

The Great Goddess's worst enemy in Olympus was arguably Athena, because it was she who supported Zeus in his rape of women, and who upheld the very patriarchy which had so diminished the Great Goddess. And yet, as I pointed out earlier, Athena is an obvious archetype for strong women to follow; by accepting male power, there is a good chance of sharing it, goes the logic. But women who follow Athena are helping to destroy the world. Instead, we need to look backwards, past Athena and the other goddesses and gods who reigned with Zeus, to the Great Goddess. We need to study her and respect her, which means among other things to study and respect Nature. We need to re-mythologise her, invent stories about her, draw and paint her, dance and sing her. Only then will there be strong and clear alternative archetypes to Zeus's crowd, so that women can choose freely how to be.

Long live the Goddess.

FRANÇOISE'S FIRST STEP TO A THERAPEUTIC ENCOUNTER

by John Stathers

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After several attempts to dial the number Wendy had given me, I steeled myself to pick up the phone one more time and dial again.

It started ringing. Already, I wanted to put it down. Two rings, three rings - surely they would have answered by now? I was about to hang up on the fourth ring when the phone was answered from the other end. Why the delay in speaking? It was with some relief that I listened to the recorded message....

"Hello, this is David Phelps. I'm not able to bla, bla, bla....."

The tone came and I decided to put the phone down. For one thing I always felt so silly talking to a tape recorder but more importantly I really felt fine after all, didn't I? Didn't I? I was coping with my life. But that was it!

I was only coping and coping wasn't very fulfilling at all, in fact it was really quite miserable at times. So I didn't hang up, but took the first and probably most significant step towards a therapeutic encounter and left a message for David to phone me taking care to sound really quite casual, in control and fairly disinterested.

As I put the phone down I felt an immediate sense of relief.

Just in that action, somehow, I had taken some responsibility for myself and made contact with David Phelps who was a Core Process Psychotherapist, whatever that was. I felt a bit choked that I had indirectly, by leaving that message, actually dared ask for help.

Then the doubt set in!! All the old stuff chattered away, such as:

"Think of all the thousands of people who are worse off than you!"

"You can't afford it!"

"It's totally self indulgent!"

"What if I lose control completely?" etc. etc.

I was even debating phoning David Phelps and cancelling my message. But somehow I didn't have the courage. I suppose looking back on it, even at that stage I was hooked.

The phone rang. I jumped. Let it ring a few times, I thought. Now answer it. Sound casual, at ease, in control.

"Hello, Torquay 217634."

"Francoise, is that you? I didn't recognise you for a moment. You sound different. Are you alright dear?"

Shit - it was my bloody mother. Always interfering. What did she really care anyway?

"Oh, Hi Mum! I'm fine..." etc. etc.

If only I could collapse and bring myself to say that I was not fine and I wanted Mum. I want you mother! I love you Mum! Oh please Mum can't you hear me wanting you when I say I'm fine?? -

The phone rang again. This time I knew it was David Phelps.

"Hello!"

"Oh, hello! This is David Phelps. I've just come in and received your message to call you."

The voice was gentle and kind. I noticed that I felt a flush of pleasure at the thought that he had called me back so soon.

"Oh er, yes. Well Wendy Wendy Roberts suggested I call you. It's nothing really. It's just that....." (I felt a lump rising in my throat)

"Well, I'm sort of" (I felt stuck for words)

"Could you find some time to come and see me?" David asked

"Er, yes. I'm quite busy but" And slowly we moved towards each other and fixed a time to meet.

Again I felt some release at having taken this next step to the extent that I started convincing myself all was well and I didn't need therapy. Even if I don't need it, I thought, I'll go along purely out of interest. I couldn't quite put my finger on it but somehow I felt that David had heard the bit of me that wasn't coping, that wasn't fine. Also, and this seemed very important to me, I sensed that I had been accepted. No sense of David trying to establish if it was really necessary or how

urgent it was. Not like the dentist or health centre where one almost felt obliged to exaggerate the extent of one's ailment to get an early appointment.

David liked the name Françoise and already was reminding himself of his tendency to form preconceived ideas about the client, their background, their problem etc. etc. Could he handle and give proper attention to another long term client? Another woman? He had been a therapist for several years now but he still felt a mixture of anxiety and excitement at meeting new potential clients. For the time being he would not think about Françoise and would know at that first meeting if he wanted to take her on as a client, if indeed she wanted to take him on as a therapist. His experience had been that normally the decision to continue or not was a mutual one made during the first exploratory session or very soon afterwards.

I was acutely aware that today was the day. At 3 p.m. I would, all being well, step into my first meeting with David. How did I feel? A whole mixture of feelings, but in a word - ridiculous - ! Ridiculous for feeling excited, for feeling frightened, for worrying about what to wear, for having looked at the map at least three times, for having no appetite, for having waves of panic, elation - you name it, I felt it!!

The waiting room was simple and non threatening, except for the notice board. I read some of the advertisements, cards and posters with incredulity and an increasing sense of panic, of being totally in the wrong place. Things like: women's sexuality groups in Totnes, retreats at a Buddhist Monastery in Sussex, rebirthing groups, a talk on crop circles, etc. etc. This wasn't me. I could just imagine David Phelps sweeping out in some long robe, wearing beads, his hair tied in a pony tail, a beard, smelling of incense or even pot. With a strong feeling of panic and the need to cut and run, I turned to leave just as David came out to meet me.

He had a kind face which showed traces of humour, sadness and compassion. But most striking of all was the fact that he wasn't striking. Just ordinary! He didn't look like a therapist! Quite, I thought, what does a therapist look like anyway? I felt rather clumsy and awkward as we said hello. Already I felt obliged to make comments to fill the silence as we walked through into the other room. Well not silence exactly, but more the perceived silence of David listening rather than talking pleasantries.

The room was not at all what I had expected. No couch, no high backed leather swivel chair, no desk and no shelves of psychology books. I noticed the box of tissues, the cushions, the mattress, blanket and the candle alongside the bowl of pot pourri on a small table. There were two chairs but their positioning suggested that they were not normally used.

I went for a large cushion and sat rather awkwardly half on and half off it trying to look casual in a crossed legged posture while David sat on the floor fairly close to me. His proximity felt about right and I was aware that my exit route wasn't blocked by where he was sitting. The room was bright and clean. It felt nice, although a bit bare.

"So", David started, "I like to start with this first meeting to establish if you feel you would like to start therapy with me and likewise if I feel right about it as well. If we do decide to continue I would wish us to mutually agree the basic terms of our contract."

I hadn't considered for one moment that the therapist would have any say as to whether he would take me on as a client or not. After all, I was paying so surely I should decide. This thought that David might reject me as a client was almost unbearable. I felt disempowered by my need to have David accept me as a client. Also, what was this contract business? It sounded rather cold, uncaring and businesslike. Would I have to sign something or what? As I thought all of this and a thousand other things, all I could hear myself saying was: "Fine".

David: "You mentioned on the phone that you were coping with things in your life, but that was all."

Me: "That makes it sound rather dull, like all I'm doing is surviving!"

SILENCE - I could feel the sadness welling up inside me. I fought it down in my usual way.

Me: "It's just that I've noticed increasingly that I'm dissatisfied."

David: "How does that feel?"

I felt angry. What a bloody stupid question!

Me: (aggressively) "What do you mean? Dissatisfied feels dissatisfied, not satisfied!!"

I then started feeling a bit guilty at my petulance: "Well I mean it's sort of, Oh I don't know, just...." I gesticulated with my hands.

David: "Can you do that again with your hands?"

I felt embarrassed and rather silly as I obligingly tried, even at this early stage, to please my therapist who obviously saw great significance in hand gestures and maybe even sensed a breakthrough already! I wanted suddenly to giggle. What on earth was I doing here in this bare white room, half sitting on a cushion opposite a man I didn't know making funny movements with my hands at the age of 46!?

"God, this all feels suddenly so silly and ridiculous. Look, I'm sorry but I think I'm wasting both of our times", I said.

David: "You're not wasting my time, but I wouldn't want to persuade you either way to stay or go. The decision must be yours."

"Well, what exactly is Core Process Psychotherapy then?"

David started to explain. I found it hard to absorb. I was moved by the description of the four boundless core states and the feeling of therapist and client

being on equal footing. I found I was just getting what David was saying and his sincerity.

I was particularly interested in the idea that therapy was an individual journey and that it can go beyond the initial problem/crisis solving stage to one which is positively transformative.

David had stopped talking. There was silence. I had discovered already I felt uncomfortable during these silences. He seemed in no hurry to break the silence and I felt an increasing urge to blurt something out. I didn't know what, but was just aware of something rising up from somewhere in the depths.

"What's happening?" David asked.

"Nothing really. I was just enjoying the silence", I lied, at the same time avoiding eye contact. God I felt very exposed. He somehow seemed to be giving me so much undivided attention. It was unnerving, but at the same time quite blissful to be receiving ... what? I wasn't sure, but I knew somehow I needed it. This attention, positive regard, recognition had been missing from my life for a very long time. I started feeling very sorry for myself. Overwhelmingly sad. He must see it surely? I hung my head.

Very quietly and gently David said: "Take your time, Françoise."

Maybe it was just those four words, or the use of my name, or the loving tone, or the sincerity, or all of these things that acted as a trigger for me. I burst into tears. The grief rose uncontrollably upwards and outwards.

Instead of trying to comfort me by putting his arm round my shoulders, David sat quietly with me and offered me the tissues. I hadn't cried for a long long time. The relief eventually gave way to embarrassment.

"I'm sorry. You must think I'm quite foolish, crying like that!" I sobbed.

David said in all truth: "Your crying touched me deeply!"

Shit! I could feel the grief all welling up again.....

John Stathers apologises but he is unable to continue this account. He doesn't know if Françoise became David's client and, if so, for how long. He doesn't know what the outcome was, because at this point he realised how essential total trust and confidentiality are to the therapeutic relationship. In fact John realises that he may have appeared indiscrete in revealing the story so far and would like to assure the reader that this is a totally fictitious account. But you may have spotted that John knows Françoise and David only too well.