

And is there anything else about.....?

Clean Language in Bodywork - an Introduction

When I take some time to be still, for example during meditation or before falling asleep, that's when it starts: A buzzing goes through my head, like a swarm of bees is flying through or a choir of crickets is giving a summer concert. This noise often doesn't stop unless I distract myself.

What might a therapist or a friend say if you told them about this?

There are many possible reactions. Let's look at some of them:

A.)

This is tinnitus

It increases with age.

I know that, I have it all the time.

There's nothing you can do about it.

It is not dangerous.

Are you under a lot of stress at the moment?

Do you often listen to a loud music?

Do your ears hurt?

You should relax.

B.)

And what kind of buzzing in the head is that?

And where exactly is this buzzing in your head?

And is there anything else about this buzzing in your head?

And what happens before the buzzing starts?

And what happens next?

And this buzzing in your head is like what?

And what would you like to happen?

The first set of reactions is probably more familiar to you from everyday life. It is about gathering information and organising it into a concept, giving advice and providing support. The therapist or friend takes the lead in the conversation, offering help, advice or comfort. In some contexts, this makes a lot of sense.

The second set of questions may seem strange at first. The questions are open-ended. They allow for a wide range of answers. They encourage the client to turn their attention away from the therapist and towards themselves in order to find their own personal answers. This type of questioning may seem unfamiliar or disappointing, especially if you are expecting concrete information and advice. However, there is enormous potential in this method and it is worth exploring.

What is Clean Language?

Clean Language is the name of this communication method used in therapy and coaching. New Zealander David Grove developed it in the 1980s while working with traumatised people. He noticed that they often found it difficult to put into words what they had experienced or what was going on inside them and that they often intuitively turned to metaphors and symbols to describe what they had experienced. David Grove began to use gentle, open-ended questions to pick up on these metaphors and explore them together with his patients on the level of images. In doing so, he opened up a safe space in which they could explore the deeper and more personal meaning of these metaphors. This was amazingly successful.

Over time, he developed a system of some 12 basic questions that take the therapist's attitudes, concepts and hypotheses out of the equation as much as possible and allow the client to discover their own insights and solutions without being influenced. "Clean" itself is also a metaphor referring to the fact that the conversation is free from "contamination" by the therapist's perspective.

Clean Language in Bodywork

Nick Pole, a British mind-body therapist and shiatsu teacher, deserves much credit for introducing Clean Language into bodywork. He offers international training courses on the subject and published the book "Words that Touch" in 2017, which is also available in German under the title "Worte, die berühren". In his book, Nick Pole demonstrates the benefits of Clean Language for bodywork in a practical way and with clear examples.

What is the Core of Clean Language?

The basis of Clean Language, as I understand it, is the special attitude of the therapist: an attitude of mindfulness, of full attention, observing what is happening from moment to moment, as it is, without interpreting or judging, without any intention of influencing what is happening. This mindfulness is characterised by acceptance, compassion, genuine interest and equanimity. It shows great respect for the client's world view and a natural trust in their ability to find solutions. This attitude leads almost automatically to the design of dialogue situations in the form of Clean Language:

In a Clean Language conversation, the therapist withholds their own interpretations, suggestions and impulses. They simply reproduce the other person's words as accurately as possible and, if necessary, the manner of emphasis or gestures so that the other person can perceive them more accurately as if in a mirror. And open-ended questions that do not expect a specific answer stimulate chains of association that can lead to new insights.

Examples of such questions are

- "And is there anything else about X?", where X is filled in with what the interviewee has previously said, for example: "And is there anything else about this pressure in your stomach?"
- Questions such as "And what kind of X is X?" or "And X is like what?" can encourage people to use metaphors and images to express what they want to say, especially when words are lacking. Metaphors and images hide so many facets of an issue at once.

A Practical Example

To illustrate what Clean Language can look like in practice, here is an abridged extract from a conversation with a client.

The client tells me that she finds it difficult to express her feelings, especially to her partner. Before we begin a shiatsu treatment, I invite her to focus her attention on the inside of her body and to feel which area of the body might need special attention and whether the problem might be reflected somewhere in the body.

- Client: "I feel a pressure in my throat."
- Me: "And where exactly is this pressure?"
- Client: "More in the front."
- Me: "And this pressure more in the front of your throat is like what?"
- Client: "Like a ball."
- Me: "And is there anything else about this ball in the front of your throat?"
- Client: "It's stuck."
- Me: "And is there anything else about 'it's stuck'?"
- Client: "Nothing comes out."
- Me: "Nothing's comes out. And is there anything else about 'Nothing comes out'?"
- Client: "Then I won't tell my secrets and won't hurt anyone."
- Me: "Then you won't tell your secrets and you won't hurt anyone. And is there anything else about 'nothing comes out'?"
- Client: "Somehow I can't say what I want to say."
- Me: "And if you somehow can't say what you want to say, what would you like to have happen?"
- Client: "For the ball to move."
- Me: "And what does the ball need so that it can move?"
- Client: "You'd have to pour oil on it."
- Me: "And what would the ball like to have happen?"
- Client: "It wants to jump."
- Me: "And if the ball can jump, what happens next?"
- Client: "Then I can alternate between expressing myself freely and closing myself off."
- Me: "And how would that be?"
- Client: "I can breathe better."
- Me: "And if you can alternate between expressing yourself freely and closing yourself off and breathe better, what happens to the pressure in your throat?"
- Client: "It's softer and the ball has colourful polka dots."
- Me: "And what do you know about all this now?"

- Client: "I can move the ball myself. And this humour and lightness helps me move forward."
- Me: "And what difference does it make to know all that?"
- Client: "I feel that I have more influence. And I take the humour with me!"
- Me: And is this a good time to start the shiatsu treatment?"

Principles of Clean Language

Perhaps this brief example illustrates the key points of this method of communication:

Exact mirroring: I mirror the client's words and gestures as accurately as possible. I do not paraphrase them or summarise them in my own words, as this would be coloured by my own point of view. This has to be done very carefully and minimalistically. It is easy to run the risk of sounding mechanistic and parrot-like. That would quickly break the contact. Sometimes a simple "Oh" or "Yes" is enough

Attention to body sensations: I always invite to pay attention to the sensations in your body. The body knows more about the issue at hand than we realise.

Include metaphors and symbols: Metaphors, images and symbols are closer to consciousness than physical sensations. I therefore ask whether a symbol might emerge for the bodily sensation or the theme, the various facets of which we can then look at more closely. Again, the metaphor is the client's metaphor with its own individual meaning. We would do well to support them in exploring its meaning without offering our own associations to the metaphor, which may not really fit.

Open questions: The questions are open-ended and do not lead in any particular direction. They usually follow the wording suggested by David Grove to avoid being influenced by your own nuances.

Anchoring the experience: Closing questions such as "And what do you know about all this now?" help to anchor and consolidate the experience.

Basic Questions at a Glance

And is there anything else about X?

This question encourages the client to look more closely at the topic and to follow chains of associations.

And where exactly is X?

This question draws attention to the part of the body where the issue is reflected or, if necessary, to its position in space.

And X is like what? Or: And what kind of X is X?

This is about a metaphor for the issue, a symbol in which the various facets and meanings of the issue are condensed. The metaphor brings closer to consciousness what is more vaguely hidden in the body's sensations.

And if X, what would you like to have happen?

This question focuses on the needs and possible solutions.

And what would that be like?

This question makes it possible to anticipate solutions in the imagination and also in body awareness. This alone can bring about a change in body energy and be healing.

And what happens next?

This question can take us a little further in our exploration of the issue.

Possibilities and Limitations of Clean Language

Every person - at least according to constructivist philosophy - perceives the world in their own personal way, "constructing" their reality. Their unconscious focuses on what is important to them and structures what they perceive in a very individual way.

It is this point of view that underlies the great respect for the client's view of the world in Clean Language and for the therapist's restraint in making his or her own interpretations.

And this respect is necessary in order to create a safe space in which the client can relax and focus on their own issues without having to be constantly on guard against unsolicited comments and interventions. Relaxation, as we know, saves energy for more important things and allows attention to turn inwards.

Because the therapist does not intervene in what is happening, only as much comes to the surface as the client can cope with. Some things remain hidden, others are allowed to remain at the level of images and can be set in motion there without fully reaching the conscious mind. All of this explains why Clean Language proves to be so helpful in trauma therapy. Unlike with traumatic events themselves, control over what is going on remains entirely with the client.

Trust is a prerequisite for the success of therapeutic processes and human encounters in general. Trust arises from the certainty that one's own boundaries, needs and perspectives are respected and from the experience that the two partners are on the same wavelength in at least one area. In Shiatsu, this arises from the fact that the two partners resonate with each other energetically. In Clean Language, this is achieved by the therapist attuning to the client's choice of words, emphasis, gestures and facial expressions. In this way, Clean Language can contribute to the development of a trusting, relaxed and fruitful relationship between the dialogue partners.

The therapist's confidence in the client's ability to self-regulate has a direct effect on the clients. They experience how self-effective they can be when they develop their own

solutions without help. Their self-confidence grows and their courage to take things into their own hands increases.

Where is Clean Language Used?

The areas of application are many and varied.

- ④ In coaching, it helps to clarify goals and solution strategies.
- ④ Teachers use it to help students find their own creative solutions and also for conflict discussions.
- ④ Clean language is also an important tool for managers in appraisal interviews. It can contribute to a respectful working atmosphere and be useful for organisational development.
- ④ Some questions from Clean Language can also be used very well on their own for self-exploration. I often get this feedback from my clients.
- ④ Clean Language can be used well in psychotherapy to initiate developments and facilitate problem solving at the level of symbols and metaphors. Clean Language has proven to be particularly helpful in dealing with anxiety, depression and trauma.
- ④ I myself am at home in bodywork, more precisely in shiatsu. The appeal of Clean Language for shiatsu therapists lies on the one hand in the similarity of the approach. Shiatsu is also primarily about opening up spaces for self-awareness and self-regulation. In addition, Clean Language uses language to bring what is happening closer to consciousness. Shiatsu therapists generally have no psychotherapeutic training. With a few simple questions and the appropriate attitude, Clean Language gives them the possibility to accompany things that come up during treatment without making excessive demands on themselves or the client.

Like any method, Clean Language is not a panacea. In my work, I encounter numerous situations where it makes little sense to use Clean Language.

- ④ I regularly give shiatsu treatments to people with severe physical and mental disabilities. Most of them have limited or no language skills. Questions such as "And is there anything else about X?" or "And what would you like to have happen?" are often of little use to them. They either don't answer at all, say "I don't know" or answer with a stereotype that doesn't fit the question, such as "There's no power cut today". Clean Language questions are rarely appropriate here. The question "Where should I put my hands?" is more likely to focus their attention inwards and on their own needs. If they can't speak, they guide my hands. And the mindful, unintentional basic attitude of going with what shows up energetically is as indispensable here as in Clean Language.
- ④ Not many people are in good contact with themselves, with their own needs and body sensations in the current, more externally orientated culture. Clients who are new to Clean Language often give us a blank look when we ask them "And where exactly is X?" or "And what would X like to have happen?". Perhaps they are not at all ready for a conversation and simply want to be left alone while we do our work and

free them from their symptom. The only thing we can do is make offers like: "Would it be okay if I asked a few simple questions? It is certainly up to you to decide whether the questions are appropriate or whether you want to answer them at all." And then it makes sense to ask only a few questions at first.

- ② Some topics of conversation involve facts that require expert knowledge. Although a respectful approach and some open-ended questions are useful in this case too, the client often wants to hear my opinion and needs information or advice. If the car won't start, then the information "You need a new battery" is more helpful than the question "And what would you like to have happen?"
- ② Some clients are stuck in negative, problem-focused beliefs and thought patterns. Open-ended clean question might just leave them in their spiral of thought. This also needs to be accepted. Conscious acceptance alone can relax the atmosphere. The therapist is less in danger of tilting at windmills and the client feels accepted for who he or she is. Nevertheless, offers that liquefy the situation can be an act of love and responsibility. Psychotherapy offers a variety of paths from which we can draw inspiration or which we could perhaps even pursue further.

For example:

- Question about an exception: "I always get everything wrong" - "And is there anything in your life that has worked out quite well?" Or: "And how did you manage to be here on time today?" "I just can't remember the English vocabulary. English is not for me." "And which English word do you already know?"
- Giving things a different meaning, putting them in a different context: In psychotherapy, this method is called reframing. In Focusing, a method related to Clean Language, clients are sometimes asked: "And what is the worst thing about it?" and then: "And what is the best thing about it?" This can certainly cause irritation, because what is supposed to be good about a slipped disc or a separation? However, if used carefully, it can open a view to the brighter side of the problem. One of my clients was once very bothered by a painful shoulder. When I asked her what the best thing about it was, a mischievous smile flitted across her face and she said: "I have a window cleaner now!"
Another client complained that she was never able to spontaneously speak out loud, to express her needs or start an argument. My statement "Yes, you are very considerate and you certainly don't need to sweep up broken china all the time." showed her the competence in such a rather introverted trait.
- Related to reframing is the approach of the Austrian neurologist and psychotherapist Viktor Frankl. As a psychologist, he survived the concentration camp and his horrific experiences led him to believe that suffering is inevitable, but that we always have a choice about how we relate to it and what meaning we give to it. He himself was kept alive by the idea that it was his task for the future to give lectures about the effects on the psyche of being in a concentration camp. He later developed logotherapy, which aims to help people find meaning and value in their lives and also in individual difficult or painful situations. The question "WHAT FOR?" is very important in this

context. To what end is this stressful event challenging me? What does it inspire me to do? In this way, the client may be able to discover a meaning for themselves and the whole event may appear in a new light.

- And then there are cases where people find themselves in severe, overwhelming crises or where they do not have the strength to face a situation without active support. Here it is no longer a matter of asking questions, but of acting to the best of one's knowledge and belief. Even what appears to be an intrusion can be an act of love and of a willingness to take responsibility, knowing full well that mistakes can be made. Doctors know such situations well enough. In the case of a heart attack, you can't ask lengthy questions about what the patient would like to have happen. But even bodyworkers, psychotherapists or friends are sometimes faced with the task of preventing people from harming themselves or others, or of giving decisive advice in difficult situations.

What is important in all of this? What Clean Language brings to a conversation is a focus on mindfulness, non-intentionality and Zen-like minimalism in the way we ask questions. This is a great gift. Deciding when and how to use this gift, requires compassion, love, pragmatism and connection to a wisdom beyond ourselves.

"Somewhere beyond right and wrong, there is a garden. I will meet you there." " says the Persian poet and mystic Rumi. I am looking forward to meeting many people in that garden who, full of enthusiasm and equanimity, will engage in experiments, mistakes and new experiences with Clean Language.

*Barbara Murakami
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