

## **On Learning**

When I was training to become a psychiatrist I had weekly supervision of the work I was doing with various faculty members. I usually had two supervisors. Every six months I would be assigned new supervisors. I could keep a supervisor longer if I made a special request to remain with one I was finding to be particularly helpful or if we were in the midst of understanding more deeply a case I was working on. One supervisor I was finding to be boring. I would present case material to him I had seen in the previous week. He would say almost nothing about the material. I knew this man was a very bright, kind, caring and gentle person. Also I knew he was a good therapist. I was very frustrated, feeling I was getting nothing from the supervision.

I decided to tell him what I was feeling by saying I felt he had more to offer regarding my work than I was hearing. I wondered if there was anything I could do to get a clearer response regarding how he viewed what I was presenting. He agreed to be more responsive. From then on it became one of the best supervisory experiences I had. I still wonder what the reasons were I either did not understand the little he was saying before or he was not responding with what his thoughts were about the case.

I suspected in some way he was trying to protect me from feeling incompetent in my work. I believe by requesting his comments I had indicated I could tolerate the realization I had much to learn about being a therapist. Indeed it was with a case he supervised me on I ultimately learned the most that has since become helpful to those whom I have taught.

Being a student is strangely a very difficult thing to do. It demands we admit there is much we do not understand. It is willfully accepting we are incomplete and unfinished. The paradox is by being a good student, by fully submitting to the knowledge of our incompleteness, we are able to become more powerful at the same time we become more aware of how incomplete we truly are!

It is a student's responsibility and opportunity to determine what a teacher has to teach. All situations where we perceive ourselves as being students are opportunities for growth. If we feel too threatened by the situation, whatever it is, we cannot tolerate the student role of submission and powerlessness and we are likely to switch into the false position of behaving like or believing we already know everything or the teacher has nothing to teach us. Through the realization all situations present us with opportunities to learn we are able to learn what a particular situation has to teach us. This may or may not be what the teacher believes they are attempting to teach. By approaching all learning opportunities with this in mind we can adjust our reaction to the situation so we can tease out what the situation has for us to learn.

Learning is the miracle of discovering the previously unknown. It is a miracle because

learning is the only time in our life when we are truly changed. It is a miracle when something previously totally foreign to us becomes perceivable. Being a student is a very difficult task. It requires us to temporarily set aside previous beliefs we used to explain what we are experiencing so we can entertain a new understanding. When we are able to do this, it is a miracle because we then experience something we were previously unable to experience.

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