



THE BRAIN AS A FUNCTIONING ORGAN

Taken from audio tapes of Erickson's lectures and workshops

The brain functions in four separate ways:

1. It functions completely and separately within itself:

Your thinking is done within the brain; your memories are taking place within the brain. The association of ideas takes place within the brain. You don't need a stomach or legs or arms to carry out many of the brain's behaviors. It is a structure complete within itself.

2. It functions as an organ within the body:

The body has a controlling influence on the brain just as the brain has a controlling influence on the body. You can be reading this paper and then all of a sudden your stomach announces to your brain it's lunchtime. Thoughts come into your mind: will I have fish, rice or meat today.

3. The brain can function in relation to the environment:

You can be walking along the street talking about psychology with your friend and you pass a bakery and all of a sudden the conversation shifts to "what pastry should I take home tonight".

4. It functions in terms of the personality:

The personality is defined as the sum total of the constitutional endowment plus the experiential learnings that have been acquired. Do you think that Mozart would have manifested his musical genius had he been born on a desert island? It depends upon the stimuli of the environment as to how that genius manifests itself. If you happened to be color blind, there is no possible way you can experience or sense pastel colors without the rods and cones in the retina of the eye. The personality is sum total of constitutional endowment plus the experiential learnings.



Take for example the 15 y/o farm boy who grew up in isolated rural Wisconsin and had very little contact with the outside community. He was brought into the hospital in an acute catatonic psychotic episode. My old teacher Milton Erickson asked him to draw a picture of a man. Erickson then looked up in Princehorn's publication of the drawings of psychotics. There were only two copies of Princehorn known to be available in the U.S. at the time. And yet this untutored farm boy duplicated one of the drawings in Princehorn. As this case well illustrates, one doesn't need much of a formal education in order to use his brain cells. In the brain are an infinite number of brain cells that serve certain purposes. One set produces one kind of personality experience and another set produces yet another. The same set of cells that produce the thought don't produce the emotion. Because there is such a multiplicity of brain cells there's the possibilities of getting a great wealth of manifestations. When you look at the psychopathology of the psychotic patient coming from that isolated rural environment-very, very elaborate: then you ought to respect the complexity of behavior that every individual is capable of showing. If that untutored 15 y/o farm boy could produce that complex system of psychopathology that takes psychiatrists and psychologists years and years of analysis to understand, why not assume that anyone of you can produce an anesthesia of the jaw or an arm levitation or an age regression, or a negative hallucination for everyone in the room except for me.

Hypnosis is something that people learn by the reordering of their total learnings from the stimulations acquired over their lifetime of experiences. Anesthesia, for example, is no more difficult a hypnotic phenomena to produce than realizing that you forgot the glasses on your face. The analogue of every hypnotic phenomenon can be found in daily functioning.

People function in three major ways:

1. Intellectual behavior. You present ideas in various ways. For example: "The teacher says the principal is a fool". Repeated in another way: "The teacher, says the principal, is a fool". The pause, carries a meaning...is a comma. "No" can be said 16 times in succession with a different meaning each time. Structuralized and unstructuralized

2. Emotional behavior. Counting from one to ten. with emotion. comfortable, nice and warm and relaxed.

3. Motility-Motor movement. Relaxed muscles calling upon memories of physical/kinesthetic memories. Hypnosis is occurring within the subject. It is within him that he has his intellectual understandings. It is within him that he has his emotions. It is within him that he has motor responses. All these experiences happening completely within him.