

## 6 WHAT IS REALITY?

Richard expressed relief at understanding more about what drove his mind and caused his pain. He explained it had never occurred to him that what showed up in his mind—his reality— could possibly be different from what happened in the world— actuality. He acknowledged that he lived totally unaware that denial could distort realities in the mind so completely. Grasping that principle struck a chord of recognition for him, and he volunteered an example.

"I had never conceived before that what happens in the world could possibly be different from what shows up in my mind. The other day I was in a restaurant enjoying a steaming cup of coffee when the waitress came by and took it. I didn't give her the chance to explain," he continued sheepishly, "I just snapped at her before I saw the fresh cup in her other hand. She had seen me spill the coffee in the saucer and was attempting to keep me from making a mess of my clean suit.

"I have never thought in these terms before, but what you are saying helps me make sense of that situation. When I turned and saw her picking up my cup, I thought, 'Don't touch my coffee!' I was quick to attack. I now realize her reality was probably something like, 'Uh-oh, that cup is about to drip! I'd better grab it!'" Richard concluded.

With the idea of bringing the train of thought full circle, I offered, "Your underlying reality was probably something like, 'People take things from me!' For her, it was likely, 'I take care of people.' In the meantime, the actuality was that she simply picked up a dripping cup." As we continued to focus on his experience with the waitress and the reality in him that was being triggered by this event, his insight deepened.

[Book contains graphic at this point.]

"Now I see why people in my life are confused by my behavior. I am quick to accuse and they often have no idea why I'm upset. I understand now that my upset is a reality in my head. I'm grasping the idea that my reaction to the waitress didn't have anything to do with the actuality that happened, except that it was a trigger. I'm sure my reality didn't even remotely resemble the one that was happening for her."

This initial insight provided Richard with a new perspective on actuality, his own and others' internal reality structures and his responsibility for his life. He had understood the concept of a "trigger" and was delighted. "I feel great!"

**KEY THOUGHT**—We have been trained to think that giving up responsibility for ourselves is easier than being responsible. It is not.

"Good work, Richard. It's exciting to see through new eyes, isn't it? In my experience, most people think, 'Everyone is experiencing the same thing I am; why don't they understand me?' The Truth is that at every moment every person is experiencing a different reality, and seldom do our realities match exactly. If you don't make room in

your heart and mind for other people's realities to be different, especially in your intimate relationships, there is going to be trouble!"

"Looking at things from that perspective, it amazes me that we even start to get along!" Richard said in an exasperated tone. Silence filled the space as we mulled over that idea.

Suddenly a smile broke the tension in his face, "I'm really starting to understand! Let me see if I can recap what I'm thinking. I'm still a little confused, but bear with me, I need to clarify this. The waitress, and the thousand other people I've done this to, did something that in their reality was positive—something Loving. The actual event between us was neutral; after all, picking up a cup of coffee is just picking up a cup of coffee. She was trying to help, but her action was a trigger for my reality, 'They are taking something away from me.' I attacked her to protect myself from losing something—a reality that was happening only in my own head!"

Richard became quiet; all animation disappeared. Tears rolled down his reddened face and he could hardly speak.

"What's happening, Richard?" I asked quietly.

"I-I'm realizing this happened all the time between my mother and me. I'd do something I thought she would appreciate and instead I got yelled at or beat up for it. I never understood why! No matter how hard I tried, I could never get it right. Living with her was like walking through a minefield."

Several still moments passed before he spoke again.

"I wonder how many people I have destroyed with the same behavior? How many times have I treated others like that and not realized what I was doing? Man, I don't think there are enough apologies in the world for the people I've acted that out with. Do I feel stupid," he mumbled to himself.

Another long silence followed. I finally spoke. "Sounds like perhaps you felt destroyed by your mother."

"N-no, no! I Love my mother, why would you say that?"

"As I listened to your clarification process, which was very powerful, you keyed into at least one of the reasons you attack so readily. You do it to protect what is yours. Your next step was to see that attacking was a pattern you learned from your mother. Listening to your perceptions of the interaction with her tells me a lot about the content of your mind."

When I explained to Richard that the perceptual output of a mind always tells more about the content of the perceiving mind than about the perceived world, it made sense to him. He acknowledged that he had felt devastated by his mother and, in spite of pretending that they have a great relationship, he avoids her, even to this day.

As I talked him through his fear of feeling sadness about what he had uncovered, helping to create a safe place for him to be honest with himself, he spoke again of his fear of being destroyed by what might surface.

Richard's fear of being destroyed was an old reality that needed to be exposed fully in order to be healed. I assured him that it was safe to look at whatever came to his mind. I invited him to be aware that a memory of pain is just a memory and he did not need to re-empower his old pain as though it were true, present-moment pain. He had survived the trauma when he first felt it and locked the experience into his body; he would survive its release as the old energy moved out of his system. Within moments, through simple breathing and accepting that he was safe, Richard was feeling better and seemed surprised at how much easier it had become to breathe. "What happened?" he asked, amazed at the relief he was suddenly feeling.

"Breathing through the surfacing of old, hidden feelings allows their release. I suspect people will find you easier to get along with in the future, and you will probably see an easing in your relationship with your mother."

"What a relief!" he sighed. "It's interesting to observe how these issues relate to each other. This really takes concentration and work, doesn't it?"

"Yes, and it takes courage to face yourself and be vulnerable enough to feel your true feelings and honest enough to look at your real thoughts."

**KEY THOUGHT**—Life is an opportunity to heal. Use it well.

"I think the most important piece of work you've done in the last few minutes was the next link you made; the thought you 'destroyed' people by attacking them needlessly. Did you notice that insight came on the heels of 'Living with my mom was like walking through a minefield'?"

"That sequence of thoughts said to me that, as a child, there was a good chance you felt destroyed by what you perceived as your mother's attacks. It was probably too much for a young mind to confront, so the belief remained hidden until this moment. In the denial of that reality your mind showed you only evidence of a Loving mother and, at the same time, blamed her for your hurt feelings."

Richard's inability to look directly at his thoughts of blame caused them to surface when he least expected. They would run out of control and cause his actions to be out of proportion with the situations he faced. His blame thoughts became generalized. His reaction, attacking the waitress, for example, was generalized from the realities he learned from his early interactions with a mother who attacked to protect herself. This dynamic was the source of the emotional explosions that drove people away, the type of reverberations that often go on for decades after the original reason for blaming has passed.

"The belief that someone else can be responsible for the output of your mind is called projection. If my suspicion is true you attempted to keep the thought that you were destroyed by your mother hidden by projecting it onto yourself. My clue, as I listened, was when you said, 'I destroyed others.'"

"I'm not sure I'm connecting it all together as you are, but it is a relief to be on this side of those feelings. It seems that it will be easier to be gentle with others."

What Richard had just gone through is called process. Holding the space of safety and Love allows an unraveling of the jumbled unconscious realities that one holds in his or her mind. Rarely does one realize the dynamics that run beneath the surface when a decision is made or one compulsively engages in behavior they would rather avoid. The mind becomes free of its conflicts when we allow process to happen.

"In the past, if thoughts and feelings like this surfaced for you, it was probably in the context of conflict and anger, which just reinforced your pain and upset. That continuous reinforcement makes it more difficult to confront feelings directly. It is having a Loving space while issues are surfacing that shifts the energy into a healing mode.

"Are you willing to continue, Richard?" He nodded in agreement. "You grew up behaving toward others as you perceived your mother did toward you, probably because you saw mom as 'successful' enough to model your behavior after her. That behavior worked to control you, but did it endear your mother to you?"

"No! I hated it when she did that. It drove me away from her."

"So it accomplished the goal of controlling you but you detested being controlled. You hated your mother's behavior, but have you become just like her? Earlier you said another wife was leaving. Has anyone ever told you they felt driven away by you?" I inquired.

"How did you know that?" he asked.

"The same way I figured out you felt destroyed by your mother, but let's hold that issue for a moment. I suggest you notice that controlling behavior does not serve you. It tends to destroy your relationships."

**KEY THOUGHT**—We tend to become that which we hate.

Richard paused. "Hmm, this certainly gives me a lot to think about. I'm really going to have to spend some time sorting through this, but I want to understand how you figured all this out from the little I have said."

"Okay, let's look at feeling destroyed by your mother. It appears that it was easier to admit that you destroyed people than to think of her doing that to you. If you believed treating others the way your mother treated you destroyed them, it makes sense that, in

your mind, she did the same when she behaved that way toward you. Let's keep in mind that 'destroyed' is a perceptual reality, probably a very complex one which, at this moment, we will not try to break down.

"It's more important, at this stage, that you be responsible for accepting that pattern and modeling your behavior after hers rather than trying to blame your behavior on her. I see many people who take inventory of everyone else's faults, but never acknowledge their role in adopting those faults as their own. This leads to more blame and is a justification many use to avoid accountability. It is a great excuse for staying in old patterns, letting oneself off the hook and not having to change.

"With your waitress story you clarified the difference between actuality, reality and how the mind produces evidence to back up its preconceived notions and create its experiences. You and the waitress experienced the same actuality or external event. However, your mind selected different evidence and built a reality from it. From that event her mind selected information and assembled it to present a radically different view of the situation. Your mind presented a reason to destroy while hers saw an opportunity for service. Notice how each of your individual mind-sets led to divergent experiences."

**KEY THOUGHT**—What do you believe about yourself to create what is happening in your life today?

Richard had unraveled the string of unconscious realities that drove his behavior and led to his need to attack and protect himself. He had reached into the core of this work and healed major issues. We define healing as the surfacing and letting go of the dis-integrative energies of unconsciousness and trauma. Who would think spilling coffee in a restaurant could lead to dealing with what is perhaps one of the deepest issues of someone's life? Every conflicting situation offers the same precious opportunity if you are willing to see it in the context of healing and allow your mind to construct a healing reality!