

A State of Readiness: The Power of Entrainment



with Bette Freedson, LICSW, LCSW, CGP

Entering the room with a relaxed posture, my client throws small pillows from the couch onto the floor, takes off her shoes, and puffs up the larger down cushions, then leans back on the couch with a sigh. She stretches back with her hands over her head, and says she's being aggravated and overwhelmed by the requirements of the new college semester.

I listen. I watch. I notice her breathing is somewhat shallow and irregular. Wondering what to say or do next, I realize I need to take a gentle breath and allow my intuition to guide me.

As I breath, I notice two things. First, I became aware that my breath was relaxing me, leaving me with a feeling of confidence that the session will be productive. Second, as I lean back in my chair in a way that matches but doesn't mimic her posture, I observe her breathing becoming more regular and more diaphragmatic.

Entrainment

Jeffrey Zeig, Director of the Milton H. Erickson Foundation, refers to the therapist's physiological and mental attunement, as "a state of readiness" – the ability to utilize whatever the client brings in. In a ready state, the clinician is available to join the client's world and view by using the most effective strategies in his/her therapeutic repertoire to connect the client with partially recognized and dormant resources of his/her integrated mind/body/spirit.

When I'm available for somatic attunement with my client and with myself, fascinating experiences occur. My favored tools come from the neural possibilities of somatic sensing in conjunction with the more creative features of an Ericksonian approach, such as multi-level communication. I discover wizardry in the duet of these two modalities particularly when my client and I are *entrained* in a co-regulated parasympathetic state.

When I say entrainment, I'm referring to the relationship between energy and vibration. Believe it or not, the laws of nature become upset when two objects or energy waves vibrate at a different resonance. So, inherent in our system, these vibrations start to attune, to match with one another. Consider two tuning forks started at different times, eventually, the "entrain" or match their resonance. We, as human beings, entrain too, impacting our behavior.

When I'm entrained with my clients in mutual readiness, I become aware of my own inner sensations and how they allow me to "listen" with my ears, my eyes, and my intuition, with my fullest self. Working from a state of readiness enables me to catch fertile moments of therapeutic potential during which I can use Ericksonian tools to guide the "absorption of perceptual reframes", and to guide emotional shifts and adaptive self-states into the client's soma and soul. This dynamic has been particularly fascinating, and fun, with my client, Neko, whom I wrote about in August.

As you may recall, Neko, who is in her early twenties, has mild developmental delays leftover from a seizure disorder in infancy. However, she is clever, insightful and motivated to succeed in work, school and life. After her initial perfunctory and considerable interpersonal engagement with me, Neko appears comfortable with a unique way of becoming ready for therapy.

Neural Nutrition: Back to my opening scene

Together, as we settle into our session, I glimpse a large round pink image on her T-shirt, like a creature peeking out from under her jacket. It looked like a pink blob but, in my attuned ready-to-utilize state, I sensed opportunity.

"What's the pink image on your T-shirt?"

"It's funny you should pick up on that," Neko replies, giggling. "It's Kirby. He's a walking tummy, a pink puff ball that inhales and swallows everything."

I offer a look of curious interest and Neko says, "Kirby absorbs the powers of whatever he swallows. He digests them. It makes him very confident."



"That's so cool!" I reply, pausing. "What do you think might happen if you could swallow certain powers—like Kirby?"

Throwing her head back with a giggle, Neko replies, "I-- I don't know."

"Would you be willing to have some fun with the idea?" Giggling again, she agrees.

I invite Neko to take an easy breath, to settle more comfortably and then picture a situation at school that might overwhelm or aggravate her. I suggest she notice her physical sensations and when she is beginning to feel overwhelmed to imagine she was Kirby and that she was swallowing a felt sense of confidence to replace aggravation, or anxiety.

"Imagine how confidence tastes, how it feels going down your throat, into your belly and what sensations you experience as confidence makes its way into the teeniest cells of your body, of your mind."

Almost immediately, Neko begins to laugh and nod. Her hand goes to her belly.

"What's happening?"

"Confidence replaced aggravation!" Her hand moves to her chest. Neko laughs and says, "The feeling just went to my chest."

"You can take heart," I say. "You can swallow pride in your accomplishments and digest confidence when aggravation becomes too hard to take. You can

also swallow confidence, peace, comfort or any other quality you wish to take in. You can digest the emotional nutrition and refresh yourself with pride in your energy to cope with all that is on your plate."

I finish my statements with a flourish of my hand as if to lay out a smorgasbord of available possibilities. "Your body can store these resources of confidence, pride and hope; infinite opportunities are always available for your use."

And they are available to you and to me—an amazing menu of a creatively nutritious, deliciously somatically focused and impressively presented multi-level and bountiful clinical buffet.

Enjoy!

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