



## Bankers & Bollywood Stars take to the Couch

by Julia Noakes

In the consulting room, two people sit together. One is trained as a therapist the other is learning what it means to be a client and to sit with a therapist. Together we get curious about the client's telling of the story of their life, what can be spoken, what gets included, what involves hesitation, what gets left out. Theories of oneself, theories that govern the living of a life, the internal edicts of the mind that prescribe what gets claimed as "right" action or otherwise "wrong" action all appear, hidden, sometimes disguised, in some sort of arrival for examination.

People come wanting something, presenting a difficulty of sorts, perhaps articulating a desire to feel more confident, to be more assertive, maybe a more potent leader, perhaps say able to manage a difficult boss or to become someone who sticks more with things with the tenacity of Sharuk Khan, or perhaps someone who stops trashing SRK because in fact he does stick with things. More often than not, it is a sense, a hint, a something that is difficult to convey a vague sense of un-ease or dis-ease with ones life as it is. This meeting, this coming together between the therapist and the other, is no dinner party for two; the conversation may easily wander and but rarely sidesteps important things unless it is timely to do so. Meanders, going off course maybe very telling, be useful, like the associations we make as we gaze from the window of a train, but not when they take the useless point of the scholarly, into territory that has no real relevance to the people and in particular, one person in the room. For therapy is more the realm of the poet than the scholar.

Freud, and I am simplifying here, taught us that an individual is caught between two competing instructions, the imperatives of instinctive desiring life, and the imperatives of the external world or culture. Let's consider this with a practical example: a man's instinctual desire, that pleasure seeking part, wants to live more freely have more time to himself, free of constraints and inhibition. This part might describe a hatred of wearing ties, can't bare the niceties of attending another film event, or honesty loathes going skiing merely for the networking opportunities. On the other hand, he also has internal pressure, from himself of course, to continue working in that highly respectable well paid job, probably the source of his fathers admiration, reflecting his conforming more survival instincts. Nothing of course is truly as straightforward as this, giving up the well paid job may



involve changing lifestyle, perhaps children are affected by these changes, even if such transformations, difficult shifts pose the possibility of a happier life for all concerned.

What any therapist worth his or her salt does is to encourage a freedom in speaking, a freedom without fear of punishment, whatever the various and sometimes competing desires may be. More often than not, this speaking, of getting curious with a deeply interested other, this sense of being truly listened to in the consulting room is sadly highly unfamiliar for so many.

In the therapeutic encounter, learning to speak, that is speaking with words, is privileged over speaking through a series of symptoms, sometimes bodily, say in the case of illness as symptom, or that otherwise nagging sense that leads one to ask “why did I do that?” Let me illustrate. An actor comes to see me because he fought hard to get the role, yet stays up half the night drinking single malt and misses the first day of filming. The banker compulsively works 14 hours a day in a job he claims to hate, goes home, plays with his blackberry all evening and tells me he wants a loving sensual life with his wife, or in truth, with someone else.

There are no fixed problems presented by any group in society, yet there are patterns, shapes and trends, and noticeably so in my view for bankers and actors. To start with, both groups are high achievers seeking some validation from outside of themselves. The ‘star’ cultures of both banking and the film world generally values individual performers over the actions of the team or the group and both communities are inclined to tolerate ridiculous behavioural excesses from their stars, fearful that they might lose them and the currency they bring. Bankers claim they are the ‘talent’ of the tribes, and that the actors are merely the ‘glamour’ lot. But what happens if we consider it the other way around? That the ultimate talent is a talent for imagination a critical, important freedom of childishness and that is maybe what good actors have in bucket-loads, whereas perhaps the glamorous ones are the ones who spend a fortune on clothes and go skiing, or spend hours at the gym hoping their pecks will be bigger than someone else’s on the trading floor?

What is interesting, and I have seen this again and again with the 600 or so clients I have worked with in both fields, actors and bankers often need to learn to be intimate with themselves, to be less compulsive about their work, less attached to constant action at the expense of generally ‘being’ and somewhat more confident about who they are especially when the audience has gone home and they aren’t ‘performing’ on their respective stages. I hypothesise that both groups



potentially struggle with what a friend of mine called the ‘balcony syndrome’, what happens, how they feel when no-one is looking? And that is why holidays, breaks from respective performing is so difficult.

Wealth or perhaps I should say the desire for material wealth is of course part of the script for both bankers and actors. Now don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with beautiful things, and I enjoy my Lexus convertible, the paintings in my home and the holidays my work affords. However, what is important, is what we ask of our relationship with these ‘things’ and exactly what our attachment to our ‘things’ is? What kind of substitution might be involved, particularly if we consider that doing one thing, often, although not necessarily, often means we aren’t doing something else? If I use my accumulation of things, as a kind of substitute lover, asking them to fulfil the basic human needs of love, of being close to others, of feeling that my life has some sort of purpose, then of course I am in trouble. In psychoanalytic circles it is generally agreed that there is a poverty in this sort of ‘sanity’, the sanity of the desiring to accumulate vast amounts of wealth, and with it, the potential interpretation that chasing extraordinary material wealth, is a way of denying and exempting oneself from basic human dependency needs. In other words if I have lots, I won’t need anyone. I can’t help feeling that a “so there” is said by someone, to a someone at this point, whether conscious or not.

Yet often, ‘more’ creates an interior feeling, a feeling inside of oneself of less and less real satisfaction, something other than that delicious feeling say after a really good meal, and the paradoxical result, if unexamined, of chasing more and more stuff. Recently, after a client’s young two year old son died, I stood at a roadside with his Catholic priest. A man drove past us in his new Ferrari and I noticed the priest take his hands into prayer position and so I asked him what he was doing. “Praying that the man driving that car has more in his life than just that car”. Indeed.

Freud was very cynical of certainty, believing if you like, that creative living involves holding the imperatives of our pleasure and survival needs in creative tension, renewing, regenerating, engaging with oneself and paying attention along the trajectory of life. We may eat spaghetti Bolognese, but to eat it everyday of ones life is problematic, too fixed, and too rigid. To live without thinking about living is a dangerous business. A patient once came to see Freud saying “I think all things considered, I had a very fortunate and sensible upbringing”, Freud replied, “I am very glad to hear that, for it is certainly unusual”.



Without exception, and remember it takes a certain courageous to examine ones life, we come to therapy when we are feeling under-nourished in some way or other and of course somewhat hopeful that by examining our lives some positive change will come. We all know the feeling when the menu from which we make life's selection feels flat and predictable or that there appears to be so many possibilities, potential selections that nothing seems to stand out as significantly interesting or doable. In effect, we are stuck. Generally, it is as though life doesn't seem to taste as good as we expect. Hidden in the depths of such discontent, perhaps somewhat buried are our ideals, a vision, a certain vitality, hope, some sense that life should be better in some way than it somehow is. People who rage about life show us they have ideals that they are alive, awake, not snoring at the helm of their lives, regardless of how difficult they might be to live with. Having appetite is also about having imagination and there is nothing worse than eating something for which we have no appetite.

We all arrive into adulthood with whatever it is that we have been given along the way. We might say that sitting with a therapist involves somehow transforming that which we have been given into something more rich, more vital, more fulfilling. Keeping life worth living is not merely a case of simply finding ways to just sustain ourselves, but somehow finding something that transports us? Ask yourself, what transports you? What would you give up to be transported? Essentially, life might best be described as a form of art, our own canvass, with our own style, that evolves and develops, complete with our own unique signature. We must remember in other words, there is something interesting about ourselves, that we are worthy of consideration. Yet as we search around, attempting to understand others, read their minds, possibly examine their faults, we often remain clueless as to what is on our own minds and so remain a continual secret to ourselves.

To understand one's own desire is further complicated in the sense that what we want maybe at odds with what we need. We may tell ourselves that we need a fast car, a penthouse on Marine drive, yet in silent moments, stuck in Bombay traffic we watch with longing, leisurely lovers laughing as we hurry along to the next in the series of back-to-back meetings. As a friend once asked me, "what is the use of a beautiful watch if you have no time?" In macho talk on banking trading floors, it is cool to attack or refuse our need for others, claiming that existing in some form of emotional starvation is okay, and all distortions of reality are born of fear.

You can no more be leader in banking or Bollywood if you lack the imagination to be a leader of your own life; and leadership is less about being in charge of others, than being in charge of



oneself. Yet sadly, the dreams and ambitions of parents and of significant others, of ideas we invented for ourselves perhaps a long time ago, that fail the gaze of the microscope hold tight, hold strong sometime as safely as prison-walls.

Maybe the banker wants to be in Bollywood and the Bollywood star in banking. Who knows? You'll have to talk it over with someone.



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