

FEELINGS, SELF-DECEPTION AND CHANGE
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Feelings and circumstances

I would like first to share three brief stories. I have cleared the use of these and the other stories I shall use in this presentation.

The first story concerns a young woman who was certain all her life that her father didn't want her. He was a very austere man and treated her coldly. He never told her he loved her. She had spent most of her... twenties...going from mission president to stake president to counselor to psychotherapist seeking help. She could barely function in life; she was a failure at almost everything she did. She went to her bishop and told him of her problem. From the age of three she had been troubled by haunting dreams. In these dreams a motorcycle gang attacked the family car, pulling her parents out, and savagely beat and killed them. She alone [survived]. She would wake up from this dream every night screaming.

It's obvious that she was a party to this dream. There are overtones of vengeance. Her bishop felt impressed to say to her, "The day that you feel to go to your father and ask him forgiveness for your feelings--that is the day that you will be free." She could not accept that..."You are forgetting that it is he who has hurt me; I haven't done anything to him." But in spite of initial resistance, she spent about three weeks in meditation, fasting, and prayer over the matter. She returned and said to the bishop: "You are right. I have sinned more against my father than he has against me, for I have hated him for all these years." She took the train home that weekend and went to her father. She asked his forgiveness for her hatred toward him. She did not say, "I'll forgive you if you'll forgive me." She said, "Please, Father, forgive me." He broke down and wept. "No," he said, "it is not for you to ask my forgiveness, but for me to ask yours." That moment changed his life and hers-- permanently. She is a functioning person now.

The second story was published in a Relief Society manual. A man named Max Ellerbusch was raised by a stern, brooding father. He had known no love in his childhood home. He was determined that there would be love in his own family of four children. One day, the five-year-old child who was his most vibrant and sensitive--the child who spread love everywhere he went--was killed by a teenage driver who had stolen his mother's car while she was at work. Max...was deeply embittered. He could no longer see any meaning in life; he could not believe that God could have permitted this tragedy. He was so bitter that he made a special plea that the boy who had hit little Craig be tried as an adult so that he could get the full measure of justice. He then wrote this:

So this was my frame of mind when the thing occurred which changed my life; I cannot explain it; I can only describe it. It happened in the space of time that it takes to walk two steps. It was late Saturday night. I was pacing the hall outside our bedroom. My head in my hands. I felt sick and dizzy and tired. So tired. "Oh God," I

prayed, "show me why." Right then, between that step and the next, my life was changed. The breath went out of me with a great sigh and with it all the sickness. In its place was a feeling of love and joy so strong that it was almost pain. In that moment my heart was completely changed. I experienced an unspeakable solace and comfort to my spirit. It was the suddenness of it that dazed me. It was like a lightning stroke that turned out to be the dawn. I stood blinking in an unfamiliar light. Vengefulness, grief, hate, anger--it was not that I struggled to be rid of them--like goblins imagined in the dark, in the morning's light they simply were not there.

The third story is of a woman whose sister was dying of a painful terminal illness. The invalid was incontinent and severely paralyzed. None of her siblings would take care of their sister--except the woman I am telling about. She happened to be the poorest of all the brothers and sisters. She had a family of her own to raise, she lived in humble circumstances, and she bore many responsibilities. Yet she was willing to care for her sister. At first, she felt grudging resentment about her lot. The little freedom she had enjoyed was now gone. There was no way out of the situation short of abandoning the sister herself, and that she couldn't do. So she fell into depression. She worked like a robot, dead inside. She felt herself sinking into emptiness, and felt her personality being obliterated. Almost against herself she decided that she had to fast and pray to get some relief, so that she might no longer despise her life and what she had to do. One morning her feelings changed miraculously. What had been a prison became a source of joy. She *wanted* to do what she was doing. The depression was gone.

These stories that I've shared are, in a certain sense about disturbed feelings. In each case the individuals involved felt their feelings to be beyond their control. They felt themselves to have been caused to have the feelings by the adverse circumstances they found themselves in. If you were to have asked any of these people, in the midst of having the feelings, how they would ever get rid of them, they would have told you that the only way would be for the circumstances to change. For them, their feelings were responsive to the circumstances. "I did not decide to have these feelings, I was caused to have them." Any one of them might have said: "I have been overwhelmed by my situation. I am unfortunate." In their eyes, their effective life--their psychological wholeness and serenity--was disturbed by their circumstances.

But even though this is how each of them once felt, each was wrong. For each eventually changed. The feelings ended even though the circumstances remained the same. I repeat: *The feelings ended, but the circumstances remained the same.*

What did *not* happen was clear enough. These people did not learn how to cope with situations they felt to be adverse. They did not learn how to deal with their feelings of resentment or anger of failure. Instead the situations they were in were no longer seen to be adverse. The situations remained but the problems--the disturbed feelings--disappeared.

This is contrary to what the individuals anticipated from their earlier point of view. Their only way out was for the situation that had caused their feelings to change. But when they gave up their feelings, the problem disappeared.

These cases, and others like them, suggest that it is possible to do more than just cope with disturbed feelings. It is possible to abandon them. This, I believe, is true of a

wide range of such feelings, including anger, hatred, bitterness, despair, jealousy, irritation resentment, and so forth.

The Incredibility of the Thesis

Most people do not believe such changes are possible. Let me explain why. Most of us have feelings of the kind I have described, such as resentment or irritation or fear. Precisely because we have them, we do not believe we can give them up. The reason for this is that to *have* the feelings is exactly the same thing as believing that they are being caused by the circumstances and are not within our control. *It is part of the very nature of such feelings that we who have them take ourselves to be passive in having them.* We think they are responses to circumstances, not initiatives that we take.

This, then, is why the thesis that disturbed feelings can be given up seems to be incredible: to have a disturbed feeling at all is to see oneself as passive in having it and is therefore to see oneself as powerless to give it up.

Think about being angry and having someone tell you that you can stop being angry if only you want to badly enough. You might well be offended. From your angry point of view, what is making you angry is the person or situation you are angry about. When someone says that you can stop your anger, there is only one way you can take this. He must be suggesting that you aren't caused to be angry at all. He is questioning the sincerity of your anger. He's saying that you're only pretending to be angry. Ridiculous! If there's one thing you know, it is that your feelings are genuinely agitated. Would you be this worked up if you weren't being mistreated? How dare anyone say that you can simply stop being angry! Why, you are being told that you don't really feel what you feel. Absurd!

Self Deception

Suppose, though, that we are not passive in the disturbed feelings we have. Suppose that such feelings are initiatives that we take. Then we are wrong when we suppose that they can't be given up. If they are something we are doing, then we can stop doing them.

Max Ellerbusch is one who now knows what I am talking about. When he was overcome with bitterness toward the teenage boy who killed his child, he had no question but that the youth was responsible for his feelings. But in this he was wrong. He discovered as much in that lightning moment when his heart totally changed. The circumstances hadn't been responsible for his mental agony. His mental agony was, at least partially, something that he was doing. It was an accusation, active on his part, against the youth who had killed his boy. His bitterness then was not a passive response to the situation: it was an initiative that he was taking, and accusation. This is true of disturbed feelings generally. They are not merely passive, but instead are initiatives--things that we *do*. It is for this reason we can stop doing them. It is for this reason that, as the Ellerbusch and other stories show, disturbed feelings can be abandoned. But if this is true-- if disturbed feelings *can* be abandoned--why doesn't it seem that way to the person while he is having them? Why does it seem to him that he can't give up his feelings if he really can?

The answer to this: Because these disturbed feelings are lies. Remember, it is the very nature of such feelings that, in having them, the person takes himself to be passive. To play the passive role is to blame others for the feelings. It is to accuse. To

have an accusing feeling is precisely the same thing as taking oneself as passive. As long, therefore, as the person is having the accusatory feeling, he necessarily sees himself as overwhelmed by circumstances, and is caused to feel as he does.

That is what having such a feeling means.

Think of the college girl. Her disturbed feelings--the bitterness she felt toward her father and the general hopelessness she felt in life --constituted her view of herself as passive, as overwhelmed by adverse circumstances, as helpless to feel any way but bitter and despairing. As long as she felt this way she could not conceive the possibility of *not* feeling this way. The feeling itself precluded her from seeing the truth.

The person who has such disturbed feelings, then, is self-deceived. Though he actually can abandon the disturbed feelings by which he asserts his own passivity. This is precisely what he can't see as long as he is thus asserting his own passivity. This is why in self-deception one lives a lie. It is not a lie told with the tongue. It is a lie that is lived with one's feelings. Whenever we have such feelings we are deceiving ourselves about the--we are taking ourselves to be passive when we are not.

I am not saying that the disturbed feelings a person has aren't genuine--that the person doesn't really have them. He does. The college girl wasn't pretending to be bitter; she was bitter. The point is that the bitterness was not the passive response to the situation that it took itself to be. It is in this respect that it was a lie. It is in this respect that a person having such a feeling is self-deceived.

Self Betrayal

In what context do such disturbed feelings arise? If they are not caused, how do they come about?

To suggest an answer to this question let me share a personal story.

Some time ago the toilet in one of the downstairs bathrooms broke. This annoyed my 14 year old son, David, because the other bathroom downstairs, by the children's bedrooms, was also unavailable. Consequently, David and the other teenagers were forced to come upstairs to a bathroom off the rear entrance of our house in order to use a toilet. This was a harassment in the mornings, as the smaller children too were competing for the use of that one facility. Immediately David began to badger me: "Why don't you get our toilet fixed? You are causing all of us a great inconvenience." And indeed they were inconvenienced. But the sword of accusation cuts both ways. I was far busier than he was, I felt; he had a brain and at least as much mechanical aptitude as I -- why didn't he fix it?

Two days elapsed before I addressed the problem. Under the lid of the water chamber, the float-- the plastic ball--was cracked and half-full of water. Emboldened by the simplicity of the prospective solution and enlivened by a distinctly dutiful feeling, I went to the home center, bought a new float, and...screwed it on in place of the broken one. But a test flush failed. The rocker-arm assembly at the end of the float was stuck; I couldn't free it. I abandoned the task, promising myself that the next morning I would call a plumber.

That evening I was upstairs in the rear-entrance bathroom changing the baby and occupying strategic territory, when David, with no place else to go, burst through the door and with a trembling chin screamed at me: "When are you going to get the downstairs toilet fixed, anyway?!" I was pierced. Given the unreasonable

demands he had made of me, and my sincere efforts that afternoon, this affront was inexcusable. Nevertheless, in a mature, controlled, and even calm manner I quietly answered, "I don't think I should answer a question put to me in that tone of voice." This was a perfectly just response. But he did not concur. He shot back loudly, "Oh, so you're not going to speak to your son, huh?! I felt betrayed. So he was going to be a defiant teenager! Nevertheless, restraining myself, I recounted the events of the day and my determination to have the toilet fixed in the morning. Contrary to my expectation, it neither shamed nor subdued him. "That's all I wanted to know!" he blared--and marched out, slamming the door as he went.

During and following this episode I was angry, hurt and irritated. How could this ungrateful boy of mine treat me in such a disrespectful and unthinking manner? I had spoken quietly to him, it is true, but behind my verbal sophistication was a mountain of hurt and despair.

What is the proper analysis of this case? Only later did I discover it. To begin with, I initially felt that I *should* fix the toilet. I had a personal sense that this was morally right for me to do. But still I didn't do it. I procrastinated. Now I call this act, in which a person violates his own sense of right and wrong, an act of *self-betrayal*. So betraying myself, I violated my own sense of what was right to do in the situation. I simply failed to fix the toilet.

But this is not all. In my act of self-betrayal I worked up emotions by which I showed myself not to be responsible for my failure. Early, even before the blow-up, I felt greatly burdened by the situation. I thought wearily, "Why doesn't David fix the toilet? Where's his ambition?" Notice that this feeling of weariness was itself an accusation of David. I accused him with words but also with feelings. It was as if I said: "Look how weary your laziness is making me!" It was the way I shifted the blame for my own moral failure onto him. Later, when David blared at me in the bathroom, my wounded feelings were again a declaration of my innocent and victimized state. To feel angry and hurt was to accuse him and to shift responsibility from myself onto him.

All this is to say that my self-betrayal was hypocritical. In the very act of betraying myself, I shifted responsibility so that the blame for my failure would fall elsewhere. I did this through my victimized feelings. By feeling burdened, hurt [and] angry, ...I showed that there was a great deal to overcome in these circumstances and therefore that I couldn't be blamed if I failed to overcome them. And if I did overcome them? Well, then I would be positively stupendous. To overcome such odds and to reply in softness in the face of such ingratitude--that was a remarkable feat indeed.

What, then, was the nature of my disturbed feelings in this situation? *They were part and parcel of my self-betrayal, of my attempt to justify myself in doing what I felt to be wrong.* They were not passive. They were the way I actually blamed the circumstances in order to exonerate myself in my own wrongdoing. Moreover, in the episode with David, they were how I demonstrated the contrast between my own spectacular virtue and David's crass selfishness. The very fact that the situation was so trying--as evidenced by my wounded feelings--was proof of how virtuous I was in responding as "maturely" and calmly as I did. My wounded feelings showed just how much unkindness I had to overcome. These feelings were the way I made the wrong I was doing appear to be right, even virtuous. The self-betrayer's version of virtue always

involves accusing others by means of his own disturbed feelings. *Virtue and peace never go together in a self-deceiver's view of things.*

What does this story of mine have to do with the cases I shared earlier? I will explain. Think again of the college girl. Despite all his cruelty to her, this girl felt that she should love her father--this was a moral obligation that she felt profoundly. But she didn't love him. She betrayed herself. And her disturbed feelings--her hatred of him and her despair in life generally--were her manner of justifying herself in this self-betrayal, in doing what she herself felt to be wrong. More accurately, her refusal to love her father took the form of bitterness toward him, a bitterness which demonstrated the preposterousness of what she was refusing to do and thus justified her in not doing it. Her bitterness, in other words, was a way of trying to show that her non-loving father was not her fault, but his. In this she was self-deceived. Her disturbed feelings were initiative on her part--they were accusations--but just because of this they constituted a view of themselves as passive. Thus, as long as she was bitter toward her father, she saw herself as [being] caused to have the bitterness and thus saw the possibility of abandoning it as absurd. That's why she reacted as she initially did to the counsel of her bishop.

I believe that the proper analysis of this case, then, is the same as the analysis I have offered of my own. This girl was betraying herself and part of the self-betrayal was the generation of victimized feelings by which she shifted responsibility from herself onto someone else, namely her father. All of her bitterness and despair can be seen in this attempt at self-justification, an attempt inherent in every act of self-betrayal.

It is important to notice that nothing I've said implies that this girl was "bad" or "sinful" in her refusal to love her father. I've not ever said that she *should* have loved him. The point is, *she* felt she should. In not doing so, she is betraying a moral sense that was not someone else's, but her own.

How widespread is hypocrisy like this? Does it account for all disturbed feelings? Is the root of serious psychological problems, for example? I don't know. I don't want to say that all emotional and personality problems are ultimately hypocrisies that accompany self-betrayal. But I do want to say that at least *sometimes* they are. I believe it's true in my own case and in the case of this college girl, for example, as well as in the other stories I've shared. I also think it is the correct account of the cases Freud treated, and in general covers what he call the neuroses. It is the act of self-betrayal that I believe accounts for these cases. The disturbed feelings, at least here, are not passive; they are self-deceptive attempts by the person to justify himself in wrongdoing.

Sin, hypocrisy, and Psychological Bondage

It is important to understand that self-deception is not an accomplishment that consists of a sequence of steps. We do not first sense that something is right to do, then begin to live a lie, then concoct a feeling or emotion by which to shift the blame away from ourselves and hide from ourselves our wrongdoing, and so on. This is precisely the sort of thing that is impossible to do. Instead we deceive ourselves in and by the very act of self-betrayal; it is a self-regarding, posturing, responsibility-evading act. That is its essence. There is no other way to perform it. We do it this way or not at all. Every sin is a lie --a submersion in darkness.

You will be interested in another aspect of the lie. Typically, the individual suffering from disturbed and victimized feelings longs to be rid of them. This means that he wants

his circumstances to change. Because in his view it is the circumstances that are causing his feelings. But this desire for the circumstances to change is as much a self-deception as the feelings are. He is the one who is interpreting the circumstances in this way. He needs them to be just as they are in order to feel justified in what he is doing. When my son yelled at me in the bathroom, I had my proof that I was doing all I could in a very difficult situation. What father could have done more, I asked myself, while being cut to the heart by a defiant teenager? I could excuse my self-righteous refusal to love him freely only so long as he was treating me cruelly. Because I needed my suffering, I needed my persecutor.

That is not all. My accusing attitude toward him provoked the persecution that he inflicted. That attitude came across to him, even though I did not raise my voice. "I do not think I should answer a question put to me in that one of voice", I said, in spite of the wounded feelings I was mustering. Proverbs says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." Mine was not a soft answer, but a biting answer spoken in low tones. It was pharisaically--hypocritically--soft. Its veiled message was: "You are hurting me, your own father. You're making me bleed inside, you insensitive and inconsiderate kid. What makes you think I ought to talk to you?" I could not have degraded him more effectively had I screamed at him. The principle here is that by the victimized and self-justifying attitudes and feelings that are always part of sin, we tend to provoke or elicit the very behavior that we blame our victimizers for. By this means we obtain proof that they are to blame and we are innocent. Thus these attitudes and feelings are ruthless. Sin is ruthless. It uses people insensitively in a desperate effort to be excused or justified. Sin and love are constitutionally incompatible.

It is important to try to appreciate how engulfing, how completely self-deceiving, is a sin such as mine. I didn't set out deliberately to provoke my son into bad behavior. Had this been my procedure, I could have stopped at any point. I could have said to myself, "Should I continue on this course or not?" and could have chosen to desist. But this is not what happened. I saw him in the first place as deserving the treatment he was getting. My very perception of him was part of the lie I was living. The choice I faced was not whether to see him accusingly--I was already doing that--but whether, in seeing him accusingly, I should yell at him, as many fathers no doubt would. Or else to refuse to stoop to his level and restrain myself. This so-called choice had been made by myself-betrayal; my "choice" of whether to punish my son or take his punishment patiently was only sin masquerading as choice. Both courses of action were morally wrong. *The sin was in the seeing. It always is. To see others as the problem is the problem.*

My very perception of my son was accusing. The options of conduct I therefore gave myself were the options for an accuser. I could accuse him either overtly and immaturely or covertly and "maturely". I "chose" the latter, supposing that he gave me no alternatives. Was not this bondage? My lie might as well have been true. He might as well have been giving me no alternatives. For it was impossible, as long as I continued in self-betrayal, for me to make the real choice of whether or not to see my son as Jesus saw his executioners, with compassion rather than accusation.

I was using my free agency to abdicate my free agency. As one philosopher said, "I was systematically denying my humanity in order to be justified." I want to revise that saying a little. I was denying my divinity. That is an interesting trade-off. Justification--

wanting to convince ourselves that we are worthy of a good judgment-- is an obsessive concern when we betray ourselves. We deny what we are; we contrive personalities or role-masks; we dissipate ourselves in artificiality. And we love touch with others, obliterating our love as we accuse, demean and retaliate -- all in order to obtain a good judgment.

This bondage is related to the unpopular fact that dealing properly with people is not a matter of technique, but of purity of heart. In my self-deceived condition, anything I could have conceived to say to my son would have been wrong. For example suppose you had been standing by me and had whispered in my ear: "You shouldn't accuse your son. He's only fourteen. He is not a mature person. He's got his own pressures." From within my self-deceived perspective, I would have said to myself: Oh, I know that I should not be so irritated. But it's not my fault. After all, he yelled at me. Still, he's no doubt learned his rebelliousness from his friends. It's not all his fault either. I'm not really angry with him. I just pity him. I pity him that he would be so warped at so young an age to defy his father. He needs help. I've got to get him some help." This new attitude is no less accusing than the old one. And no matter how this attitude would have been expressed, it would have been felt by my son for what it was. You can see that it did not matter how I tried to change my behavior, as long as I remained a self-deceiver. Whatever I did would have been but a variation of my basic lie. It would have been a continuation of my accusing heart. Until sin is gone there is no way out of self-deception.

Theories and therapies

Suppose that all I have said is true. Suppose that at least sometimes disturbed feelings are self-deceptions, not caused by circumstances or other people, but self-victimizations. One's disturbed feelings are the manner in which one makes it *appear* that he is the other's victim and thus justifies himself in doing what he feels to be wrong. How does one help such a person? What is the preferred therapy in this kind of case?

It is helpful to answer this question by first considering the usual view and treatment of disturbed feelings. The contrast, then, is instructive.

Standard Theory and treatment

The standard view of disturbed feelings is that either they are genuine and sincere, and therefore actually caused as they seem to be caused, or else they are pretended or "cooked-up" in order to hide some other, deeper, feeling--which itself is caused in the way that it seems to be caused. No one in mainstream psychology believes that a feeling can be genuine, i.e. "really felt, and at the same time dishonest, i.e. a lie about it's own nature.

Now if you accept this standard view, your first step in therapy would no doubt concern whether, in the bathroom incident, I was being honest and open about my feelings. (On the standard theory, thou I can't be dishonest in my feelings, I can be dishonest about them.) You might suspect that underneath my controlled exterior I am deeply angry but will not admit it. Your first step will be to get me to admit it. You might even say, "You can't deal with these feelings you have unless you are willing to be open about them." This was Freud's strategy almost from the beginning of his work. He sought, for example to dig beneath Elisabeth Von R's insistence that her attitude toward her brother-in-law was innocent and to admit a secret love. He tried to break down her

resistance by saying that such an affection was not a horrible thing because, as he said “We’re not responsible for our feelings.”

Often the first therapeutic step, then, is to try to overcome resistance to admission of the feelings disturbing us, and to be “open” and “truthful” about them.

The probable next step, if you believe the standard theory, is to get me to have the right attitude toward the feeling that I may previously have tried to hide. Precisely because these feelings are not my responsibility, you don’t want to “lay a guilt trip” on me. You don’t want to condemn me for what isn’t my fault. You may say things like, “It’s natural to feel the way you do. Anybody in your circumstances would.” Freud told Elisabeth von R. that her cover-up of her affections proved what a moral person she was, so that she had no reason to condemn herself.

The second therapeutic step, then, is to assuage or forestall guilt. It is step based squarely upon the assumption that she cannot be dishonest in our feelings, i.e. self-deception with respect to feelings is impossible.

The third step concerns what has come to be known as achieving congruence. You will want me to conduct myself in a manner congruent to my feelings. You might suggest that I be open with my son about my frustration and irritation--that, for example, I say, “Son, it irritates me that you keep pestering me to fix the toilet. It would irritate you, too, if you were in my position. You could do it, you know, just as well as I, and a lot more easily.” The concern here is for me to avoid suppression of feeling, so that it does not build up inside and manifest itself in the form of some neurotic symptom or other, such as ulcers. It is better to give civilized expression to one’s feelings than to seethe inside. So teaching congruences is the third therapeutic step.

Finally, a person holding to the standard theory of feelings will teach the disturbed individual to cope with his situation, change it, or remove himself from it. These are all strategies for neutralizing or eliminating the source of troubling feelings. Winston Churchill said that he and his wife got along as well as they did and stayed married only because the never saw each other before noon. This, on the standard view, is a paradigmatic solution. Be assertive. Negotiate for satisfaction. Insist upon rights. Rearrange relationships.

The pattern I have just traced is instructive, even if a little simplistic. The helper who relies on the standard kind of theory necessarily has as his aims not joy and perfect peace but accommodation and/or adaptation. The approach is that, because we can alter neither our psychological vulnerability nor the abusiveness of circumstances and society, our only option is to arrange our circumstances in order to minimize our pain. “I’ll call such a helper a “standard helper”.

This approach makes sense if the standard theory -- that we’re responsible for our feelings -- is correct. But if it’s not correct--if we can be dishonest in our feelings--then there is something else to say about contemporary psychological helpers. It is that they are taken in by the lies the client lives. Often they accept his self-deceived belief that his feelings are cause by circumstances. That, of course, is folly, because if the client is self-deceived in his feelings then he’s the least reliable witness there is concerning the nature of those feelings. By undertaking to help a client be honest about, and have the right attitude toward, his feelings, and act congruently with those feelings, the helper is endorsing and reinforcing him in his self-deceived view of the origin of his feelings. Whether he works with the client on resistance, guilt-feelings, congruence, or coping, he

is saying to him, "Yes, your feelings are not dishonest and therefore it's not the fact that you have them that we need to worry about. It what you do about your situation that causing the feelings. Or else, if the situation can't be changed, how you behave even though you have the feelings.

You may be saying, "not at all. Many counselors and psychotherapists are very sophisticated about the baloney that's thrown at them. They see through it." Certainly standard helpers do not always accept all they hear. But my point is that when they don't, they are still being taken in by the client, in a very subtle way. For when they reject the client's story they usually suppose the client to be a malingerer--is simply "faking it". There are malingerers to be sure. But the supposition that anyone who's not a victim is a malingerer is the supposition that there's no self-deception--no psychological bondage resulting from a fee act--and that genuine cases are still to be treated as we've outlined. The client has seduced the therapist into living his lie with him if the therapist supposes that malingering is the type of diagnosis to be given if the client isn't a genuine victim.

An Alternative to Standard Therapy

Let us contract to all of this the kind of help you would give a disturbed person if you believed that he can be dishonest in his feelings and is consequently responsible for them. My associates and I have developed a special kind of teaching that for many people, at least, is an alternative to counseling and therapy. It is a seminar we have given to both Mormons and non-Mormons, from California to Florida. The participants in these seminars are not asked to divulge their problems or life-stories. No diagnosis is made of their situations. No advice is given. The sanctity of confession and of privacy is maintained. More significantly, responsibility for changing individual problem feelings is never shifted from participant to teacher.

One important element of the seminar...is the presentation of stories or parables of self-betrayal and its consequences. My repeated observation is that participants find these stories to have...a spirit of truth and because of this, often see themselves in the stories. Yielding to accept the truth in the stories, many are led to yield to comparable truths in their own lives.

For example, a 36 year old woman hated Saturdays because her husband yelled at the children, disrupting her plans for a family day of cooperative work and loving play. When she understood some of the stories she heard, she realized that the problems of Saturday mornings were not her husband's fault alone. When the yelling would begin, she would roll her eyes in a despairing, "Here we go again" and "He going to ruin everything once more" attitude. Sometimes she would cry -- the victim of he domestic autocrat she had married. By this accusing attitude she was blaming him and in that moment abandoning all honest hope of changing things. Her project became one of exonerating herself by finding him at fault. No longer did she try to achieve the cooperative and happy Saturday she said she wanted-- though she made numerous posturing attempts in that direction, by which she showed how impossible it was to be a mother in association wit such a father. She now saw that the "Oh, no, here we go again" feeling was accusing and, in its own way, even vicious. Her husband felt the rebuke, and considered her unfair and

unfeeling. He would feel abused and become impatient. She was helping to create the very situation she suffered from.

This kind of realization comes regularly to most participants about one and one-half hours into the seminar.

We do not try to get people to see themselves in these stories. Whether or not they do is their own, anonymous business. If they do, they are already beginning to take responsibility for their own problems. They are beginning to give up their determinist way of viewing their disturbed feelings. This means that they are giving up the feelings also, since one can't have the feelings and simultaneously admit that the feelings are one's own responsibility.

At various points in the seminar we ask the participants to write stories or case studies from their experience, observation, or imagination. We don't specify that they should write them about themselves, but most of them do. Typically their minds are filled with the discoveries they are making about past events and relationships that they experienced and now recall with hurt feelings, anger, or bitterness. The act of telling or writing the truth is liberating; the bitterness or anger dissipates. You can't tell the truth and keep living a lie. By virtue of their honesty, the lie they are living is abandoned. The learning exercise is itself restorative and therapeutic.

Here is another example, told by the person to whom it happened.

My husband and I are both writers. We have a baby. Shawn insists without sympathy that I keep the house clean, prepare the meals, stay well dressed and appealing, and most of all, keep the baby absolutely quiet during his writing hours. I write during the baby's afternoon nap if I can, but usually late at night and early in the morning. If there is any noise from the baby, Shawn is not patient. He bitingly asks whether I understand the importance of what he is writing or its crucial place in his career or what it means for our future. Until recently tears would well up in my eyes in response to this harshness. Sometimes I would protest that he had no right to speak rudely to me. A quarrel would ensue. But more often I would suffer this sharpness silently and bitterly. I could not understand why I had to suffer so when I had done nothing wrong. One morning I was doing this assignment--writing a case. I left the bedroom door ajar and the baby toddled out. She was scattering some of Shawn's pages when he saw her. He began to yell at me. I immediately felt attacked; I began to burn with resentment and to search my mind for some way I could respond in kind. But all of a sudden I thought--"Its a lie. What I am doing now is a lie." I was doing the very thing I was imputing to him. My rage just dissipated. I was filled with compassion for the first time, and all I could think of was how I could help my husband."

Now someone who has not had this kind of experience may well think it impossible, or at best mystical. But those who have, know otherwise. It is liberation from self-deception, and is as straightforward as it is peaceful and renewing.

We also do a number of exercises during the seminar. One of them has to do with imagining that you are living in a world that is precisely like the present one except in one respect: you are not taking offense of any kind. You are asked to think of someone who has injured, inconvenienced, or offended you at some time in your life, and to

describe that person from your imagined perspective. You do not “whitewash” the individual; you do not simply describe all his or her good qualities. Instead you tell the truth about him or her. Being properly prepared by their experience in the seminar, most of the participants can do this exercise. They find their feelings changing toward those they write about. With their realization of the truth, their accusing attitudes--the attitudes by which they had been maintaining a falsified relationship toward another person--disappeared.

We do not encourage them to tell what they wrote; for that is and ought to remain private. But we do ask them whether they want to share any insights they may have gained from the exercise. At one of the seminars I wrote the responses on the chalkboard as follows:

- a. "I discovered that what the other person is doing isn't being done to me",
- b. "The irritability of her qualities is something I have been contributing",
- c. "I was flooded with compassion. His self-betrayal didn't offend me, but I felt sorrow for him. I longed for him. I longed for him to change",
- d. "It hurt me to think of all the things I had done to hurt him",
- e. "By being offended I have added fuel to her offensive ways of acting. I have promoted her destruction",
- f. "The same [characteristics] that can be described irritably can be described compassionately",
- g. "Doing this exercise releases you from reacting. It sets you free."

Though we do not encourage individuals to divulge their private experiences, sometimes they want to. The man who shared the last insight on the list told about the individual she had described in the exercise. She did not say he was her husband, but I knew this, for he had taken the seminar on a previous occasion. She said:

“For twenty years I have seen this individual as cocky and demeaning in his manner. In my eyes he acted so superior that I felt put down in his presence. Other people felt the same way, and that is, no doubt, why he had personality conflicts in his work. But as I did this exercise I suddenly saw all the same qualities that had offended me in a different light. I saw him as a little boy who was afraid of life and of everyone around him. He didn’t change, but I did. Where I had been heavy inside with self-pity, I now felt only love.”

This corroborated another insight that appeared on the list I gave you: When we no longer need the other person to validate our lie, he becomes real to us.

Why does this liberation come? I will tell you. When we have accusing and self-justifying attitude towards people, we are living self-deceivingly. We are not in touch with reality. In the way we see things, it is necessary to protect and defend ourselves, to lick our wounds, to justify and explain our behavior, and to get our share before others take it from us. The world thus seen is a lie. To understand about some of our own self-betraysals is to begin to repent of living that lie. Our entire way of looking at the world changes. Because we are no longer making ourselves its victim, we enjoy a sense of profound freedom. Because we are not agitating ourselves to demonstrate how victimized we are, we feel serene.

Let me tell you about Lolly, who, like many others, illustrates what I am talking about. Lolly is the mother of a large family of small children. Her husband is a rising young executive with heavy demands on his time. Before the seminar she felt under continual pressure, apprehensive about money and in need of her husband's time and assistance. There were poor relations with some members of her husband's family, particularly with her father-in-law. With him there had been much tension for 13 years. She had a handicapped son whose disposition was, she thought, harassing her beyond her limits.

By the time Lolly had gotten to the point of undertaking the "imagine" exercise, her heart was softened so that she was prepared to do it. She took her father-in-law as the person whom she would describe. She wrote an account of her feelings. When she was done she had compassion and respect for him. She told her husband, Rob, that his father was a pretty fine man; needless to say, Rob had difficulty believing his ears. Several nights later, there was a family party which in previous times she would have dreaded attending. But she went. Rob reported that she did not try to do anything particular to rebuild the relationship with his father; she simply felt differently about her father-in-law as a consequence everything she did came over to him differently. He reciprocated. They spent all evening with each other, talking delightedly; and as she was about to go, they embraced. He said, "I see you must have made a New Year's resolution to be sweet and lovable for the rest of your life."

The handicapped child was almost two years old. He had been born with a physical problem that is not noticeable to the untrained eye; but the doctor had said it would give him headaches and make him very irritable all his life. Lolly and her husband had difficulties with little Charles. He dominated the household, biting and attacking whenever he wanted something and generally taking out his misery on the closest party. In order to pacify him, they put a bottle in his mouth on what seemed innumerable occasions each day. They found other special ways of treating him to compensate for his problem. One is reminded of Helen Keller before Annie Sullivan came along. After learning the concept of self-betrayal, Lolly came to understand it in terms of her own family. She began to see how she and some of the other family members were provoking Charles—whom they were blaming for many problems—into doing the very things they were blaming him for. They were pampering him and making him dependent upon them, so as to assuage the guilt they felt about his handicap. The more they pampered him, the more he indulged himself in wild behavior, and the more, in turn, they saw him as needing special attention. Lolly could think of dozens of ways in which his behavior had been systematically induced by her. So, in the spirit of kindness rather than punishment, she went home and told Charles he would no longer be drinking from a bottle. She began to expect of him a high standard of behavior in every aspect of his life. That night he announced to his family, "Bottle; no. no." From that moment, he changed. Her husband reported to me that he is now a happy child, proud of his responsibility and progress.

Rob says that their marriage generally has improved. Whereas Lolly was before so tense about finances and other problems facing the family that she could not talk about them, she now is serene; they talk openly about the challenges facing them.

This is new. Her husband was asked to assume a leadership position in the community for which he was well qualified and needed. He said that instead of fussing about the time this would take him away from home, adding to her burden, Lolly spontaneously and actively planned ways to enable him to spend the increased time away from home without feeling guilty. And this, he says, is completely new.

Beyond Guilt and Compromise

Some might think that to talk about self-betrayal, as we do, would “lay a guilt trip” on the seminar participants, and that the sessions would indeed be gloomy. It seems that it would be like one of those sacrament meetings from which you go home semi-uplifted and semi-depressed. This would happen if it were true that we cannot help our negative feelings. Talking excessively about them would indeed tend to induce guilt; at least in our culture. But if we are responsible for these feelings--if we produce them as part of our attempts to justify ourselves in self-betrayal--then in giving up such attempts we cease producing them. We feel them no more. And then there is nothing for us to feel guilty about. This is what the seminar participants discover; they discover the joy of liberation. By gradually freeing themselves of such feelings, many become inspired and “ungloomy” for the first time. The sessions, for this reason, are not heavy, but light and buoyant. They are inspiring and the time (though we generally meet in five-hour sessions) passes very quickly. Most don’t want the sessions to end.

We saw from the list of participants insights that many of them felt sorrow for the offended feelings they were giving up and for the way those feelings had provoked disturbed feelings in others. This sorrow is to be strictly differentiated from a certain kind of guilt, however. This kind of guilt is itself an aspect of sin or self-betrayal. It is different from the guilt that leads to sorrow and repentance. You might think of it as sin on the pay-as-you-go plan. If I feel badly enough about what I am doing, I don’t have to give it up. Counselors and religious leaders are very familiar with the kind of person who feels terrible about the life he is leading, even to the extent of bitter tears, but he does not change. He is not seeking release from his problems, but reinforcement of his lie that they are too great to be solved. He feels that he is their victim, and that his guilt is an honorable if insufficient self-inflicted punishment. On the other hand, sorrow is what one feels about a self-betrayal in which one is no longer involved.

All of this has to do with hope. It has become a well-accepted piece of mythology that the kind, compassionate view to take of people is that they are not responsible for their disturbed, victimized feelings. To hold such people responsible is to be judgmental and unsympathetic. It is to condemn them for what they seem unable to do anything about. It is to leave them without excuse. But I say that it is the other view--the view that people are not responsible--that is the message of despair. For it implies that we can do nothing about our condition. That for example, the college girl was helpless to change her miserable lot in life and therefore, in the absence of some miraculous (and therefore improbable) feat of human engineering, was doomed to live it out. But this is not true if her misery was something she was *doing*. If it was something *she* was doing, then, as I said earlier, it was something she could *stop* doing. So the idea that people’s emotional problems are of their own making, [and] that they therefore they can unmake them, and that they can taste a happiness of which they previously could not have dreamed--this is

a message of hope. To suppose otherwise, in the name of compassion, seems to me an extreme case of misplaced liberalism.

Love and Technique

When I talked about our alternative to therapy, I outlined some of the things we do and don't do. But I probably misled you a little. For helping other people has very little to do with technique, and everything to do with love. Psychotherapy outcome studies indicate that this is so.

A helper who is living in a self-betrayal and self-deception has severely limited perceptions. The only things he can see to do are those that will justify himself and accuse others. When I spoke of the bondage of sin, I said the choices that lie before a self-betrayer are all accusing; they are the restricted options of a person who has already, by sin, made the choice to blame others and exonerate himself. He cannot see the non-accusing option.

That is one point. Another is that whatever he does choose to do, no matter how he tries to make it seem gentle and mature, will be an accusation, will have a sting in it, and will tend to provoke the person he purports to help to maintain his disturbed feelings. What we are come through, however we may try to disguise it.

Now you ask about what I should have said to my son. There is n answer to that question. What words I used didn't matter very much. What mattered was my heart. I could have said the very same words without fueling my son's rage, had my heart been right--had I not been taking offense. O I might have told him we'd go fix the toilet there and then. O I might have confessed my procrastination and thoughtlessness, and asked his forgiveness. In any case, he might or might not have responded in kind. But my attitude would have been a compassionate loving one.

So powerful can this compassionate attitude be that it can often elicit a new kind of response in a moment. This was illustrated by a friend of mine who wanted to write about the principles that I am discussing. He took these principles home (there were about fifty of them on several sheets of paper) and shared them with his wife one evening. They began to read about 10 o'clock. For each of the principles, they thought of an example in their extended family. After about an hour they felt that their own attitudes toward one another and their family had changed. They went to bed at 2:00, and the next morning when the children got up, his six-year-old said: "Hey, what's the difference here?" Then they sat down at the breakfast table, and his son, Chad, pulled his sister's pigtail. Chad was 9. He was a boy who would never take correction. Whenever his father told him to stop doing something, he would make excuses. He would say that his father had done things like that when he was a little boy; he would say that someone else hurt him first. On this occasion he said that his sister pinched him under the table, and that's why he pulled her pigtail. Then [the father] said something to Chad that he had said at least 100 times before. But he had a different feeling toward Chad when he said it. He said, "Chad, we're not going to do that anymore." Suddenly, and for the first time that the parents could remember, Chad melted into his father's arms and cried.

I have been told many other similar stories. Attitude is everything. "We are judged according to our works, according as our desires shall be." The commonplace question, "Doctor, what shall I do with my children (or spouse) when they. . .?" is a misguided question. But it is the sort of question always asked by those who don't believe that

feelings can be dishonest. Since according to this view, we can't determine what our feelings will be, our only recourse is to determine our outward behavior. [To the question] "What do I do when. . .?" the answer is, it doesn't matter much what you do. It's what you *are*, how you feel, that matters. "Now I would that ye should remember that God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also (Alma 60:23).

I want to share an illustration of this. Of a helper who was something that is not recommended in any book, and, indeed, would not even occur to most helpers. But it was right because the helper's heart was right. And it will be obvious that it is not something that could be recommended, for unless it were felt to be right because of Christ-like love in the helper, and indeed necessary in the situation, it would backfire. Only love can see what to do. And only love can do it.

A woman, married for several years, came to her older brother...and said that she was going to divorce her husband. She had discovered that he had committed adultery several times over the years, and her heart was broken. She was ashamed and hurt; she could do nothing but leave him. The brother was incredulous--he had no hint of this--and sought an occasion to speak to his brother-in-law. When the occasion came and they spoke, he sensed that something was wrong. So he began to pry: Why did you do this? Why have you been a philanderer? What About my sister? Has she been loving? He pried and finally discovered that in all their married life they had never had intercourse--she had let him lie on top of her and so on, but they had never had intercourse. Now the brother knew that his sister had been raped when she was twelve years old. She had seemed to recover fairly well and to have lived a normal girlhood. But now, he realized, she had spent her whole married life frightened and withdrawn and had always withheld herself from her husband. The brother was astonished. He said a fervent silent prayer and asked his brother-in-law to go get her. He felt he had to do something, but what? Should he "let her off?" After all, given what she'd been through as a child, wasn't her behavior understandable? Shouldn't he be sympathetic? What counsel could he give? He spent the intervening hour sobbing almost uncontrollably. After ...they came back...he said to his sister, "Tell me how you feel about your husband." "Oh, I feel terrible," she cried. "He's shamed me so much. I can't do anything but leave him, because he has left me" He responded: "I understand that you've never had intercourse." "Oh no, that's not true," she said. And he said, "Let me tell you what intercourse is." He told her and then he said. "I understand. then, that you have never had intercourse." She replied, "Oh, but that part isn't important." And then [the brother] said, with love in his soul. I want to tell you something. What you did is worse than what he did--and what he did was reprehensible. You have been mean and stingy and shriveled and small and unwilling to love just because of something that happened to you years ago. If you don't go home with your husband tonight and love him, I will testify against you in the divorce proceedings."

She was stunned, even livid. She left angrily. But she came back to her brother the next day and embraced him. Weeping, she reported that those few minutes talking to him the night before had changed her life. "I have found peace and joy," she said. "I love my husband with all of the physical and emotional completeness

that a person can...I am no longer afraid. I no longer hate the person who did that to me years ago."

Now this case is rather unusual. What this brother did is not a technique that can be prescribed and copied by other counselors. The primary factor was love. It was the brother's love for his sister that permitted him to see that she was ruining her own life and that she didn't have to. She could give up her fear and bitterness and resentment. She didn't have to be shackled all her life with a crippled personality. His love enabled him to see that her crippled personality was her own doing. His love enabled him to help.

I will not talk extensively about the pitfalls of techniques - any techniques--when they are used without love. But I will say that in such cases -- and they predominate--the actions, words, and gestures of the clinician amount to no more than manipulations. And when the client succumbs to manipulation, no matter how artful and sensitive it may be, he is shifting responsibility for his problems to his manipulator. It is true that he may abandon the symptoms for which he has come to the clinic, but always they will be replaced by other symptoms.

A woman appears for a first appointment. It is obvious that she is struggling to put up a valiant front, but it is equally obvious, once she begins to tell her story, that her husband's abusiveness and infidelity and her children's rebelliousness have her on the ropes emotionally. She is barely able to control herself. The clinician initiates a routine series of responses designed to ensure that all the facts come out. As the story unfolds he feels a particular sympathy for this woman's suffering, and is reminded again of a question he has asked himself a thousand times: Should someone as sensitive as he be in this profession? Should a counselor feel his clients' pain as deeply as he does? He searches his mind for ways he can help her. The responsibility he bears weighs heavily. It is obviously a crossroads moment for this woman; what he does for good or ill will affect her future irrevocably. It is as if she has given him her agency, temporarily placed herself in his hands. He knows his task is to take over direction of her life in order to prepare her to receive her agency back soon, to regain control of herself, and to stand autonomously." What can you do to help me?" she asks. He asks himself, "Do I have a right to play God?" But he is a poor theologian: God never did anything like what he is about to do.

Already the counselor has accepted her proposition that her feelings are sincere, that she is a victim, that she is not responsible for what has happened. Whatever he does now will indulge her in the lie she is living by means of her distraught feelings. The indulgence is an accusation and an insult. "You are not responsible", it says. "You need me." This is true if he is, as they say, non-directive--for given the state of his heart, the so-called non-directive responses accept and reinforce her self-deceiving view of the world.

But, you may say, suppose he doesn't buy her story? Suppose he recognizes at once that she is a self-deceiver, pulling the wool over her own eyes in order to excuse herself for her contribution to the family's problems? Why then, of course, his skepticism will be expressed in his responses to her, whatever they may be. She won't feel protected and indulged. She will feel accused of being a sham, a faker. His lack of sympathy will seem to minimize her suffering. He pushes a choice on her, [and] either she must resist him or else start to consider the possibility that she has had hidden, evil

intentions all along. Whichever way she turns she will have been manipulated into continuing her lie in this new, clinical setting. For she is neither innocent nor cynically evil, but she will find a perverse comfort if she can only extract from her clinical experience a validation that she is one or the other. For then she has an explanation that absolves her of responsibility. She is either the victim she has always thought she was, or else she can't help herself, because she is really no good.

These issues are very complex; they require an extensive treatment. I mention them briefly only because many of you will recognize in them a pattern that you are already familiar with. There are myriad ways in which a client can evade responsibility, even when 'confessing' the truth. And if his heart is not completely pure, the clinician, self-deceivingly seeking validation for some lie he, himself, is living, will abet the evasion in one direction or the other. And he will not comprehend what he is doing, for he will be exactly as self-deceived that the person he thinks he is helping! If the clinician takes responsibility for the client, he himself is being manipulated. Their positions mirror each other. The clinician is evading his responsibility to help his client take responsibility. He is using the client to validate his lie that he is doing what must be done, responsibly. And the client is using him, reciprocally, to validate his own lie that he, the client, is being as responsible as he can be under the circumstances. This is as much a collusion as the scene in the bathroom between my son and me. Client and clinician are manipulating one another -- provoking, pleading, judging, managing... in order to gain reinforcement for their individual conviction that they are *not* doing what they *are* doing. And the interesting thing is that very often one or both of these colluders will change; symptoms may disappear. But you can be certain that they are replaced by other symptoms. The theme continues, but with a new variation.

Now I touch upon this complicated subject, even though I may cause confusion because I cannot discuss it adequately here. [I do, however,] need it as background for an important point. Understandably, individuals in the helping services want anxiously to know what they can do, now, practically and concretely, to help their clients more effectively. I will tell you. We can repent with all our hearts and become pure by partaking of the influence and power of Christ's atonement. When I suggested that people can abandon their victimized and self-deceiving feelings I spoke incompletely. They can, but only by receiving and yielding to the Spirit of Truth, which originates in but one source and speaks directly to the heart. Ultimately, [this takes place] by accepting the constantly available psychological miracle that in the scriptures is called the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost.

My experience is that people can shed many of their self-deceptions by yielding their hearts to do exactly as they feel they ought to do, obeying the Spirit of Truth. Whether or not they recognize that it is God's Spirit. To become completely pure, however, they must come to this recognition and believe in Christ and accept His gift, which includes having his pure love within us for all creatures.

If we do purify ourselves, we will possess powers of influence beyond anything we could have anticipated. We will neither manipulate nor provoke, not even inadvertently. It is, of course, true that some may take offense, as they did to Christ; but that is very different from the active collaboration in their sin for the purpose of gaining proof that they are guilty and we are innocent. It is different because only in charity are we not active collaborators in the sins of those around us, and our skirts free of their blood. No

clinical program was ever devised that nullifies this truth. President Kimball has repeatedly said that if we have problems with our marriage or our children, the cause is our own selfishness. The prescription is repentance. We tend to respond: "What a simplistic answer. He does not comprehend the complexities of human behavior. But, then, we shouldn't be harsh in judging him; he hasn't studied the literature on these subjects, or had our clinical experience." I say that behavior is only complex to those who are caught in self-deception and thus regard disturbed feelings as complicated products of history and injury. It is only complex to those enmired in sin themselves. To say that the diagnosis is simple is, of course, not to say that the cure is easy. There is bondage in sin for which repentance is the only solvent. If there was an atonement, if we can follow in the footsteps of Christ, if we can be pure and free and whole and at peace, then it is possible to be victims of neither history nor accident. [Neither will we be victims of] those who would injure us, but walk in the newness of life and to look back upon our former self as upon someone we once knew and pitied and have all but forgotten.

Freedom

Let me share with you some questions that have been raised, as well as my responses to them. Perhaps the same questions have arisen in your own mind.

Question: Have you suggested that I can't injure another person because if they are suffering psychologically this is because of their own sin and self-deception? If so, then it doesn't make any sense to ask their forgiveness. The only harm you could inflict is on yourself, and if they were harmed they did it to themselves.

Answer: There is truth in what you say. Yet it needs to be understood carefully. I do not cause another to sin, but when I provoke him by my unloving attitude I...promote his sin. I conspire, I cooperate, I validate his lie, I give him provocation and excuse. I lay my life upon the altar of his unhappiness. That is why the Savior said that if someone has aught against us, we must first go to him and be reconciled. ...Otherwise, we are not innocent of the other's sin: we have not caused it, but we have worked with our might to promote it.

When I ask for forgiveness, then, I am not asking for his absolution for causing his downfall, but I am repenting of my [contributory] sin--confessing and forsaking it--and doing all in my power to be reconciled to him.

Question: Aren't you defining the word "cause" a bit narrowly? If I insult you and you get angry, surely I have caused you to be angry.

Answer: It is proper to use the word "cause" in the way you are using it. And I am, indeed, using it in a narrower sense, which is this: a cause of a particular response is an event that, taken together with prevailing conditions, is a sufficient condition [to elicit] that response. A provocation isn't *cause* in this sense because whether it is a sufficient condition depends upon [the provoked person's] response. In other words, we determine by our attitude--it may be the self-justifying, responsibility-evading attitude of the sinner, or the open and guileless attitude of the upright individual--how the circumstances will influence us, whether or not they seem to us provocations.

If circumstances could determine our response...then our freedom, such as it is, could be exercised only in that little sliver of time between stimulus and response--

between what I get from the world and my decision of what to give back. I have heard important psychologists espouse this view, including Rollo May. It is a theory that might be stated [in this way]: “Controlling behavior in spite of the character of the stimulus.”

I do not accept this view. Freedom consists not in how we act, given how we see and feel about our circumstances. It consists in how we see and feel about it in the first place. Once we see it, most of our agency has been exercised. If I see my son offensively and “nobly” control myself, my conduct is hypocritical and, specifically, pharisaical. But I can also see him compassionately, even when he’s yelling at me. The way I see him is the primary exercise of my agency. But once I see him offensively and accusingly, any “self-control” I exert is but whitewash laid over grim--a kind of sham. Once again we see that psychological wholeness does not consist in successfully coping; but as not seeing the circumstances as having to be coped with.

You may object that we cannot decide how we are going to respond to circumstances. In one sense of “decide” this is true. We do not deliberate and choose. ...Fundamentally, our agency is exercised in the choice whether to sin or not to sin; how we see the world is a manner of carrying on our sin or guilelessness.

If freedom were a matter of self-control, eternal life would be characterized fundamentally as keeping a lid on our wayward desires and acting in spite of offenses, irritations, and provocation. I do not believe this. I believe [freedom] is, instead, serenity and joy--a liberation from all evil inclinations, all need to fight against our desires. This is what the people of King Benjamin discovered [Mosiah 3; 4:1-3] when they repented wholeheartedly. They comprehended their carnal state, they pled with God for mercy, they testified that they were born of God and rid themselves of all dispositions to do evil, or, in other words, rid of that carnal state.

Question: Isn’t your position idealistic or solipsistic? You are saying, are you not, that we determine the nature of our circumstances. Do you mean that we can live in an external hell and still be in heaven?

Answer: On the solipsism issue I will say that we insulate ourselves from reality only if we are deceiving ourselves. And even then we are in contact with the world. It is my boy that I see in the bathroom. It is his yelling that I hear. I do not devise these things. But there are dimensions of my experience of them that I do determine. Namely whether they are offensive to me [or not]. Furthermore, if I do not deceive myself, and am guileless, far from being insulated, I live at one with others. I see things as they are, for I have no investment in misconstruing them.

FREEDING OURSELVES TO ACT AS OPPOSED TO BEING ACTED UPON

The Doctrine, Principles and precepts written below were adapted from an article written by C. Terry Warner. This adaptation was written by Robert Fitt

The doctrine: Men are free to act for themselves, and not to be acted upon:

Nephi 2:26: And the Messiah cometh in the fullness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given.

The Principle: Wrong circumstances need not disturb the feelings of happiness and serenity in a man who is willing to act rather than allowing himself to be acted upon.

The precepts:

The man who is acted upon believes that others are in control of his happiness because:

- ◇ *Circumstances* control his happiness,
- ◇ *That it is others* who control the circumstances,
- ◇ *He is powerless* to change the circumstances because others control them,
- ◇ His disturbed feelings cannot change until *others* change the circumstances that are causing his pain,

In a man who is *acted upon*, wrong circumstances displace feelings of happiness and serenity, and replace them with anger, hate, stress, despair, jealousy, irritation, resentment, bitterness, and hopelessness.

A man who acts, (as opposed to being acted upon), believes that it is he, and not others, who control his happiness because:

- ◇ He has been given the gift of agency,
- ◇ The gift of agency allows him to choose how he will respond to his circumstances,
- ◇ It is his *response* to circumstances, not the circumstances themselves, that cause feelings of happiness or unhappiness,
- ◇ Because he can control his response, he can also control his feelings, even when he is being provoked by circumstances outside himself.
- ◇ His feelings (good or bad) are the outgrowths of his own motives and behavior,
- ◇ If any changes are needed they must come, first, within himself.

A man who acts can replace feelings of anger, frustration, irritation and bitterness with feelings of serenity, love, relaxation, compassion, composure, gratitude, hope and happiness.

It is possible to do more than just cope with disturbed feelings; it is possible to abandon them entirely.

C. Terry Warner shared three brief stories that demonstrate this principle:

The first story concerns a young woman who was certain all her life that her father didn't want her. He was a very austere man and treated her coldly. He never told her he loved her. She had spent most of her... twenties...going from mission president to stake president to counselor to psychotherapist seeking help. She could barely function in life; she was a failure at almost everything she did. She went to her bishop and told him of her problem. From the age of three she had been troubled by haunting dreams. In these dreams a motorcycle gang attacked the family car, pulling her parents out, and savagely beat and killed them. She alone [survived]. She would wake up from this dream every night screaming.

It's obvious that she was a party to this dream. There are overtones of vengeance. Her bishop felt impressed to say to her, "The day that you feel to go to your father and ask him forgiveness for your feelings--that is the day that you will be free." She could not accept that..."You are forgetting that it is he who has hurt me; I haven't done anything to him." But in spite of initial resistance, she spent about three weeks in meditation, fasting, and prayer over the matter. She returned and said to the bishop: "You are right. I have sinned more against my father than he has against me, for I have hated him for all these years." She took the train home that weekend and went to her father. She asked his forgiveness for her hatred toward him. She did not say, "I'll forgive you if you'll forgive me." She said, "Please, Father, forgive me." He broke down and wept. "No," he said, "it is not for you to ask my forgiveness, but for me to ask yours." That moment changed his life and hers--permanently. She is a functioning person now.

The second story was published in a Relief Society manual. A man named Max Ellerbusch was raised by a stern, brooding father. He had known no love in his childhood home. He was determined that there would be love in his own family of four children. One day, the five-year-old child who was his most vibrant and sensitive--the child who spread love everywhere he went--was killed by a teenage driver who had stolen his mother's car while she was at work. Max...was deeply embittered. He could no longer see any meaning in life; he could not believe that God could have permitted this tragedy. He was so bitter that he made a special plea that the boy who had hit little Craig be tried as an adult so that he could get the full measure of justice. He then wrote this:

So this was my frame of mind when the thing occurred which changed my life; I cannot explain it; I can only describe it. It happened in the space of time that it takes to walk two steps. It was late Saturday night. I was pacing the hall outside our bedroom. My head in my hands. I felt sick and dizzy and tired. So tired. "Oh God," I prayed, "show me why." Right then, between that step and the next, my life was changed. The breath went out of me with a great sigh and with it all the sickness. In its place was a feeling of love and joy so strong that it was almost pain. In that moment my heart was completely changed. I experienced an unspeakable solace and comfort to my spirit. It was the suddenness of it that dazed me. It was like a lightning stroke that turned out to be the dawn. I stood blinking in an unfamiliar light. Vengefulness, grief, hate, anger--it was not that I struggled to be rid of them--like goblins imagined in the dark, in the morning's light they simply were not there.

The third story is of a woman whose sister was dying of a painful terminal illness. The invalid was incontinent and severely paralyzed. None of her siblings would take care of their sister--except the woman I am telling about. She happened to be the poorest of all the brothers and sisters. She had a family of her own to raise, she lived in humble circumstances, and she bore many responsibilities. Yet she was willing to care for her sister. At first, she felt grudging resentment about her lot. The little freedom she had enjoyed was now gone. There was no way out of the situation short of abandoning the sister herself, and that she couldn't do. So she fell into depression. She worked like a robot, dead inside. She felt herself sinking into emptiness, and felt her personality being obliterated. Almost against herself she decided that she had to fast and pray to get some relief, so that she might no longer despise her life and what she had to do. One morning her feelings changed miraculously. What had been a prison became a source of joy. She *wanted* to do what she was doing. The depression was gone.

Mankind believes the following falsehoods about disturbing feelings:

- ◇ Feelings are a natural response to circumstances that are beyond their control,
- ◇ They have no control over how they feel, because feelings act upon them without their consent,
- ◇ Since there is nothing they can do that will change the feelings, their disturbed feelings will change only when someone else changes the circumstances that caused them.

What is the true nature of disturbed feelings?

- ◇ It is our own behavior, rather than the behavior of others, that causes our disturbed feelings. Others may do things that contribute to our disturbed feelings, but they do not cause them,

- ◇ Our disturbed feelings are the result of something we do, not something that others do to us,
- ◇ Because our moral agency allows us to control our behavior, we have the power to give up the things that cause our disturbed feelings.

How does an individual cause disturbed feelings within himself?

- ◇ He perceives that *others* are responsible for his disturbed feelings and *blames them* for doing the things that have caused his distress, thus becoming an 'accuser'.
- ◇ An accuser always has disturbed feelings. The very presence of disturbed feelings is evidence that he is guilty of blaming others for his woes,
- ◇ The accuser communicates his blame toward others in two ways—both outwardly and inwardly: Outwardly by his use of words and body language toward the offender, and inwardly by the disturbed feelings he experiences within himself,
- ◇ Whenever the accuser is blaming others for his trouble, he feels hateful, bitter and resentful,
- ◇ Being hateful, blaming, bitter and resentful is a sin,
- ◇ In order to give up his sin and gain relief, the accuser must accept responsibility for his feelings, change his response to negative situations, and stop blaming others.

Disturbed feelings are an act of rationalization:

The following phases of rationalization quickly become evident in an individual:

- ◇ He reasons that his disturbed feelings are conclusive evidence that he has been violated by someone else,
- ◇ He rationalizes that because he has been violated, his own sinful behavior (bitterness, accusation, spitefulness and hate) is an appropriate—perhaps even virtuous—response toward the offender,
- ◇ He holds-on to his abused feelings as evidence that he is right, and is, therefore, virtuous; And that "they" are wrong, and are, therefore, evil (or at least insensitive, or stupid).
- ◇ Though he has felt spiritual promptings, and knows that he is doing wrong, he is so caught up in justifying his behavior that he continues behave wrongly anyway.
- ◇ As he betrays himself, he becomes obsessed with the need to justify his misdeeds. In doing so he tries so hard to demonstrate (both by himself and others) that he is praiseworthy, that he is willing to deny what he is, contrive personalities or role-masks, and dissipate himself in artificiality. The result is

damaging, for he loses touch with others, and obliterates every vestige of his love as he demeans, accuses and retaliates—all this so that others will praise him and regard him as a good person.

Self-righteousness requires a persecutor.

Terry Warner: "The individual suffering from disturbed and victimized feelings longs to be rid of them. This means that he wants his circumstances to change, because in his view it is the circumstances that are causing his feelings. But this desire for the circumstances to change is as much a self-deception as the feelings are. He is the one who is interpreting the circumstances in this way. He needs them to be just as they are, in order to feel justified in what he is doing...I [can] excuse my self-righteous refusal to love...freely only so long as [I am being] treated cruelly."

"The principle here is that by the victimized and self-justifying attitudes and feelings that are always part of sin, we tend to [arouse within ourselves]...the very behavior that we blame our victimizers for. By this means we obtain proof that they are to blame and we are innocent. Thus these attitudes and feelings are ruthless. Sin is ruthless. It uses people insensitively in a desperate effort to be excused or justified. Sin and love are...incompatible"

-C. Terry Warner-

Why is it so very difficult to give up our disturbed feelings?

It has to do with self-deception. The very fact that disturbed feelings exist confirms that a hidden lie ("Someone else is to blame for my suffering!") is concealed deep within your heart. It is a falsehood to believe that someone other than yourself is responsible for your disturbed feelings. If you believe that they are, you deceive yourself:

- ◇ If you harbor disturbing feelings you are guilty of self-deception.
- ◇ You will continue to promote this self-deception so long as you refuse to accept personal responsibility for your disturbed feelings, and accuse others instead.
- ◇ By seeing yourself as the overwhelmed victim of circumstances caused by others—and falsely believing that those who have created the circumstances (and not yourself) are the causes of your suffering—you contribute to these problems. Deep within you, the hidden lie and the disturbed feelings will continue to feed upon each other, until—given enough time—hopelessness and neurosis will develop.

I. Practices: How the use of your agency will bring you relief and peace:

If you wish gain relief from disturbed feelings:

- ◇ You must take control of your feelings, and decide—*consciously and deliberately*—whether you will be happy, sad, disturbed or serene.

- ◇ You must give up the notion that other people are responsible for your disturbed feelings. Accept your personal responsibility, and strive to respond more positively to the circumstances that surround you.
- ◇ You must stop accusing others for causing your disturbed feelings. When you give up being hateful, blaming, bitter and resentful—and forgive those who you believe are responsible—you give up the sin that is at the root of your disturbed feelings.
- ◇ You must forgive the perceived offender. Forgiveness demonstrates that you no longer hold the offender responsible for your feelings. If you truly forgive, the sinful feelings of hate, blame, and bitter resentment will cease to exist, and these additional benefits will follow:
 - ◇ You will no longer feel the need to agitate yourself in order to demonstrate that you are being victimized,
 - ◇ You will stop adding fuel to the offensive ways of others, thus allowing them to heal their own behaviors,

“When you forgive, you open the channels of trust and unconditional love. You cleanse your heart. You also remove a major obstacle that keeps others from changing, because when you don’t forgive you put yourself between people and their conscience. Instead of spending their energy in work with their own conscience, they spend it defending and justifying their behavior [toward] you.”

(Steven R. Covey, 7 Habits of Effective Families, Readers Digest, Feb. 1998 p. 25)

Once you stop accusing and freely forgive the offender, the disturbed feelings go away, and are replaced by a profound sense of serenity and freedom.

Here is an example:

My husband and I are both writers. We have a baby. Shawn insists without sympathy that I keep the house clean, prepare the meals, stay well dressed and appealing, and most of all, keep the baby absolutely quiet during his writing hours. I write during the baby's afternoon nap if I can, but usually late at night and early in the morning. If there is any noise from the baby, Shawn is not patient. He bitingly asks whether I understand the importance of what he is writing or its crucial place in his career or what it means for our future. Until recently tears would well up in my eyes in response to this harshness. Sometimes I would protest that he had no right to speak rudely to me. A quarrel would ensue. But more often I would suffer this sharpness silently and bitterly. I could not understand why I had to suffer so when I had done nothing wrong. One morning I was doing this assignment--writing a case. I left the bedroom door ajar and the baby toddled out. She was scattering some of Shawn's pages when he saw her. He began to yell at me. I immediately felt

attacked; I began to burn with resentment and to search my mind for some way I could respond in kind. But all of a sudden I thought--"Its a lie. What I am doing now is a lie." I was doing the very thing I was imputing to him. My rage just dissipated. I was filled with compassion for the first time, and all I could think of was how I could help my husband."

Dealing appropriately with people has very little to do with technique, and has everything to do with love, spirituality and purity of heart.

What we are comes through no matter how we may try to disguise it. Only love can see what to do, and only love has the power to do it, for everything we believe, say or do is colored by what our heart feels. C. Terry Warner tells us that this compassionate attitude can elicit a new kind of response in a moment:

This was illustrated by a friend of mine who wanted to write about the principles that I am discussing. He took these principles home (there were about fifty of them on several sheets of paper) and shared them with his wife one evening. They began to read about 10 o'clock. For each of the principles, they thought of an example in their extended family. After about an hour they felt that their own attitudes toward one another and their family had changed. They went to bed at 2:00, and the next morning when the children got up, their six-year-old said: "Hey, what's the difference here?" Then they sat down at the breakfast table, and his son, Chad, pulled his sister's pigtail. Chad was 9. He was a boy who would never take correction. Whenever his father told him to stop doing something, he would make excuses. He would say that his father had done things like that when he was a little boy; he would say that someone else hurt him first. On this occasion he said that his sister pinched him under the table, and that's why he pulled her pigtail. Then [the father] said something to Chad that he had said at least 100 times before. But he had a different feeling toward Chad when he said it. He said, "Chad, we're not going to do that anymore." Suddenly, and for the first time that the parents could remember, Chad melted into his father's arms and cried.

We can repent with all our hearts and become pure by partaking of the influence and power of Christ's atonement.

We do this by yielding to the Holy Spirit. We can abandon our victimized and self-deceiving feelings only by receiving and yielding to the Spirit of Truth, which originates in Jesus Christ and speaks directly the heart. This constantly available psychological miracle is called the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost.

We can shed many of our self-deceptions by yielding to our hearts, and doing what our feelings tell us to do. We should obey the feelings and impressions that we feel in our hearts -- whether or not we recognize those feelings as the ministrations of the Holy Spirit.

“Our inability to forgive others becomes a barrier between us and the Savior. To become like Him, we must learn to freely forgive others, just as He forgives us.”

(Spencer J. Condie, Ensign, Jan 96, pg.27)

To become completely pure we must believe in Christ and accept His gift, which includes feeling His pure love within us (Moroni 7:48) and sharing this pure love with others.

As we purify ourselves, we gain great powers of influence, and, as a consequence, we will neither manipulate nor provoke others, not even inadvertently; even though some may take offense, as they did to Christ. Only when we are filled with the pure love of Christ do we avoid being active collaborators in the sins of those around us; our skirts are then free from their blood.

If freedom were a matter of self-control, eternal life would be characterized fundamentally as keeping a lid on our wayward desires, and acting righteously in spite of the offenses, irritations, and provocations of others. Instead, freedom from these irritations, and provocations can be a God-given gift, an actual change of heart that delivers us from all our evil inclinations, and frees us from the need to fight against our wicked desires. (Mosiah 4:1-3). This gift can liberate us from sinful behavior and bring about an abundance of serenity and joy.

(This document was adapted from an article by C. Terry Warner, published in the AMCAP Journal/April 1982, “Feelings, self-deception and Change”. The format used, (doctrine, principles, precepts and practices), was suggested by Bishop Keith B. McMullin of the Presiding Bishopric, in the Sandy Utah Crescent West Stake conference, February 28, 1998. The doctrines, principles, precepts and practices in this document were identified and written by Robert Fitt.)

FREEING OURSELVES TO ACT RATHER THAN BEING ACTED UPON

When we have been wronged we feel hateful, bitter and resentful.

We feel that the pain will not go away until the person who wronged us makes it right.

We blame the offender for our pain and *accuse* him of having wronged us, either outwardly or inwardly in our hearts and minds.

We feel that our bitterness, spitefulness and hate is an appropriate—even virtuous—response to the wrong that was done to us.

We hold to our bitter feelings as evidence that ‘we’ are right and ‘he’ is wrong, and that ‘he’, therefore, is evil, or at least insensitive or stupid.

All this time we have been lying to ourselves, we have misread the evidence. Our bitter and resentful feelings are really an outward evidence that we, ourselves, are sinning.

It is evidence that if any change is to be made it must begin, first, with ourselves.

The sin is that we believe that others, rather than ourselves, control our happiness, and we become an accuser by blaming other people or circumstances for our grief.

Being an accuser is a sin.

The truth is that we don’t *have* to suffer for the wrongs that others do to us.

Once we stop accusing and freely forgive the offender, the disturbed feelings go away and are replaced by a profound sense of serenity and freedom.

We are in control. We control whether we are happy or sad . For we have the power to choose how we will *respond* to any provocation.

We can respond by accusing, or by forgiving, it is our choice.

If we refuse to accept responsibility for our own happiness, and choose to accuse and blame others instead, we will continue to suffer.

If we accept the responsibility for our own happiness and *forgive* whatever circumstance or person has wronged us, our suffering will be replaced by feelings of serenity, peace and joy.

We will no longer feel the need to agitate ourselves in order to demonstrate that we are being victimized,

We will stop adding fuel to the offensive ways of others, thus allowing them to heal their own behaviors.

Adapted from the teachings of Terry Warner

(over)

Steven R. Covey has said:

"When you forgive, you open the channels of trust and unconditional love. You cleanse your heart. You also remove a major obstacle that keeps others from changing, because when you don't forgive you put yourself between people and their conscience. Instead of spending their energy in work with their own conscience, they spend it defending and justifying their behavior [toward] you."

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Practices:

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August 2, 2001

Dear June;

I'm glad that you feel a desire to read this information. You will benefit from it, even though it is difficult for you to read. Perhaps the principles that it teaches will help you, as it has helped me.

Before you read it, you should know that understanding these principles helped at least one man who was crippled emotionally. It took away his anger, and along with it, some extremely severe emotional symptoms. I only counseled with him three times as stake president; but I was simply amazed to observe how an understanding of—and obedience to—the principle of forgiveness could cure a disabling affliction that had defied the efforts of several psychologists and psychiatrists.

I feel sure that you will have questions and will want to discuss some of this material with me. Please call me when you do.

I treasure our friendship with you and Andrew. You are wonderful people who make a meaningful contribution wherever you go. As you work through your struggles, June, you will grow stronger, many of your fears will depart and you will grow to be what you want to be--more confident and outgoing.

Please allow us to help you when we can, because you're certainly a great help to us!

Happy reading!

With all my love always,

Robert Fitt