as an embodiment of evil. When we enter into a dialogue with the other, when we speak with—not at or against—him or her, then a dialogue begins that can change both parties.

As mentioned before, the factual-historic and pedagogic transmission of information is not enough. The personal stories need to be worked through to be integrated. This is possible in a dialogue with one another; integration of the other side of the story is unlikely to succeed in systems designed to function against one another. There is little use in dealing with the facts from a position of vengeance, such as was the case when American lawyers filed class-action suits against Swiss banks in a highly self-righteous manner. The objects of these claims felt shamed, compensated their shame into national pride, and behaved defensively, which in turn sparked more aggressive behavior from the American lawyers. In the end, payments were made and the Swiss public senti-

ment turned decidedly anti-Semitic. So what was gained?

We need to avoid the formation of fronts, of monolithic claims of truth, and this works well in a process of dialogue. The German playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1779/2000) used dialogue as a plea for toleration in his play *Nathan the Wise*. In it, the sultan asks Nathan which of the three monotheistic religions is true, and Nathan responds, “How strange—what does the sultan want? I am expecting money and he wants—truth. Truth! And wants it, so clear and clean as if truth were a coin!” (p. 77). And then Nathan tells the sultan a story in which a king has three sons but only one ring, which has the power to make its owner agreeable in the face of God and people. The king orders two duplicates of the ring to be made and gives a ring to each son. The three sons start to fight about which ring is the real one. Then a wise judge orders all three to prove the power of their rings, which would reveal itself by the fact that its wearer would be agreeable to God and people (p. 82).

The judge demands tolerance and humanity, a moral behavior as an indication of the real, true faith. Lessing shifts the theoretical problem of truth to the practical level, to action, just as Buber did much later in writing that the eternal guiding principle is what people do, their actions.

### **Psychotherapy as Dialogue**

*A dialogical conception of human beings:* A dialogical understanding of truth and identity, a pluralistic, dialogical conception of human beings is preferable to approaches that divide and exclude people. Unfortunately, in the last few decades the profession of psychotherapy has fostered too much psychological narcissism and hedonism. We have been concerned with issues of self-actualization, self-assertiveness, self-esteem, self-power, and so on. We thereby helped to advance the egoism and egocentrism that is prevalent in our culture. We have been concentrating too much on symptoms within the client, on his or her pathology, often at the expense of our common mutuality.

We can choose. We can apply transactional analysis (and any other method of psychotherapy) as a monologic form of therapy by

addressing the disturbances within the client in an attempt to correct them by using technical instruments (e.g., analysis of ego states, transactions, games, symbioses, etc.). Or we can practice transactional analysis as a dialogical therapy. After all, Berne (1964/1967, pp. 178-191) defined the goal of therapy as the attainment of autonomy (consisting of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy). Intimacy is a phenomenon of dialogue, very close to the I-You encounter described by Buber. Berne founded a social psychiatry and devised his therapy as a group therapy.

In a similar way, we can choose to apply Erskine’s integrative psychotherapy as a monologic or dialogic psychotherapy. If we deal with relational needs (Erskine, 1998, 2002) as intrapsychic constructs rather than as interpersonal processes, and if we move these relational needs into the foreground, then the client is likely to focus on just those relational needs. Consequently, he or she is likely to be concerned primarily with himself or herself. The therapist, in turn, is likely to analyze and focus on working through relational needs. As a result, both client and therapist may focus on relational needs and miss what the therapy is aiming at: real contact between I and you. Focusing on attunement, involvement, and so on can, therefore, be an impediment to real contact in the here and now. On the other hand, these techniques of integrative psychotherapy can also be used to understand better the other side of the story and to be in genuine contact. What counts is not so much which methods we apply, but how we apply them and how we relate to our clients.

The approaches of narrative psychotherapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996) and constructivist transactional analysis (Allen & Allen, 1997) point in a similar direction.

Most current ideas about diagnosis and treatment are based on the notion that the patient has some problem and that the therapist can arrive at some description of that problem. Central to this is a belief in one real something “out there” that can be described independent of any one observer, something that we can both know and manipulate. To date, transactional analysis has largely followed this path. We make

diagnoses, elaborate structural diagrams, observe crossed transactions, figure out what is “wrong,” compare all of this with how we think things “should be,” and then make our interventions. (Allen & Allen, 1997, p. 89)

According to the constructivist approach, the problem with traditional psychotherapy lies in the way we think about the problem. The constructivist model “shifts our scrutiny from psychological structures—ego states, transactions, and the rest—to the world of meaning and to narrative” (Allen & Allen, 1997, p. 89). “If the patient’s problems are conceptualized as deficits or dysfunctions, then the therapist will act in certain clear and directive ways. However, if the therapeutic relationship is conceptualized as providing a safe and intensive context in which the patient can explore meanings about self, others, and the world, the therapist will behave in quite different ways” (p. 90). “It is in the interaction between the teller and the listener that new narratives emerge. . . . Through dialogue a new story or new understanding of the old story will emerge” (p. 93).

Likewise, Beck (1999) advocates a connectedness perspective . . . a sensitivity to other’s needs, responsibility for their welfare [as opposed to the individualistic orientation that] is focused on protecting the separateness of people. This individualistic orientation emphasizes rights and entitlements: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; equal opportunity; fair treatment and justice. This orientation is centered on the assumption that people have competing claims of justice and are in conflict with each other for available resources or personal reinforcement. (p. 240).

*The therapy process as dialogue:* The nature of this dialogue can be shown through a story. In his autobiographical fragments, Buber tells the story of the dapple-grey horse. From the age of nine, Buber spent summers on his grandparents’ farm.

When I was eleven years of age, I used, as often as I could do it unobserved, to steal into the stable and gently stroke the neck of my darling, a broad dapple-grey horse. It was not a casual delight but a great, certainly friendly, but also deeply stirring

happening. If I am to explain it now, beginning from the still very fresh memory of my hand, I must say that what I experienced in touch with the animal was the Other, the immense otherness of the Other, which, however, did not remain strange like the otherness of the ox and the ram, but rather let me draw near and touch it. When I stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvelously smooth combed, at other times astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was as if the vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was certainly not akin to me, palpably the Other, not just another, really the Other itself and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of Thou and Thou with me. The horse, even when I had not begun by pouring oats for him into the manger, very gently raised his massive head, ears flicking, then snorted quietly, as a conspirator gives a signal to be recognizable only by his fellow-conspirator; and I was approved. But once, I do not know what came over the child . . . it struck me about the stroking, what fun it gave me, and suddenly I became conscious of my hand. The game went on as before, but something had changed, it was no longer the same thing. And the next day, after giving him a rich feed, when I stroked my friend’s head he did not raise his head. A few years later, when I thought back to the incident, I no longer thought that the animal had noticed my defection. But at that time I had considered myself judged. (Buber, cited in Hodes, 1971, p. 58)

And it is just like that in our work. When we occupy ourselves with what we are doing while we are doing it, when we turn it into an object of our observation, then we lose contact with the other, there is no more dialogue, no I-you. Real encounter presupposes that we approach the Other naturally, with an open mind, without prejudice—that we are present in the here and now and do not aspire to any therapeutic goals. Otherwise, we are in contact with these goals and not with the Other.

When we describe, categorize, or diagnose people, we see them as objects, and objects are

separated from us. We cannot be in an I-You dialogue with an object: Here am I and there is my object. Between us there is no common situation, we do not share a common ground. This is the I-It position. In contrast, in the I-Thou position we are in relationship. At that moment we know no details about the Other, but we are dealing with each other and we share a common situation.

What does this mean for psychotherapy? In his article on the psychotherapy of the schizoid process, Yontef (2001) writes:

The dialogic therapist must trust in and surrender to what emerges from the interaction with the patient rather than aiming at a preset goal. This approach recognizes, centers on, tolerates, and stays with what is happening as the therapist practices inclusion and thus focuses on present experience and moment-to-moment, person-to-person contact. In a sense, progress is a by-product of a certain kind of relating rather than something that is sought directly. (p. 16)

The three basic elements of a dialogic therapy could be called decision, embracement, and responsibility. In the process, we decide, embrace, and respond.

1. To decide: We decide all the time. We need to decide because our existence is basically split—split between good and evil, yes and no, I and you, mind and body, and so on. This split stops us from encountering the world with our whole being. We can overcome the split by deciding. When we decide, we move the opposites out of their separation into unity. We are looking for the common ground, for that which bridges our differences. As Buber (1953) wrote:

A real conversation is one in which each partner . . . also when in conflict . . . recognizes the other as the other and confirms his existence. . . . In this way the dispute cannot be undone, but the conflict can be dealt with and resolved in a human way . . . [when] we speak with each other without reservations; we do not disregard the conflict, but we have decided and are resolved to bear it together. (p. 41).

2. To embrace: When we embrace the other, we enlarge our own concrete being by sharing with him or her our perspective of the common

situation. We enrich the other by adding a new dimension to his or her life. For this reason, embracing—inclusion, which is the term Yontef uses to translate Buber's "Umfassung"—is not to be equated with empathy. When we feel empathetic toward someone, we are turning that person into an object. It is as if we go inside that person, we put ourselves into his or her position and thereby out of our own position. Empathy is an exclusion of our own concrete being, an extinction of the living situation because the common ground is absorbed by the ground of the other. So what is needed is to enlarge the perspective of the other rather than to focus on his or her own existing perspective. We facilitate such enlargement by adding our perspective of the situation, by embracing the other, by including ourselves to create the common ground, the common humanity.

This can happen in many ways. Sometimes I tell my clients stories, sometimes real stories, sometimes Hasidic stories, whatever I find fitting. Take for example the story of the "Obliging Dream":

A man who pursued honors came to Rabbi Bunam and told him his father had appeared to him in a dream and said, "I herewith announce to you that you are destined to be a leader." The zaddik accepted the story in silence. Soon afterward, the man returned and said that he had the same dream over again. "I see," said Rabbi Bunam, "that you are prepared to become a leader of men. If your father comes to you once more, answer him that you are ready to lead, but that now he should also appear to the people whom you are supposed to lead. (Buber, 1948/1975, p. 254)

When we embrace our clients, when we allow them to include us and ourselves to include them, we enter into a relationship of dialogue in which both of us are transformed. Progress, cure, and so on are then a by-product of this kind of relationship. The therapist gives up control, and as a result, both client and therapist grow from the experience. A new story, with new truths, can emerge.

3. To respond: Response-ability is the ability to respond to what is happening to us. By answering the other, by responding to him or her, a common situation is created. We are then

present and in relationship with one another. Before we respond, we must listen, smell, be intuitive—that is, turn on all our receptors in order to perceive what the other is saying. A person is saying something to me, she is speaking to me. What she is saying is not my object—I do not know anything “about her” at this moment, but I am dealing with her. When answering a client, the frame of reference is enlarged by our response and the responsibility we both share.

This is not about taking on responsibility for the client in the sense of our being responsible instead of the client. This is about answering those questions the client has put to us and those that he or she has not put to us; it is about dialogue, about asking and answering in a mutual process. The answer can be concrete, but it can also be a question or a story. The real and true answer, however, is responsible action. What matters most, is what we do. Our truths prove to be real only by our actions.

I want to demonstrate the practical meaning of deciding, embracing, and responding by sharing a short case presentation. A successful self-employed businessman in his mid-fifties, a likable fellow with a lot of depth, came to see me on recommendation from a management coach. At the beginning of therapy his company faced some difficulties and after a few months went bankrupt. He told me that he could no longer afford treatment because he needed his savings to cover his living expenses, and he did not want to approach official authorities to ask for financial support. At that time we were already working on how he would build up a new company, which would take time and energy.

So I had to consider what to do, what my options were. I decided that I would not turn this into an either/or situation but that we would overcome those difficulties together. I ask myself, “What does he need and what do I need?” and then I knew what I was going to do. I said to him, “I have the following proposal to make: We double the fee for your therapy!” He looked at me with some astonishment, and I continued, “And you pay me once you have become successful in business again.” He looked at me with surprise, and I continued, “In this way I get rewarded for the risk I take, you

get as much therapy as you need, and you know that eventually you will pay me.”

This intervention solved the client’s actual payment dilemma, but it has farther reaching implications. In this way I expressed my trust in his business ability and my confidence that he would make it again. I did not just say this as a verbal reinforcement, I did not just talk with him “about” his problem, but I acted in accordance with my words: Words and action coincided.

I think that this example demonstrates what I mean by embracing, by enlarging the perspective.

### The End of the Story

This article does not distinguish between political, social-psychological, private, and professional stories. They all belong together, because “cure” is brought about not so much by what we say to our clients as by who we are with our clients (see Kotler, 1993.) Whatever we do is personal. I can only help my client as far as I have come myself—and at the moment I am just about where Nathan the Wise was 224 years ago: Searching for practical and hopefully wise solutions for conflicts in a difficult time.

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