

You Were Bound To Read This

by Dr. Richard Bolstad

The Best Choice At That Time

At the beginning of each Practitioner training, I review the main presuppositions of NLP, and the course participants nod knowingly. Of course, by the end of the training most have still not begun to unpack many of these extremely radical statements, which are gleaned from the work of Gregory Bateson and others. The presupposition that, "People are always making the best choices they can." for example, is a transformational reframe used in Eastern spirituality. In this article I will explore the deeper meaning of this reframe. You can use this as a word game, or you can use it as a path to spiritual enlightenment. Whichever is the best choice for you right now...

Robert Dilts describes this core NLP presupposition more fully, saying, "People make the best choices available to them given the possibilities and the capabilities that they perceive available to them from their model of the world. Any behavior, no matter how evil, crazy or bizarre it seems is the best choice available to the person at that point in time – if given a more appropriate choice (within the context of their model of the world) the person will be more likely to take it." (Dilts, 1994, p. 305). Of course, most NLP trainers realize that this doesn't in any way mean that we can't make even better choices now than we did previously. We are, of course, able to learn from previous "mistakes" and do better. It's just that now, our previous experience, our learning, gives us better choices. And how well we learn will decide what is "the best choice" we can make right now. The presupposition also makes it clear that guilt is not an appropriate response to the recognition that you "could have done something better." You can accept that you did the best you could have done at the time, and you can learn from the results.

Ramesh Balsekar's Teaching

The Indian spiritual path of Advaita Vedanta takes this notion to its logical conclusion, and Mumbai guru Ramesh Balsekar is a recognized expert in using it. Balsekar is a western educated former president of the Bank of India. In his spiritual teaching, he maintains that every action we do is inevitable. He argues that since each action is the best choice we could have made (given our genetics, our experience, etc.) then it is the only choice we would have made. If there was a better choice, after all, we would have done that! So each action we take is totally determined by the previous events in our life, which have shaped our choices. Even these thoughts that you are having right now are totally determined by your previous experiences, and by what you are reading and doing now.

Balsekar says that one way to describe this is to call human beings body/mind organisms, who

respond like complex machines and have no free will at all. Another way to describe it, and the way that Balsekar prefers, is to realize that everything that you do is a result of God's will. He urges, "The sage knows that 'Deeds are done, events happen, but there is no individual doer.' That is the only difference as far as I am concerned, as far as my concept goes. The only difference between a sage and an ordinary person is that the ordinary person thinks each individual does what happens through that body/mind organism. So since the sage knows that there is no action which he does, if an action happens to hurt someone, then he will do all he can to help that person – but there will be no feelings of guilt." (Parish, 1998, p. 41)

Like an NLP trainer, Balsekar is emphatic that this model is only a model. He says, "This is all a concept. Make no mistake." (Parish, 1998, p. 42) He also does not mean to discourage people from making choices, or from exercising what they would think of as "free will." He explains, "So what I'm saying in fact is, what you think you should do in any situation at any particular moment is precisely what God wants you to think you

should do! The bottom line is that accepting God's will does not prevent you from doing what you think you should do. You see? In fact, you cannot help doing it!" (Parish, 1998, p. 46).

Journalist Chris Parish says he remained completely skeptical of Balsekar's teaching until he sat down to recover in a tea shop after interviewing him. At that moment, Parish says, he had what could only be described as a spiritual awakening. "It was there, at one of the many empty tables, as the first sip of sickly sweet milk tea passed across my lips that, in a flash, it hit me. I was not drinking the tea! I was not sitting at the table! In fact, I was not the one who had entered the teashop. And I was not the one who had just been tormented for an hour in discussion with a man who at that moment was beginning to seem like the sane one. In fact, it had never been me doing anything. It was as if a burden I had been carrying for my entire life was suddenly lifted into the sky by a hot air balloon, whisked away, never to return again.... As if through parting clouds, clearly now I could suddenly see that what I had thought of as 'my life' had in fact been only a mechanical process. The

person I had thought I was, was just a machine.... As the clinical perfection of God's scientific plan started to open up before me, the ecstatic thrill of absolute freedom – from worry, from care, from obligation, from guilt – began to rush through my veins like a torrent of undammed rivers." (Parish, 1998, p. 151-152).

Gurdjieff and Krishnamurti's Teaching

The same message is found in the writings of the Russian teacher Gurdjieff. George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1877-1949) was a Russian who searched Asia and the middle east looking for ancient mystical teachings. He studied with Sufi and other teachers, learning both Sufi sacred dancing (a form of meditation akin to Chinese Tai Chi) and Sufi mystical thought. His teachings were expounded in the west by Peter Ouspensky. Ouspensky explains that human beings are literally asleep. When we are dreaming in our sleep at night, we imagine that we are awake and acting, but in fact, we are merely dreaming, and all our actions and perceptions are imaginary. Gurjieff, or "G" as his students called him,

described humans as running like machines, and said that the "idea" that we have free will is just another mechanical thought which each of the "centers" in our mind mumbles in our sleep.

"Ouspensky told us how a deep realization that man was asleep came to him quite soon after he had heard the idea of sleep from G in the year 1915. He said that he had been seeing G off on the Moscow train, after one of his periodic visits to St. Petersburg, and that whilst walking home, along Trotsky Street, he suddenly realized that the man who was approaching him on the pavement was fast asleep. Ouspensky has since then described this episode in his book published many years later, *In Search Of The Miraculous*. 'Although his eyes were open he was walking along obviously immersed in dreams which ran like clouds across his face. It entered my mind that if I could look at him long enough I should see his dreams. But he passed on. After came another man, also sleeping. A sleeping *izvostchik* went by with two sleeping passengers. Suddenly I found myself in the position of the prince in the "Sleeping

Princess." Everyone around me was asleep. These sensations lasted for several minutes.'" (Walker, 1973, p. 44-45)

This experience of waking up, notice, is very similar to Chris Parish's experience of suddenly realizing that he has been a body/mind mechanism. It is an experience of awakening, literally. I am reminded that when Buddha was asked, "Are you a God?" he said, "No!" When he was then asked, "Are you a man?" he again answered, "No!" When the speaker finally asked him, "Then what are you?" he replied, "I am *awake!*"

The Indian teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) refers to the same experience of waking up and realizing that one is behaving mechanically. He says "The brain responds all the time according to its conditioning, according to various forms of stimuli: it is always active. The brain is the response of time, of memory; in the brain the whole past is contained.... When the old brain sees that it can never understand what freedom is; when it sees that it is incapable of discovering something new, that very perception is the seed of intelligence, isn't it? That is intelligence: "I

cannot do." I thought I could do a lot of things, and I can, in a certain direction, but in a totally new direction I cannot do anything. The discovery of that is intelligence, obviously.... Obviously the old brain, all these centuries, thought it could have its God, its freedom, it could do everything it wanted. And suddenly it discovers that any movement of the old brain is still part of the old; therefore intelligence is the understanding that it can only function within the field of the known." (Krishnamurti, 1973, p. 403, 411)

The Final Step

Balsekar, Gurdjieff and Krishnamurti are all pointing out that an extraordinary experience occurs when this reframe is fully accepted. Balsekar says of the person who realizes that he is not the actor, "When he reaches that stage then it means that the seeker is no longer there. It is extremely close to enlightenment, because if there is no one to care, then there is no longer any seeker.... That could lead to enlightenment." (Parish, 1998, p. 149). Instead of being caught up in the mechanical operation of the brain, and thinking that these operations are evidence of a "self," the person who sees the truth is awake and observing

the mechanism. In this awake state, the mechanism mysteriously functions better. This is the sense of ecstatic freedom, which Chris Parish described when he woke up to the mechanical nature of his life.

Kenneth Walker reports Ouspensky's way of describing this in a metaphor. "Ouspensky illustrated what he meant by means of a simile. He likened the several centers we had been studying at previous meetings to so many machines set up in a factory, machines which were quite capable of working in the dark, but which worked very much better if candles were lit in the room in the factory in which they had been installed. When electric lighting was substituted for the candles, the performance of the machines improved still further, and when the closed shutters of the factory windows were thrown wide open and daylight admitted, the machines worked at their maximum efficiency. Light here represented consciousness." (Walker, 1973, p. 36). This metaphor of en-light-enment is used repeatedly by great teachers to describe the state of heightened consciousness.

Krishnamurti emphasizes that this turning on of the lights is not the same as a mechanical

attempt to speed up the machines. He says "I find, when one examines one's activities, that the old brain is always responding according to its limited knowledge, to its tradition, its racial inheritance, and when that is operating nothing new can come about. Now I want to find out whether that old brain can be quiet so that a new movement can take place.... The brain is not forcing itself to be quiet. If it is forcing itself to be quiet then it is still the operation of the past. In that there is division, there is conflict; there is discipline and all the rest of it. But if the old brain understands, or sees the truth – that as long as it is in constant response to any stimulus, it must operate along the old lines – if the old brain sees the truth of that, then it becomes quiet. It is the truth that brings about quietness – not the intention to be quiet." (Krishnamurti, 1973, p. 403).

Using The Reframe

"This is all very fine," you may say. "I can understand this intellectually, but I don't seem to get the experience of change." This is a challenge, which I mentioned at the start of this article, talking about presenting the presuppositions of NLP to new NLP

Practitioners. They nod when I say that, "People are always making the best choices they can." But they have not really put together their actual experiences of life with this profound new way of understanding. The "idea" exists separate from the rest of their experiences, in an intellectual Never-never land where it cannot grow up and become real. If it ever truly becomes real, then they have that experience of release, of exhilaration, of awakening.

To truly check out an idea like this, you need to simultaneously hold in your mind the idea and the situations where the idea actually applies. Experiment right now! Choose an actual, specific experience you have had where you "regret" your feelings, thoughts or behavior; where, you "could have" thought, felt and behaved much more resourcefully. As you consider that experience, say to yourself, "I made the perfect choice at that time." Notice that when you say that, you may have an objection come up (i.e., "But I could have done..."). Consider that objection and realize that you could only have done something different if you fully and absolutely realized at the time that that choice was available

and that you could manage (emotionally and physically) to do it. Since you didn't, you made the perfect choice. Say the first statement again ("I made the perfect choice at that time.") and again check that it feels true. Repeat this for as many experiences as you need, to fill your convincer strategy (i.e., to ensure that you are completely convinced that this will always apply). If you know that you will never be convinced fully, then say to yourself "Since I know that I can never be fully convinced, no matter how true this statement is, I might as well accept it now and act as if the original statement ("I made the perfect choice at that time.") is always true.

As the sages say, "The truth will set you free."

Summary

The NLP presupposition, "People are always making the best choice they can at the time" contains radical implications. Amongst the spiritual teachers who have explored these implications are Ramesh Balsekar, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff and Jiddu Krishnamurti. Balsekar points out that if you are always doing the best thing you could do, then everything you have

done was determined. There is no separate actor "choosing" what to do, and no reason to feel guilt, regret or any other emotional response to one's past actions. The freedom that one experiences on discovering this is compared by Gurdjieff's friend Peter Ouspensky to the experience of turning on the lights in a room full of automatic machines. This experience is called being "awake" in Gurdjieff and the Buddha's teaching, and it is called intelligence in Krishnamurti's teaching. To obtain the experience, it is necessary to fully consider real life experiences where you have "regretted" your actions. You can then check that the brain accepts that you made the perfect choice at that time.

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