

CONNECTIONS

Volume 10 Issue 1

Winter 2009

Dealing with Uncertainty

by Don Benson



We are living in uncertain times. Our economy is hurting. We have a new president in the White House and the nation is poised to change direction significantly. We're still fighting two wars. Few seem to be speaking with a lot of confidence on what should be done. Those that do think they have the answers are often met with doubt and suspicion.

Will a nearly one trillion dollar stimulus package turn the economy around? Will it put people back to work? I am certainly no economist and haven't the vaguest notion as to what the answer is. I find myself speculating on the worst case scenarios. I've never considered myself to be a pessimist, so am a bit surprised at myself. I am still relatively secure in comparison to many. Still, I notice an ongoing uneasiness as I talk with others, watch the news, read the papers, and consume the information at hand. It's as if an apprehensive mood has captured the nation.

So how do we live with uncertainty? It occurs to me that uncertainty is part of our ongoing experience. Of course, the belief that our lives are certain is the illusion. Nevertheless, we get so used to living in denial of this reality that we're surprised when it comes crashing down on us. This usually occurs in very personal ways, such as a health concern, lost employment, divorce. It can also occur on a larger scale, as it is now. Even those of us who remain gainfully employed continue to scrutinize the health of the economy more than we ordinarily might.

Perhaps the pursuit of certainty and security is not all it's cracked up to be. We can argue that this can be a misguided pursuit, one fraught with problems. It is easy to cheapen our lives, avoiding the fullness of our experiences. We so easily talk ourselves out of taking a chance, a risk, such as with a new career or a new relationship. Addiction can thrive on this need for certainty. In spite of the mess that addictive behavior can make of our lives, we use the objects of our addiction to feel the "perfect" way and to avoid the more difficult feelings, missing the point entirely that these feelings add to the experience of being alive as well.

Living in the uncertainty is akin to letting each moment unfold without trying to force or control the outcome. This is not to say that there is no point in preparing for anything. It is merely to recognize that life is not something to be conquered, but is something to be experienced. Mindfulness, or mindful living, is a mechanism for cultivating this attitude toward our lives. Living in the present moment requires an awareness of the present moment. Too often we mistake our mental constructions for lived experience itself.

It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into an understanding of mindfulness. Plenty of books and workshops abound for those interested. I can offer an example, however, in helping to face the uncertainty of our lives in 2009.

Observe your reactions to the onslaught of information you receive. Watch what happens to your mind and body. If you become more anxious, where is it occurring and what is happening? What is it about the information that provokes such a response? Is it the substance or the style? Is it presented in an alarmist fashion? Does it touch a more basic need in you?

Do not run from the feelings and sensations. Do not ignore them, rationalize them, or distract yourself. Most important, do not judge them or yourself. Instead, accept them into your experience. Embrace them. Extract everything you can from them and let them enliven you. All parts of our experience, from the most sublime to the most difficult, are worthy of our attention. When we do this, we cease to let our feelings control us, gaining a confidence in our ability to cope and live with a full range of human experience.

You might say "This can't be easy". Not in the least. There are plenty of failures along the way. The point is not to master it, but to continue the effort. Even failure is an experience to be embraced. To deal with uncertainty means to accept it and to live with it. We then discover that it is not such an awful thing. It is merely a part of our human experience.



Therapeutic Relationships

by Joanne Robinson



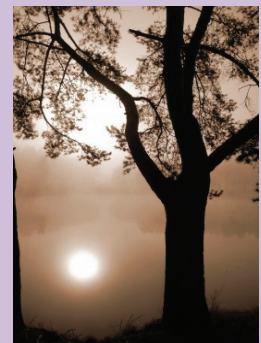
Jasmine had never been to therapy. She had seen the cartoons with an aloof man sitting in a chair and had seen the TV shows where the therapist ridicules the client to get to his issues. She did not know what to expect. Her friends were no help either. They said it was a place to vent their anger without repercussions. Jasmine could not believe that no one would blame her for being angry. When she finally saw a therapist, she asked Jasmine a lot of personal questions including ones about her family. Jasmine thought she was intrusive and answered each question with one word. She felt attacked and never went back.

Does your therapist concentrate on your past relationships with your family or does he or she teach you different ways to think about events? It is generally agreed that all the different types of therapies are not effective without the “therapeutic relationship”. What is this? In it’s simplest form, it is obviously your relationship with your therapist. Your therapist is responsible to develop this relationship, but you must be involved in your treatment too. This can be referred to as the “non-specific factors in therapy”, meaning it doesn’t follow a specific type of therapy and should be present at all times. In the fictional case described above, the therapeutic relationship was not established. What do you look for in these interpersonal interactions? All therapies include empathy, insight, understanding and acceptance without moral judgment. Your therapist indicates these by listening closely, making eye contact and reflecting your statements back to you to make sure he/she understands. The client must have the opportunity to speak the unspeakable with the therapist’s full interest no matter how disturbing the subject. The therapist provides structure by creating a safe environment for the client, including keeping appointments and ending the session in a timely manner. Feeling safe and understood are important things to look for. It is the therapist’s job to convey these conditions to the client.

The therapeutic relationship does not mean that you have to “like” your therapist or even enjoy her company, although that may be the case. It is not like having coffee with a friend. The only time your therapist may disclose personal information is to illustrate a point or assure you that your feelings are normal. That time is set aside to concentrate on you. At Three Trails EFAP we try to convey these conditions. There are three therapists with distinct personalities, educational backgrounds, styles of counseling and genders. We try to match your preferences with the therapist. If you feel more comfortable talking with a woman or if you like a more directive approach, we can accommodate you. If you don’t feel comfortable for any reason, we can transfer you to another therapist. Our personable administrative assistant will try to get you in to see us as soon as possible. We all prioritize the “therapeutic relationship”.

**Half of the harm that is done in this world
Is due to people who want to feel important.
They don't mean to do harm - but the harm does
not interest them.
Or they do not see it, or they justify it.
Because they are absorbed in the endless struggle
To think well of themselves.**

T.S. Eliot



In the library.....



Latest Additions

- *Too Good to Leave, Too Bad to Stay: A Step-by-Step Guide to Help You Decide*
- *A Broken Heart Still Beats: After Your Child Dies*
- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*
- *A Volcano in My Tummy: Helping Children to Handle Anger*
- *Grieving Mindfully; A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss*
- *Too Safe for Their Own Good: How Risk and Responsibility Help Teens Thrive*
- *When Your Child is Cutting*
- *Parenting Teens with Love and Logic*
- *Not "Just Friends" : Rebuilding Trust and Recovering Your Sanity after Infidelity*
- *Stress Free for Good: 10 Scientifically Proven Life Skills for Health and Happiness*

THREE TRAILS EMPLOYEE & FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Three Trails Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is a counseling agency designed to respond to the needs of eligible active and retired employees, spouses, and dependent family members of participating businesses and organizations.

Our mission is to provide professional assistance early and in a timely manner so that problems do not worsen. Such concerns may include workplace stress, marriage and family tensions, alcohol and drug abuse, and other difficulties that may impact individuals. Counselors at Three Trails assess the scope and nature of the presenting concerns and will either provide short-term counseling or refer the individual(s) to specialized services as necessary.

Three Trails EFAP is staffed by two full time, one part time counselor and an administrative assistant. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call 237-5750 or stop by the office at 812 South David Street.

OFFICE HOURS:

Monday & Wednesday	9:00 to 6:00 pm
Tuesday & Thursday	9:00 to 7:00 pm
Fridays	12:00 to 5:00 pm

We are closed through the noon hour, although noon sessions may be arranged.

A grad student, a post-doc, and a professor are walking through a city park and they find an antique oil lamp. They rub it and a Genie comes out in a puff of smoke.

The Genie says, "I usually only grant three wishes, so I'll give each of you just one."

"Me first! Me first!" says the grad student. "I want to be in the Bahamas, driving a speedboat with a gorgeous woman." Poof! He's gone.

"Me next! Me next!" says the post-doc. "I want to be in Hawaii, relaxing on the beach with a professional hula dancer on one side and a Mai Tai on the other." Poof! He's gone.

"You're next," the Genie says to the professor.

The professor says, "I want those guys back in the lab after lunch."