

## **How to Make a Choice Without Driving Yourself Nuts! Transforming The Torment of Making a Decision into a Wise Self Ah!**

### **The Dilemma of "What to do?"**

Often we are faced with important choices to make. The "shoulds" and "what-ifs" and "oh my gods!" pile up and we end up going over and over the scenarios like a gerbil running inside a wheel. No answers there! Only increasing rounds of running over similar scenarios with little new info and no answer in sight. No relief, and increased anxiety. I tell clients that in getting on that gerbil wheel, which is a very human tendency, we are in the part of the brain in which **there are no answers** to our dilemma! We can search and search in this mode but no answer arrives. Clients usually relate to this with a chuckle of self-reflection and a "Yeah!"

The Kathleen-version of some of the science behind how to make choices (simplified, poet-ified, KD-ified) is this. One of the left brain's wonderful gifts is that it compares things. That's great—I know I'm me and I'm not the chair I'm sitting in so I can get up and walk around! Being able to identify differences let's us get on in the world and not be a lump merged with the chair.

However, while the measuring system allows us to differentiate, it doesn't help us choose, or choose well, or come up with new info—the left brain can compare but not create something new! Often what we need is a solution that is an entirely new synthesis built from, arising from—but different than—what we already know. For that we need the right brain-answers that are found in the right brain, not the left.

The left brain has a collection of comparable options. However (saying it in a really simplified way) the left brain can't create anything new. It actually even has somewhat less neurons than the right brain. The hardworking left brain must relinquish its info to the right brain. The right brain, instead of running around in a circle, lets it all be laid out and cook until what arises is either: a Wise Self, sense-of-rightness choosing of an option; or, a Wise Self synthesis of all the options into something entirely new which has a sense-of-rightness feel. How cool is that, the right brain can find the "answer." So-how do we do this?

With a big thanks to the left brain for collecting a lot of important facts, and for identifying what might be some of our main choices, we need to move from the endlessly over-comparing gerbil wheel cycle of the left brain to the Great Kind Decider—the right brain. No coincidence that the right brain is closely linked with the body, with sensation, with compassion and the heart. It also is *inclusive*—here's what I mean by inclusive. The left brain says, "This is how it is buddy. Suck it up and decide." The right brain says, quite kindly, "Oh, I can understand how you'd see things that way. *And...*" One of the right brain's functions is being able to put ourselves in another's shoes. Being in our right brain and making room for left-brain angst actually softens ourselves toward ourselves. The right brain, which is not primarily concerned with comparing, but instead with including and creating, is then freed up to compassionately see that its left brain friend is stuck in an uncomfortable dilemma, include the info, sit with the info, and allow something helpful to emerge.

In the right brain there is true magic: "Oh, I can understand how you'd see things that way. *And...*" Both-And. The miraculous And: To say it in a simplified way, the right brain now has access to all that great left brain info, but instead of endlessly comparing, what it does is set it all out there and *Let It Be*, (The Beatles were on to something) and voila!—*something entirely new can be created out of what is already known, what is greater than the sum of its parts*. The right brain's magic is that it can take many different components and in a friendly way be inspired by all of them and come up with something that is an inspired and entirely new synthesis of all of it! The "answer!"

### Some real life examples I share with clients:

- Practicing scales on an instrument, then memorizing a song. This is the great gift of the nerdy left brain. However, when performance time comes up, all that info gets downloaded into the right brain—all the notes, the words, the music get transformed into a *performance*, ie, the feeling-infused, performer-audience connection that is alive, electric, and takes the plain facts of the notes and words of the song and allows the performer to create an *experience* which connects performer and audience in something unique and memorable.
- Einstein was notorious for often sleeping as much as twelve to fourteen hours a day. The special time between wakefulness and sleep is a very special transition from the left brain's helpful calculations and info into a more right brain realm where things are less "defined," more dreamy, spacious—and creative. Ha!—Einstein came up with  $E=MC^2$  exactly in this half-waking half-sleeping state.
- Here's one a lot of us know, and my clients recognize it right away. You have a dilemma, drive yourself nuts over it, finally find a way to put it aside, and lo and behold, when you are taking a nice hot shower and relaxing (right brain territory) the answer to your dilemma comes as a welcome shot out of the blue—it comes easily, and often there is new, unexpected information, and it feels right. Tah Dah and kudos to right brain time in the shower!

So, how to get into right brain territory! Here's how we can *play* with this—play being another right brain gift—with *curiosity*. Curiosity is helpful because when you are curious you've shifted away from being afraid (which is gerbil-wheel territory). Here we go:

### Using the practice. You can try the practice on your own, or therapists can use it with clients.

So, let yourself bring to mind a dilemma you have had. Some commons ones are: "Should I go to the party or not?" "Should I take the job or not?" "Should I go out on another date with this person or not?" "Should I tell Mom I'm not coming to Thanksgiving or should I go?" Or in the words of that Clash song that I just love, "Should I stay or should I go?" You get the idea. In a left brain way we can come up with all kinds of reasons for both options as the left brain lists the endless differences. Sometimes the voice of our reasoning is friendly, but fairly often it's not and on top of the endless gerbil wheel loop we get **The Voices**: "You never take a risk and you won't this time." "You're not good enough to do that." "You're going to act like an idiot again." "Who would like you?" It's already tough to make a decision, but when we get this kind of critic talk, which is often part of the left brain comparing (comparing yourself unfavorably to others), it compounds the problem and there's not only a choice to make but also a choice in how we feel towards ourselves. We really need the right brain's compassion and wise mind. So:

**Example** Let's take an example. A "client" of mine (identity and details changed) had a three-fold question: "Should I stay in the job I hate for the experience? Should I quit the job and stay in this geographical area and look for another job? Should I quit the job and move to Michigan but I don't know if I'll find a job there." As a practitioner, I don't have to know the answer to the question, I just have to know that my client has a keen interest here, and I offer a way to play that can help the client find his own way to an answer:

- **Therapist:** I have an idea how to work with this, would you like to explore here?
- **Client:** Yes! I've been driving myself nuts about this! I have to decide soon! Oh no!
- **Therapist:** Here's a pile of pillows. How about you pick three pillows, one for each one of your choices, and throw them down on the floor wherever feels right.
- **Client:** Okay. (Client picks three pillows, defines an option per pillow, and puts them on the floor in front of him).
- **Therapist:** Okay, this is how you do it. I'll be you for a moment and show you how. Okay, you're in neutral first, nothing to do here. Then you pick one of your three choices, it doesn't matter which one or what order, just where you feel you'd like to go first. Say it happens to be "Quit the job and stay in SF." So now you *actually change your chair position so that you face that pillow/choice*. You pretend that you're really choosing only that choice and you're not going to do the other choices. You face that pillow/choice and just see what naturally arises as you imagine

*going with it.* Then after a while you'll change pillows—move to another choice.

**Comment:** In other words—get the choices out of the client's head, out of left-brain-only mode **and set them out in front of him—creating some needed objectivity, but in an experiential, playful way.** I have **unfailingly** had clients have huge sighs of relief and immediately more grounding in just getting the choices out of their head and out in front of them. This is a very simple but also very sophisticated act! We're already beginning to access the client's right brain which can value something in all information, which is kinder, which is more intuitive, creative and calmer. The blood pressure goes down and a bit of playfulness kicks in. Already the client is entering Wise Mind.

- **Client:** I'll pick staying in the job first. (Client shifts chair so he is facing that pillow. Client has an immediate very strong response, tightening and getting more activated). God this sucks! I don't even want to think about that boss anymore. And the job is really boring! I hate it!
- **Therapist:** Wow, a lot of energy there in saying you hate it!
- **Client:** Yeah, I know, I mean I really know, that nothing is going to change there. That boss has been there forever, and I've done all I can do. It's really time for me to go. Whshew!
- **Therapist** (tracking client's physical responses): So it doesn't feel right to stay there, and it looks like you're feeling a bit of relief in saying that, even a bit of calm, huh?
- **Client:** Yes, so much relief! And that's interesting, I feel a bit calmer just saying out loud that I don't want to stay there!
- **Therapist:** So seems like there's a kind of rightness about not staying there?
- **Client:** Yes, it feels right to not stay at that job.
- **Therapist:** So how about just stay with that rightness about not staying.
- **Client** (client is quiet for a while): Wow, it's pretty clear to me I don't want to be in this job.
- **Therapist** (tracking a sense of freedom in client's body): Feeling freer, huh?
- **Client:** Yes. Wow, I feel so much more energy!
- **Therapist:** A lot of energy!
- **Client:** A lot of energy . . . But I'm worried what to do!!!

**Comment:** Bite-sizing to one thing at a time allows a fuller felt-sense experience for that particular aspect. I track for a sense of rightness in the client and help them stay there. The client had a sense of rightness, then there's a bit of re-upping the gerbil wheel—"I'm worried what to do." So now it's time to shift to another choice, making it clear that we're switching, to help the client remain objective and more self-kind. So I ask the client where he feels drawn to next:

- **Therapist:** There's that worry again, and you get faster. How about we slow it down, and you can shift to another pillow and see what happens with that option?
- **Client:** Yeah, I'm faster. It helps to slow it down. I'll pick the pillow of staying here but quitting my job. (Client shifts chair so he is facing that pillow). I still have a lot of relief in quitting. Wow, that feels good. I am so over that boss.
- **Therapist:** Leaving that boss brings a lot of relief.
- **Client:** Yes, that's clear to me. But then there's staying in the Bay Area and looking for something else, another job. That feels kinda weird.
- **Therapist:** That's what this pillow is about, leaving that job, but staying in the Bay Area. And there's a weird feeling—just stay with that and see where it takes you.
- **Client:** Yes. Okay, so I have so much more energy at first, in not having the old job, but then there's staying here and something changes (ie, in his energy).
- **Therapist** (tracking carefully): You were looking relaxed at not having that old job, but something just shifted when you talk about staying here—a little collapse or something—do you notice that?
- **Client:** Oh, that's interesting, I hadn't noticed—but even though I feel better that the job will be over, then yeah, I sort of lose energy again at the thought of staying here. I mean I'm glad that I've had this adventure, but I don't feel good. I start wondering if I should stay or go. I'm feeling anxious again—what if I do the wrong thing?

**Comment:** Watch for the dangers of gerbil-wheel-mind, which would be if the client at this point starts to get caught in the going back and forth of "Should I stay or should I go?" So I acknowledge the worry-part and go back to the bite-sizing:

- **Therapist:** It makes sense that the part of you is here that worries you'll do the wrong thing. We know that part (ie from prior sessions). That part has helped you survive. And, I wonder if you'd like to thank that part first, and then, you know, you set up a pillow for going back to Michigan and we can explore what it feels like to make the choice of leaving in a little while. But if it's okay with you, how about you thank the worry part and then just feel into your staying here in the Bay Area—what this feels like. Your worry part can be off the hook for a while.
- **Client:** Oh, thank that part? I forgot I can do that.
- **Therapist:** Yes, we've done that before.
- **Client** (silently thanks the worry part): Yes, that helps.
- **Therapist:** You can put him away from you a bit if you like. Where is he?
- **Client:** He's over there (points to the right). Yes, that's better. I've got more room for me now.
- **Therapist:** Great, feel the "better"—room for you now.
- **Client:** Okay. Yeah, that's really helpful. Just being with this aspect of it.
- **Therapist:** Yeah, and how about turn inside, maybe close your eyes and go inward, that's right (client closes eyes). Let yourself feel the freedom of leaving the old job, your sense of relief, the life force that comes with it. And let yourself be playful here, curious, even "irrational"—just look around at the city, take a walk along the streets, imagine being with your friends. Feel the adventure you've been on, and how also you're losing energy, and it's maybe a little bit of a surprise, but there's this collapse and a sense of weirdness at looking for another job. Let yourself be with all of it. Really take your time here, and tell me where this takes you.
- **Client** (quiet for a while, staying with the experience)
- **Therapist** (after client is quiet for a while): Yeah, you're really in there with it all.
- **Client** (voice is a bit subdued): Yeah.
- **Therapist:** Something a bit subdued about that "Yeah."
- **Client:** Yeah, I start to feel a little tired, or maybe smaller somehow.
- **Therapist:** So just stay with that sense of tiredness, and how you get smaller, and see where it takes you.
- **Client** (stays with it for a while): I'm glad I came out here, but this place doesn't feel like *me*. I miss the seasons, and the smell of the snow even though snow can be a lot of work and the feel of spring when it comes back in Michigan where I grew up.
- **Therapist:** You're missing all that.
- **Client:** I feel sad in SF, even though there's some good things about it. But not just sad.
- **Therapist:** How about stay with that "not just sad."
- **Client** (quiet for a while): It's like I'm looking for something.
- **Therapist:** Looking—sounds maybe like a feeling of longing?

**Comment:** Longing is the royal road to the Wise Self. Any sniff of whiff of longing that I track and I immediately focus the client's attention there.

- **Client:** Yeah, a longing.
- **Therapist:** Stay with that longing.
- **Client:** I hadn't noticed until now, but that longing has been with me for quite a while. You know, I think I want to switch pillows now, over to the go-to-Michigan pillow.
- **Therapist:** Great, just follow your instinct.
- **Client** (switches chair to face "Michigan" pillow)
- **Therapist:** Take your time and really feel that you're leaving your job and the Bay Area behind and going to Michigan, arriving back there, looking around at where you are (etc. deepening client into the experience) smelling the new snow, seeing the colors of the spring flowers.
- **Client:** Wow, I feel at home. And not just because this is where I came from, my home I mean. But I *feel at home*. I've been missing it so much, and telling myself I should like it here in SF, and though I'm glad I came here on the adventure, it's just not what I want for the long term.

**Comment:** Here the right brain can accept and understand *both*: how the client would try to make it work in SF, but also how there's an intuition-longing-inkling for something else. This ability to make room for both allows the client's system to settle, and for a more spacious, creative attitude to develop. The next comment is a delightful surprise to the client and I:

- **Client:** I really want to go back to Michigan, everything just feels right going there. And I've always found some work. There will be something there for me, I just have this trust and this feeling. Oh, it feels like I trust it more now.
- **Therapist:** Trust "it"—what's the "it?" Seems like the "it" is actually "you!"

**Comment:** Clients often talk about "it" when they really mean "I"—I track for this and gently invite them into the "I"—which is an active practice of being in their Wise Self.

- **Client:** Oh, I guess I do mean "I"—yeah, *I trust myself. !!!*
- **Therapist:** So really feel the "I"—that Wise Man we've talked about—let yourself experience the "I trust myself"—how you're breathing, how your shoulders are relaxing (ie, things I'm tracking in the client), what's happening in your heart, your belly, your attitude towards yourself right now, your flow, your pace. Let yourself fill up with all of the nuances of this "I" and this "trusting yourself."
- **Client:** Yes, this feeling is what I've been searching for.
- **Therapist:** Would you like to say that out loud, "I trust myself?"
- **Client:** Yes (pause), "I trust myself" (quiet for a while). I feel so much better.
- **Therapist:** What's coming along with the "better?"
- **Client:** I see myself at my friend's house in Michigan, hanging out there, it just feels right. Wow, it's really clear. I want to go to Michigan. This is great. I'm really excited! This feels so *right!!!!* It's easy now—I know how I can put this into play.
- **Therapist:** So how can you take this feeling with you this week, to keep nurturing your sense of "I trust myself."
- **Client:** If I get anxious I can come back to seeing myself at my friend's home in Michigan, hanging out there, and all the feelings of that place, and really feel my core self, my Wise Man, and the trust. How I trust me.
- **Therapist:** That's great!

**Comment:** The client left this session walking out with a deeper felt sense of who he is, how to calm himself, how to trust himself. He arrived at the next session having made plans to return to Michigan and was really excited and looking forward to the change. I have also had clients who, by doing this process, came up with a completely different course of action than the two or three choices laid out, and that new choice was the right way for them to go. Of course, not all choices a client has can be made in one session. However, I have found that laying choice-points out in this way really helps for both immediate and longer term goals, helps clients learn to self-regulate, and is a practice to bring them into Wise Mind in the following way:

- This exercise helps clients learn to bite-size, and along with bite-sizing comes self-regulation and friendly, felt-sense objectivity.
- Clients have a really palpable, valuable, take-home felt-sense experience of their Wise Self to keep practicing and developing between sessions.
- Clients feel more hopeful.
- Making smaller, less impactful choices helps clients make longer-term bigger ones over time.
- For choices that take a longer time to live into (leaving an unhelpful relationship, standing up to an authority figure) my curiosity and friendliness teach the client to have curiosity and friendliness toward him or herself. My acknowledgement of such parts as "Of course there's a pull to get anxious," or "Of course there's part of you that wants to hide, that part is how you survived" invites understanding, compassion *and a felt-sense objectivity that leads to the Wise Self*. Once the acknowledgement has been made, then the client is freer to have a big picture, creative felt sense.
- This exercise is, in a way, a spiritual practice—one of many—to help ourselves cultivate friendliness towards all aspects of ourselves and live more from, and return more easily to, our compassionate Wise Selves.

#### **Kudos:**

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Hakomi,  
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