Generative Modelling

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In a 1997 article about types of modelling,¹ Penny and James described an approach which they called Generative, appropriate for clients who ”are not requesting remedial therapy, rather personal and spiritual development”. When I first encountered Clean it was this potential which grabbed me. I have been involved in the exploration of myth and symbol all my adult life, both academically and in practice through a variety of contexts, and the idea of utilising the power of metaphor in the direct and fruitful way Clean Language offers was a revelation.  ​

‘Generative’ implies invoking conditions for the new and creative to arise, as compared with unlocking the symbols of previous experience, or even, I suggest, facilitating emergence in the sense of EK. From the perspective of the world’s Wisdom Traditions, personal development is not  a process of resolving problem situations, but rather a process which may begin from trauma, but more commonly and with more stability, originates with the perception of what a Buddhist might delicately call ‘unsatisfactoriness’.  (Or ‘suffering’, as often translated). From here on, the scale of possible transformation of perception, and of Being, reaches to Infinity.

​Point zero on this scale varies from person to person. The beauty and potential of Symbolic Modelling, it seems to me, is that it facilitates entering the transformative process on a person’s own ground, as opposed to having to transport themselves to some already established pitch where in addition to learning the rules of the game, they have to adopt the whole culture and team colours. (However, I do believe that rules (principles) are essential; the kit and caboodle less so.)

​Symbol and mythological narrative are the natural language of some categories of experience, especially for attempting to communicate a close encounter with the Ineffable. Although there are clearly overlaps and parallels with the process of EK, I think there is a different assumption underlying terms like enlightenment, satori, moksha, metanoia and all the other names for the goal of spiritual work, where language itself runs out and symbols are the last-chance saloon on the edge of Infinity.

​However, along the way there’s a profound journey to be explored via symbol, metaphor and myth. A solid foundation for further growth and integration will take dedication and spiritual practices like meditation, but symbolic awareness can deepen a person’s understanding of their own experience, encourage insight into some of the perennial human mysteries, and inspire creative output.

​In my experience, many or most people have a little treasure chest somewhere in the cellar of their psyche (rarely in the front room) where the more meaningful glimpses and experiences of their life are stored for safekeeping until they can be integrated into a framework, or utilized creatively. Clean language and symbolic modelling may offer a new way to unlock this chest and bring its contents into active life, with creative results.

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¹ *Symbolic Modelling. Penny Tomkins & James Lawley*                                                              Lucy Oliver

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