

Journeying towards greater alignment with our 'True Self' (ii)



It was in the second session when the pieces of puzzles fitted. Jane* had sought counselling for marital issues. In the first session, she poured out her grievances, namely emotional abuses by in-laws and her husband's infidelity. Throughout the session, Jane maintained a stony and stoic demeanour although she admitted to feeling immense emotional pain. In the second session, the counsellor drew her attention to the stark emotional disconnect. "I do not show my weak side. I must appear strong. If I am vulnerable, people will take advantage of me," was her explanation. "Who in your life was weak and vulnerable and has been taken advantage of?" That question opened the floodgates to her childhood wounds. The pieces of puzzles fell into place.

Jane's earliest memory was of an incident when she was five years old. Her grandmother had hit her daughter-in-law, Jane's mother, on her head with a frying pan. Her father tried to intervene, but in vain. He retreated, hitting himself on his chest in helplessness and despair. Such commotion recurred in her growing up years.

More than just being traumatised by the sight of blood and commotion, that earliest incident laid the bricks that later became an unhealthy belief system built into Jane's being.

Thanks to neurological researches, we now understand what happened in Jane's brain that

led to her unhealthy coping behaviour. When we think a thought, electrical energy is generated in the nerve cells of our brain. This electrical energy travels from cell to cell. As it does so, it forms a neural pathway. As Jane thinks the same thought 'my father is weak, my mother is vulnerable' over and over again each time she witnesses the abuse, her resolve to not appear weak is reinforced. A neural pathway is formed. Over time, this becomes more entrenched. A belief system is built up. This is like a running trail being formed when people repeatedly tread on it. At this point, the brain is said to be 'hardwired'. Jane will begin to think, look at herself, others and the world with a certain bias. The brain generates automatic messages that drive her behaviour. They make her strive to protect herself from further harm.

When Jane saw the connection between her childhood wounds and her coping behaviour, she understood why her children had said that she was often harsh and 'hard to talk to'. This was not how Jane had wanted others, especially her loved ones, to experience her. If she does not want to continue going down the path her brain's hardwiring has taken her to, she can begin to take back control. She will then be journeying towards becoming more aligned with her true self.

The brain mechanism responsible for hardwiring Jane in her belief systems and behaviour is also that which makes people hardwired into undesirable habits and addictions. If each time we feel stressed and we indulge in consuming alcohol or watching pornography and find relief, over time, our brain begins to link these events together forming a brain circuit. Given enough times, this becomes hardwired into our brain. Without ourselves being conscious of it, the brain generates automatic messages, in this case, in the form of urges. By then, we are not involved in determining how we would respond to the stress. The brain circuit would have been so strengthened that the cravings for the habit or substance would have increased to a point where the relief would only come when we do the urges' bidding. We have become enslaved by the brain to the habit.

The brain is a mass of grey matter. Although an efficient one, it is still but a passive machine. It receives information and processes it, all done passively. It cannot tell if the information is truth or a lie, if the thought is healthy or not. Only our mind can. Our mind is the active agent. Unfortunately it was the immature mind of our adapted self that 'called the shots' then that resulted in the hardwiring that we now want to undo. Jane was only 5 when she started to witness the incidents and experienced the trauma. With limited ability to analyse and a weak capacity to understand, she unquestioningly accepted the thoughts as her only option she knew then for her own survival. This

resulted in her inability to form positive and healthy relationships in later life.

With new found awareness, Jane has to engage her mind differently if she wants to forge a new path to achieve the goal set by her true self, which is for people to experience her as loving and kind. If her dormant true-self is reinstated to the seat of control of her mind, renewing of her mind will happen and rewiring of her brain will follow suit.

**fictitious name*

Connect-Point

The True self is that part of for instance, the drug-addict, that makes him seek out counselling. Some call this the 'Higher-Self'. Some believe this is the 'spirit' part of our being which is made up of 'spirit, soul and body'. This is the part that has been side-stepped when the adapted version of ourselves evolved. *(see previous article)*

Putting our True self back onto the driver's seat of our mind is necessary for change to take place. We have lived with our adapted self in control for so long. We will be going into unfamiliar territory. Where do we start?

Let's try with ABCs. A is for **Awareness**. Being aware of the brain processes and how they are taking over our life gives us a good head start. Add to that a desire to grow in self-awareness. Pause, step back, take stock of what thoughts / beliefs / accompanying bodily sensations are generated within us. How are they impacting us? We cannot change something we are not aware of.

B is about **Becoming more focused and intentional**. We need to be aware of unhealthy thoughts, beliefs, urges when they surface but we cannot beat them to submission or wish for them to disappear by our willpower. When Jane finds herself reacting to others in her usual ways, she has to intentionally input the new message she wants her mind to focus on: 'The people out there are not my grandmother. I am neither my father nor mother.....' Jane has to weaken the old neural connections and simultaneously strengthen the new connections she wants to forge.

And last but not least, C is for **Courage**. Admitting that something in our life is out of sync takes courage. Seeking help to address that takes even more. Because Jane did that, she uncovered the root issue of her relationship problems. She even chose to move away from putting the blame on others. She chose to assume her part of the responsibility. That is truly something. It is courage at its best. It will serve her well in aligning with her true self more and more.

Moving towards aligning with our true self is a journey. It is going into new grounds. In our next article, we shall explore specific strategies for rewiring to happen. One of such is the practice of 'Self-Talk'. A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step *(Lao Tzu)*. Let meditating on the ABCs above be your first step.

