

## **A Problem Defined is Half-Solved**

**June 23, 2013**

Years ago I had a client come for hypnosis for weight loss, and over time we also worked on some other issues surrounding her family of origin, especially her self-regard. She began to create such positive change in her life that her sister came to see me, too. They've both lost weight, quit smoking, feel happier and more in control of their destinies -- I would say they're both outwardly experiencing the beautiful light I could see in each one.

I've since become friends with both ladies, and have been introduced to a third sister. She's one of the relationships they both struggle with. Youngest sister Maggie, if you believe the two sisters, is crazy. Unpleasant, demanding, scattered, selfish, narcissistic, always late, blames everyone else for things that go on. She's late to her own parties, has made and cancelled a half-dozen appointments with me, and is completely unreliable. Just a very difficult woman.

I've had several spirit communication groups at Maggie's house, but never have done any personal work with her until last week. We set up an appointment for hypnosis, and the universe immediately leveled the playing field by having *me* screw up the date and time we were supposed to meet.

I went in to this appointment with a "Here we go" attitude, and I was checked instantly. She was a tad more gracious than I might have been if the situation were reversed.

I asked Maggie what she wanted to work on, and suddenly the flood gates opened. She was living the definition everyone else had given her; she couldn't control her thoughts or feelings; her marriage was a shambles because her husband is a rage-aholic.

As I do with many first-time hypnosis clients, we began to work on her self-definition. If you've ever heard the saying, "A problem defined is half-solved," you can imagine how we spent most of our session.

Every time I asked Maggie, "What do *you* feel is wrong with you?" she'd say, "Everyone says I'm crazy. My father calls me the Hurricane, my husband says I'm this, my sisters say I'm that."

"But what do *you* say?" I asked her. "What do *you* want? Why am I here for this session?"

Maggie gave me a list of all the things she'd like to be different in her life, but I could hear her actually asking, "Who am I?"

Maggie was living the temperament and behavior defined for her by her family, but deep down she wasn't comfortable with that lifestyle. She just had no idea what values were *hers*, and which had been assigned to her. I knew that once Maggie had a handle on who she was and who she

wanted to be, *how* she was -- behavior, emotions, mental processes, lifestyle -- all would fall into place.

This is easier than it sounds. I know the great philosophers of the ages all ask that question, “Who am I?” but I also believe it’s okay to have the answer be non-specific overall, with a few well-defined values pinning it up. When we succinctly and accurately define our underpinnings, or what we would like them to be, we create a code to live by. This is what the Dalai Lama recently called “secular ethics” on his Facebook page. Isn’t it cool that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has a Facebook page?

With a self-definition that reflects my understanding of myself, I am ultimately guided to fulfill that. One way to begin self-definition (and thereby solve *half* of your problems) is to determine what your top three values are. Figure this out and pass everything through it: your relationships, career, spending habits, home environment, interactions.

Even if you simply aspire to those values, use it as a mission statement for your life. Like such a guideline, this is a living document, which may change as you go through certain stages in life.

Once you determine your values, you determine your personal ethical code. You’re defining your life, and most of all, taking responsibility for living that definition. That takes some growing up. It means holding yourself accountable for where you are right now.

Think of your values or ethical system as your personal GPS. Before you even program in a destination, you have to determine where you are right now.

For example, now at this time in my life, my Number 1 value is serenity. That means I have to create this within myself. It’s no one else’s responsibility to make me feel at ease or give me peace of mind.

This is *my* self-definition, and the solution to half of *my* problems. It’s not going to be everyone’s solution, so I can’t make anyone around me help me create this. It’s *my* duty.

If serenity is where I’m headed, I have to take stock first of where I am, meaning if there is something in my life right now that interferes with my serenity, it has to go or I have to make peace with it as it is.

If you’ve been present for one of my previous talks, you’ve heard that I’ve had a challenging relationship with my mother. Regardless of who is the cause of the initial or ongoing challenges, it’s *my fault* if I can’t find serenity with her now. If serenity is my Number 1 value, then it’s woven into my ethical code that I create serenity around me -- and leave peace in my wake.

I can’t insist on serenity and cause drama in my relationships, or heap blame on someone else.

It guides my behavior in many ways. I dated a man who used to save all of his good moods for his co-workers and strangers, and then come over to my house to “relax” by dumping all his stress on me! This is not conducive to my serenity, but it does me no good to just complain about it... I’m compelled to exercise my ethics, my mission statement, and serenely set clear boundaries.

Which leads me to my Number 2 value, and the further refinement of my own ethical code: to communicate honestly.

This is a work in progress for me. I learned long ago that it was better to say things or appear in such away that was pleasing to people, regardless of how I was feeling. I have decades of smiling, quieting down, saying “I’m fine,” when I’m not. I learned a long time ago that I ought to manage other peoples’ feelings.

But now my values tell me I’m responsible only for my own feelings. When I communicate honestly and directly, it contributes to my serenity. Sometimes I still say “yes” when I mean “no.” As a result, I’m frequently over-committed. And my serenity tips out of balance because I experience resentment building inside.

Yet, it’s my doing, my responsibility. The consequences are clear when I don’t follow through on my values and ethics.

This afternoon I’m giving a workshop on self-hypnosis. Though the perception of hypnosis is for behavior change -- which of course it’s very good for -- it also has the great benefit of helping us define our lives on a deeper level.

If my top values are serenity and honest communication, and I’m still working on the honest communication part, I can use self-hypnosis to help reinforce that.

My third value now, and it hasn’t always been this, is to be conservative in all that I do. This applies to spending money of course, but also to judging, eating, goal-setting, and with criticism and with praise. The ethical code that arises out of this -- which I wasn’t expecting -- is mindfulness. I’m aware of what I spend, but also of what I save. I’m aware of what I throw away, too.

It’s easy to live by a code that a religion or spirituality gives us, or what our culture gives us. But in living what is handed to us, we sometimes hand back the responsibility. We’re less likely to rebel if we are our own authority.

So if you are lost, if you don’t know what to believe, if you want to be more present in your life, set yourself to the task of identifying your values. By doing so, you’ll be presented with a very clear ethical code and healthy instructions to follow that will be life-affirming and uplifting for *you*.

I'm sure there are many things important to you, but you'll need to choose values that are within your control. You can have as one of your top values that your children lead happy lives -- but after a certain age that is out of your hands.

Ask yourself questions like: What is important to me? How do I want to feel?

Try not to ask questions like "How do I want to be remembered?" because you have no control over how other people perceive you. You could restructure that to say, "What kind of legacy do I want to leave?"

When you have determined one or two or three of these, ask yourself if the life you're living reflects these values. If it does, you're living your own secular ethics. If it doesn't you will have in black and white what you need to do to create change. Learning something like self-hypnosis will empower you to make those changes.

Here is how I developed my values and how the standard of action (ethical code) arose from each:

I want to feel...

- serene while I'm working and when I'm done working
- peaceful in the company of my friends and romantic relationships
- at peace with the memories of my childhood
- that my home is a safe place of quiet serenity
- that my thoughts and feelings can be expressed
- that I don't take others' feelings personally
- confident that I'm making good decisions
- that I'm living ethically
- that I have enough resources

Out of this list I see that most of my desires are focused on feeling peace, the direct and safe in my expression, and that I'm keeping the planet and animals in mind.

This translates into the following code of ethics, or my mission statement:

I will work with people who uplift me and whom I can uplift. Those who taunt me or ridicule my work have no place in my life. I won't waste a moment of time trying to convert people to my beliefs. What a relief that is. I'll work sensibly and set boundaries with my clients so I have time off.

With my sweetheart, I'll do my part to create peace and serenity between us. Sometimes that means taking a break from each other for a few days.

I will train myself to reflect on what was positive and happy in my earlier life, and stop blaming my parents or early experiences for troubles I might have as an adult.

I will decorate my home, have as friends, guests, and pets only those people who act respectfully there.

Honest Communication is important to me --

Ethically, that means I have to be brave enough to give my heart when it's filled with love, and not hold back because I've been hurt before.

It means communicating clearly and honestly if I am feeling hurt in the present.

It means taking responsibility for everything that issues from me, not expecting people to read between the lines.

So you get the picture.

I want to close with the following tale, that happened to me just a week or so ago:

I used to volunteer actively with a group whose mission was to end the stray cat population in our county. We'd trap, neuter, and find homes for or return stray cats to their colonies. We educated people about the benefits of spaying and neutering, and worked hard to get a line in our towns' budget for our non-profit. The leader of our organization has slowly but surely descended into Alzheimer's, one symptom of which seems to be angry paranoia directed at the volunteers. Last week she sent me an email informing me she was removing me from the organization's Board of Trustees because I was trying to take over, and she was so happy I would be out of her life forever. This rocked my serenity badly, and I made several attempts to reconnect with her because I had no intention of hijacking her organization to no avail. So I resigned from something which had been very important to me.

I recognize it was her mental illness driving such a shocking email, so in considering how to respond, I passed my options through the filter of my three values:

- What will give me the most peace (and create peace in my wake)?
- How can I best communicate honestly how this makes me feel?
- What is the conservative response?
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In the end I chose not to reply to her, resigned from the organization, and shared my sadness with friends and other board members, who helped me come to peace with this dear person's mental illness.

If you have problem

s, define yourself first. That will solve half of them. Then begin by living out the mission statement or code of ethics that is the natural result of your self-definition. That will solve the other half.

And if you want some guidance on how to do that, join us at this afternoon's self-hypnosis workshop, or google how to do it. It's the fastest, most efficient way to create change that I've ever seen.

Amen