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Phyllis Krystal gave the name 'Cutting the Ties that Bind' (Phyllis Krystal 1982) to a method which she developed in her individual counselling practice, using specific symbols for specific therapeutic purposes. In addition, she facilitated clients to draw on their own intuition in a symbolic way. This approach allows two people working together to connect to a mutually shared wisdom, which often seems to present itself in the mind's eye as an image which can then be reflected upon creatively. Thus the image becomes a symbol that can be drawn on to guide and inspire the process of the therapeutic work. I have been stimulated by part of the Cutting the Ties ritual, the Figure of 8 model, to find ways to help clients strengthen their sense of personal space. I say more about this later.

### **Energy Follows Thought**

As the old maxim states, energy follows thought, and so our thoughts become a great resource for us to introduce changes. Changes in perception and experience can be encouraged by changes in our habitual ways of thinking.

The language of symbol speaks to us through our thinking, dreams and conscious reverie. It is actively involved in conveying information into consciousness, as well as helping us to process everyday events. In psychotherapy symbol can both provide information about a problem and a means of addressing it.

Symbol seems to operate in an area of the body/mind which acts as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious realms of awareness. The unconscious realm throws up images that can propel our experience into consciousness, by allowing us to reflect on what they may be communicating. When we invest meaning into the images they become symbols which enable us to access parts of ourselves that operate outside conscious awareness. Thus we can work with unfamiliar aspects of ourselves, or with familiar aspects in new ways.

In the past twenty years I have been practising as a healer, a teacher of healing, a massage therapist, and a psychotherapist. I approach all my work with an awareness of an energy matrix, whereby each individual has their own energy field or aura, operating within a greater field through which energy and information flow. (See Delcia McNeil's article in this issue.) I enter the therapeutic relationship with the view or expectation that energy within both the client and myself has the potential to flow differently, if that seems appropriate. I think of this as being mental, physical, spiritual and emotional energy. In particular I consider emotion as E-Motion – energy in motion. This is significant because so many of our emotions are perceived as movements or sensations in the physical body; yet emotion is often experienced as being blocked or inaccessible, unable to emerge. Working with symbol encourages the creative energies to flow more freely – body-mind pathways can be influenced, engendering a sense of personal resource and power within the client.

As a psychotherapist and healer I experience the energy matrix as a resource on which both my clients and I can draw. I believe that the disconnection many people experience, where they feel cut off from the natural rhythms of the earth, also extends to a disconnection from 'source'. Source doesn't have to have a name. Everybody has a different label for what may be viewed as the divine, an intuitive inner voice, or a numinous 'knowing' which is difficult to describe. Connection to source or intuition can convey a natural sense of mystery and wonder. Phyllis Krystal's work

provides a grounded way to connect symbolically with this 'knowing'. Because of the readiness with which individual clients and workshop participants take to working with symbol, I conclude that it is a natural manifestation of what it is to be human.

The experience of the numinous is mysterious and wonderful because we cannot see it with our eyes, or touch it with our bare hands. And yet, when people have a sense of tapping into deeper parts of themselves, this can bring a sense of recognition, of being in touch with their dreaming or unconscious selves. This gives them access to a storehouse of information to draw on for information and guidance.

### **Phyllis Krystal and the Cutting the Ties that Bind Ritual**

The model developed when Phyllis and a colleague, working together, aligned themselves meditatively to their higher conscious selves – which they came to refer to as 'the High C' – which allowed them to gain intuitive insights in the form of symbols, into the problems of individuals seeking help.

The Cutting the Ties that Bind ritual evolved specifically to allow individuals to free themselves from the constraints of old conditioned connections. These 'ties', which they have established with others, importantly within the family of origin, may continue to negatively affect current relationships. In engaging with the ritual, clients go through a rite of puberty and separation, to release these conditioned connections. The cutting of the ties facilitates more satisfying and harmonious relationships in the present, and supports individuals to fully enter adulthood healthily

separated emotionally from their parents.

The process encourages images to spontaneously surface into consciousness, where they can then be discussed and used as a resource. In this way individuals are supported to find their own relationship with symbol.

I have run workshops presenting the ritual. In a weekend, working with a group, the energy is intensified and the whole process can be completed in a few days. Generally, however, Phyllis Krystal advises that one-to-one work should be set up in advance and carefully prepared for by the client over a period of two weeks.

### **The Power of the Circle**

One of the preliminary symbols used in the Cutting the Ties that Bind ritual is the Figure of 8, where in the client's imagination two large circles are described separately at arm's length, at floor level; firstly one round the client, the second in which a parent is visualised. The client is then guided to mentally loop light around the perimeter of the two circles, thus creating a Figure of 8 symbol. The idea is that all the energy of each person represented is gathered in and concentrated within their own circle, prior to the next step of the ritual. Practising this mental movement of light rehearses the Figure of 8 in advance of the tie-cutting session and helps the concentration of individual energy within the circles to occur. This supports the separation process. During the next part of the ritual, the client is invited to visualise the symbolic parental 'ties', and to find ways of cutting and removing these.

People completing the Cutting the Ties that Bind ritual often make an energetic healing with the parent concerned (parents are dealt with individually in this process). Without them being aware of the work that has been done, the energetic shift that takes place may somehow be experienced by the absent parent. For example, where there has been a long absence of contact, the parent may suddenly reach out and call the client within a few days of the ritual being completed. The removal of the invisible binds creates a space where rapprochement may occur.

### **Circle as Boundary**

I have found the circle components within the Figure of 8 symbol immensely useful over the years both as a diagnostic tool, and as a tool for change. I often use them on their own without necessarily proceeding to the Cutting the Ties that Bind ritual. Because the connection to working with symbol is often made very easily, I may not spend much time explaining the background. I may feel it appropriate to introduce, say, an awareness of personal space by asking the client to think of a circle around them (see below). If this doesn't seem to come easily to them, I may explore the reasons for this with them further; or we may simply move on

Many people feel overwhelmed by the influence of a family member or partner, and simply don't know how to protect themselves from a sense of being invaded. They may have little sense of giving their permission or exerting control over their own space. Using the circles of the Figure of 8, the client can be helped to gather more information about what is going on. For

example, when they envisage themselves within their own circle, are they in the centre? Do they remain in the centre? Can they use their conscious efforts to change and take charge of this? When they see the circle of, say, a parent, in front of them, is the parent in the centre of their own circle? If not, can the client move them back to the centre?

All these mental activities can strengthen the client's sense of influence and control. Because they are employing symbol, the actions are being integrated at many levels within the psyche, bridging both the conscious and unconscious mind. Such symbolic exercises lend themselves to being rehearsed by the client outside the therapy room, and may be used as a personal resource at moments of difficulty.

Focussing on the client's own circle or personal space, I will encourage them to envisage a circle of light (like a hula hoop) around them at floor level. I ask the client to tell me what their circle looks like. All sorts of things may happen with the circle. It may be incomplete; it may be an oval or uneven shape; it may be vertical rather than horizontal. Let's look more closely at these examples.

*Incomplete circle.* I have noticed that this happens where someone has ill-defined personal boundaries. This may be because of some sort of abuse where the personal space has been violated and the boundary shattered. Whether or not I know this to be the case, I encourage the client to find a way of closing the circle for themselves and envisaging themselves at the centre of their

personal space. This may be more or less difficult to do, depending on the degree and nature of the original violation. However, I find most people are able to work effectively with this symbol. If it is not easy for them to use their inner awareness to visualise, then another strategy is to ask them to represent the symbol by drawing it. The drawing can then be repeated or the symbol practised in the imagination with intention, until the boundary feels stronger. Introducing movement to describe the circle physically can be another very effective way for the client to experience defining the boundaries of their personal space.

*The Oval or Uneven Circle.* This happens when there are some imbalances. The next step is to explore these with the client. Are they 'squeezed' in some area of their life as a result of stress? Or do they have an inability to express some part of their character? Inviting them to envisage the circle becoming more symmetrical is simply a way of encouraging them to create some energetic balance and in doing so take more space for themselves. We can then look together at how they might manifest this in their daily lives. What aspect of themselves doesn't get enough space or expression? It's like working an unfamiliar muscle, and may be an exercise that a client will practise over time in order to become stronger.

*The Vertical Circle.* This indicates a lack of groundedness. When we are grounded, we can operate effectively in our day to day lives; we get things done and arrive at places on time. If someone 'sees' their circle as vertical, I ask them to envisage the symbol on the

horizontal plane at floor level, so that they are consciously engaging with their dreaming self. I also encourage them to use awareness of current body sensations and physical space to stay present in the here and now. (Babette Rothschild 2000.) In addition I ask the client how they are organising their daily lives and look at strengths and weaknesses with them, as well as exploring other ways of asserting a personal worldly confidence.

*The Circle within a Circle.* Working recently with a client who was reflecting on the nature of their relationship with their mother, I suggested they drew two circles illustrating the dynamic of the relationship. The client represented their own circle within than of the parent. Having the relationship so graphically

illustrated allowed us to follow up by discussing ways the client could move forward. Where would they like their circle to be? What would be the consequence? How would that feel? We can continue to use drawings as a means of trying out different constellations of the relationship.

### Conclusion

For many clients, using the language of symbol to explore their issues can elicit new insights and resolutions. I believe that this style of working supports the integration of the conscious and unconscious parts of ourselves. Because it may be very new to the client it can be all the more effective and inspiring. It is as if they've opened a cupboard door inside themselves and found a room full of treasures, to reflect on and use for self-healing.

### References

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