

## Chapter 3.1 Changing Internal Images to Minimize Emotional Impact

This chapter begins with information about the brain and how emotions are centered in a lower brain level, which is out of our awareness. Therefore, a conscious decision to change an emotion is ineffective. One can make oneself aware of the specific details of the mental image or the remembered sounds connected to the emotion. This provides a pathway to the unconscious area of the brain. Making the mental image smaller, less colorful, farther away and less distinct will lessen the emotional impact. Making the mental image bigger, brighter, closer, more distinct and colorful will increase the emotions you feel.

Billy was determined to get his life back and experience the life he had before meeting Dahmer. Up to this time he still had still not talked about many of the humiliations he experienced, particularly the anal rape. He was willing to face the shame and guilt of admitting this and to do whatever it took to make changes in his life. He already felt comfortable with me and trusted me. When I asked him to go inside and become aware of the mental images and sounds that occurred when he had his fear and panic, he was willing to do this. To explain how important it is to be able to become aware of unconscious processes, I need to talk a little about the brain.

Temple Grandin (2005: 52-55), in her book Animals in Translation, discusses the three brain theory. She writes that the neurologist Paul MacLean has proposed that our skull holds not one brain, but three, each representing a distinct evolutionary stratum that has formed upon the older layer before it, like an archaeological site: He calls it the "triune brain." MacLean, now the director of the Laboratory of Brain Evolution and Behavior in Poolesville, Maryland, says that three brains operate like "three interconnected biological computers, [each] with its own special intelligence, its own subjectivity, its own sense of time and space and its own memory." He refers to these three brains as the neocortex or neo-mammalian brain, the limbic or paleo-mammalian system, and the reptilian brain, the brainstem and cerebellum. Each of the three brains is connected by nerves to the other two, but each seems to operate as its own brain system with distinct capacities. This hypothesis has become a very influential paradigm, which has forced a rethinking of how the brain functions. It had previously been assumed that the highest level of the brain, the neocortex, dominates the other, lower levels. MacLean has shown that this is not the case, and that the physically lower limbic system, which rules emotions, can hijack the higher mental functions when it needs to.

He sees a great danger in all this limbic system power. As he understands it, this lowly mammalian brain of the limbic system tends to be the seat of our value judgments, instead of the more advanced neocortex. It decides whether our higher brain has a "good" idea or not, whether it feels true and right.

Grandin (2005) expresses the same concept in this way: “In other words, if you’re Mother Nature, and you’ve got a lot of lizards running around the world breathing, eating, sleeping, and waking up just fine, you don’t create a whole brand new dog breathing system when it comes time to evolve a dog. Instead, you add the new dog brain on top of the old lizard brain. The lizard brain breathes, eats, and sleeps; the dog brain forms dominance hierarchies and rears its young.

The same thing happens all over again when nature evolves a human. The human brain gets added on top of the dog brain. So you have your lizard brain to breathe and sleep, your dog brain to form wolf packs, and your human brain to write books about it. In a lot of ways, evolution is like building an addition onto your house instead of tearing down the old one and building a new one from the ground up.”

The limbic system or old mammalian brain is concerned with survival, and reactions occur very fast –too fast for our neocortex to have thought about it. However, the neocortex attaches images and sounds and on occasion smells and tastes to the emotions. This occurs fairly rapidly and at an unconscious level. However, one can become aware of those images and sounds and thereby gain emotional control. This is the crucial difference between neurolinguistic programming (NLP) and other therapies. As Grandin (page 51) points out, we do not see what is there, but what we expect to see or what fits with our way of organizing our world. It is useful to think that our neocortex has the same control over our mental images that a television camera has. The TV screen can be any size and it can be close or far away, to the right or to the left, up or down or center. The picture can be in black and white or color or any tint of color. It can be a still image or a movie. It can be in focus or fuzzy. The people can be life-sized or smaller than life or bigger. You can zoom in or zoom out. The background can stand out or fade away. Your mind can do anything that Photoshop can do. It can put people in a picture, remove them or make the eyes a different size. Your mind can do the same thing with imaginary sounds. You can make the sounds louder or softer, higher pitched or lower pitched, distorted or clear. The sound can come from within your head or anywhere around you. You can give a person an entirely different voice. The emotion comes first and then we make the mental image, which is coded in such a way as to make a connection with the emotion we felt. The image of the person may be distorted depending on the emotion. Most of our expressions can be taken literally such as love is blind. The image is distorted to eliminate any faults. If the emotion is negative, then the image may be distorted to reflect that negative emotion. If the emotion is fear, the person may be seen as large and towering over us. When one feels contempt, the person may be seen as smaller than life-size. If the emotion is shame, then people may be seen as large with big eyes looking down on us. It is important to realize that emotions originate very quickly in the mammalian brain, and that this is an unconscious process, which doesn’t involve our conscious thoughts initially. Many people have the misconception that they are in control of their emotions. To support this belief, they make justifications for

the emotion. "I am mad at John Doe because he did such and such." This justification often becomes a sound movie, which plays over and over again in people's heads, each time reactivating the feelings of anger and resentment. When I have seen couples in therapy, one will often complain that the other is still harping on something that happened 30 years ago. The positive intent of the person's part that maintains the anger is often to protect the person from future injury or slights. However, this is not an effective way of achieving that. So how can one get rid of the negative feelings?

One of the most difficult concepts to get across is that the mental picture of a person is the coding made by the neurons in your brain. None of our images is a true picture. The United States has to be distorted in various ways so that a map can be made. Likewise we distort the information in various ways so that we can make a mental image, and those images produce certain feelings. If you grew up with an abusive parent, then that monster image can haunt you all your life. The brain does not evaluate whether a program is negative or positive; it just keeps running the program unless it is changed. Once a person can be aware of the image, he can make changes in the image much like a TV cameraman can do. There is some variation between individuals, but generally to intensify the emotion, make the image big, bright, close, in color, as a movie, and in sharp focus. To diminish the intensity, make the image small, far away, black and white, a still picture and out of focus. The image that you saw through the lens of your eyes is called an associated image and has the original emotional intensity. The image as seen through the lens of a TV camera is called a dissociated image, and you see yourself in the image. The image tends to dissociate you from the emotions and make the feeling less intense.

To change the negative feeling, go inside and become aware of the images and sounds connected to the feeling. Then experiment with changing the images and sounds to find out which change is most effective in creating a lessening of the negative feeling. \_The images of Dahmer were so intense that Billy had difficulty in making changes at first. Billy said that Dahmer had a particular expression that he had never seen on anyone else. I asked him to change that picture. I suggested he move it away and make it smaller. He said it wouldn't change. I asked him to see the image as reflected in one of those mirrors in a science museum that make one look fat. He could not do this. I think this was because he still had the belief that Dahmer pounded into him, "You can never be free of me." As therapy progressed, he was able to make those changes not only in the therapy sessions but also on his own.

Many individuals heard negative messages about themselves as children and continue to hear that message. When they hear the internal voice, it often uses "you" instead of "I". e. g., "You will never amount to anything." "You are a bad seed." "You are just like your father with his temper." This voice has a tremendous effect on the person's self image. People try to get rid of the voice but that doesn't work. It is like an arrow to the left with a line through it indicating "no left turn." The left turn signal is still there. The brain is highly selective

regarding what data to remember, but once selected they are difficult to erase. It is easier to change the voice. I give clients several choices including ones they think of on their own. You can imagine putting the voice on a 45-rpm record and playing it at 33 speed, or the reverse, putting it on 33 record and playing it at 45 speed. You can make it the voice of a rap star or your favorite singer, or a cartoon character like Sylvester the cat. A woman client was a social hermit because when she was outside, she would hear people saying bad things to her. She wasn't sure whether the people actually said the comments or not; she had borderline hallucinations. I gave her several choices, but the one she came up with was to make the voices sound like Mickey Mouse. She still hears the voices, but they don't bother her. She is active socially. She applied to rehabilitation, received funding for college, and has completed her first semester with A's and B's. She has reconnected with her family and has applied for a sales job. \_Billy learned to change his mental images to minimize the emotional impact. He became comfortable going inside (a term I use to indicate paying attention to internal sights, sounds and feelings), and he gradually became aware of previously unconscious processes. He was able to use this ability to cure his panic attacks, which he had when going into a crowded situation like a store. (This is described in Chapter 3.5 Panic Attack) He eventually was able to shrink the image of a person down so that the image could be put on the head of a pin. He said, "And I can throw the pin away."

Billy's change in his image of Dahmer showed up in his dreams as illustrated in the following quotes: "I have nightmares, but they are more bland. In one nightmare, Jeff (Dahmer) dressed up as a clown. It was hilarious in the dream. He was so out of character. He was using somebody else's identity and it was not working. The walls in the dream were blue and purple. I remember his having this big red nose like clowns have. I felt like squeezing it. It was kind of okay in the dream." I asked him what he thought the dream about Jeff being a clown was trying to tell him. He said, "I think he is trying to tell me that everything is okay and you can laugh at him. He did have a comedic side. He had a lot of charisma. He was able to manipulate and make people laugh. He handled people. It was a job for him. His job was to manipulate people so that he could kill them. I do exactly the opposite. I try to help people. When I get mad, I still talk with a northern accent. My family can tell when I am getting mad when I start talking with a northern accent."

### ***Emotional Management Suggestions***

It is possible for you to change your internal images and to control the response you get from them. One way to increase the intensity of a pleasant memory, is to make the internal picture of the memory bigger, brighter, closer, in color, and a movie. You can have the opposite effect if you move the picture away, make it smaller, dimmer, black and white, and a "still" picture. This reduces the intensity of the emotion. Similarly, if you have a negative image of a situation, for example, when you were embarrassed, by making that image bigger and brighter, the embarrassment increases. If you change that image by moving it away, making it

smaller, out of focus, dimmer, a still picture, and in black and white rather than color, then the intensity of your feeling is much less. Basically, this is an example of how you can control your brain and your emotions.

There are two ways in which you can experience visual images. If the image is what you saw through your own eyes, then this is called an associated image. If the picture was taken outside of yourself through a video camera, then this is called a dissociated image. When making a dissociated image, then you have much less emotional response. When you have an associated image, then you experience the feelings you had at the time. You can take any memory that is unpleasant or not particularly useful and see what happened as though the whole scene was taken with a camera and shown on a movie screen. Then your emotions become much less intense.