

Coaching In-Depth III: Krishnamurti as Personal Coach

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Jiddu Krishnamurti was a spiritual guide from India who lives from 1895 until 1986. Through his teaching and writings often in association with the Theosophical Society, Krishnamurti had a significant impact on the perspectives and practices of many people throughout the world who were on a spiritual quest during the first half of the 20th Century. Krishnamurti's work became particularly well known in the United States after the noted author, Aldous Huxley, introduced him to mainstream publishers in American. Krishnamurti also became acquainted with the noted physicist, David Bohm, and found that his own perspectives aligned in many ways with the scientific findings of Bohm.

Sonya Carlson, my hypothetical personal coach, studied under Krishnamurti and his proselytes at the Krishnamurti Institute during the early 1980s. She completed a demanding training program at the Institute and initially decided to apply the perspectives of Krishnamurti to her own life while she served as a high school teacher and then as a counsellor at her school. However, after more than two decades, she decided to bring his work into her new occupation in the emerging field of personal coaching. She felt that it was time in the United States for Krishnamurti's view of life to become more wide-known and applied to the issues that Americans experience in their daily life.

Background

I turn to a set of hypothetical coaching sessions that Sonya has with Katherine Vicanti, a 45 year old woman who has had a successful career as a college administrator and was married for 18 years to a man who was an executive in a high-tech firm. Katherine and her husband raised two children who are now in their early teen years. They have been divorced for 1 year.

Katherine found Sonya's name in a listing of personal and life coaches she obtained at a one-day conference on "The Future of Coaching" that was held by her college. Katherine chose to contact Sonya because she wanted to work with a woman and because Sonya's office was located in a small city located only 10 miles from Katherine's college town.

Session One

The first session begins with Sonya asking what Katherine would like to work with a personal coach. Katherine indicates that she wants to better prepare for her future. She was recently divorced and is no longer interested in working in a collegiate institution. Katherine states that she is at a point in her life when the present circumstances are no longer satisfying and it is time to look toward her future before she grows "old and full of regrets!"

There is a few moments pause and then Sonya conveys something about her unique perspective on personal coaching:

I am a personal coach and am pleased to be able to work with you if you find my perspective to be of benefit to you. Let me first indicate that I have studied with a very wise gentleman from India

called Krishnamurti. If you want me to assist you then you need to know about bit about the approach that he would take and I will take in working with you.

Krishnamurti often told a tale about three men. One of the men was someone who renounced the world as it now exists. He was deeply involved in spiritual devotion, preparing himself for his next life. The second man was devoted to the improvement of humankind through engaging other people and himself in sustained spiritual practice. He was very wise and devoted to improving his own spiritual maturity. The third man was a social reformer. He was committed to building a new Utopia where all humankind would be free and caring. All three of these men were living for the future. They were all sacrificing the present day on behalf of some future. Each of these men identified themselves with some cause or belief system.

Having described these three men and spun-out stories about their perspectives and practices, Krishnamurti would pause. He would then talk about what these three men were missing in their life. He spoke about the importance of remaining present in the current moment. Our journey should not be focused on the future. It should instead be focused on the present. It is a journey into self-awareness and love; it is not a journey into forging some identity or embracing an identity that someone else has imposed on us or convinced us to adopt. Krishnamurti would suggest that an identity as something or other is a straitjacket that limits our freedom and our capacity to reach out with sensitivity and love to other people.

So, Katherine, are you in a position to forgo your own search for a future and for a new identity? Instead, I will assist you on your journey into the unique, true and deep self that you are right now. Would you like my assistance in this regard?

Katherine doesn't say anything for about 30 seconds. She then responds to Sonya:

Whew. This does take me in a different direction from what I had expected to focus on my work with you as a personal coach. I do kind of identify with the third man. I was drawn to college administration because I believed that our society would be improved if our young people were better educated and if all of us became lifelong learners. Like all three of your men, I have sacrificed a lot on behalf of this dream of a well-educated citizenry.

I think my devotion to the cause of education contributed to the breakup of my marriage. I spent too many hours at my office at the college, and attended too many events at the college, at the expense of my marriage and my caring for our two children. In recent years, I must admit that I have grown disillusioned with the operation of my college. Everything seems to revolve around petty politics. There hasn't been a new idea posed for many years by either our faculty or our upper-level leaders. I think that is the major reason I have wanted to explore other pathways in my life.

You talked about the straitjacket of identity. I have been caught in the identity of college administrator for many years. Maybe it's time to break out of this identity and try something new. If my college can't create anything new, then maybe I can create something new in my life. If our students only seem to want a comfortable job in some corporation after they graduate, then perhaps I can differ from them and break out of my comfort zone to find work that is more meaningful for me right now. And perhaps a loving relationship to which I can devote more of my attention. And maybe I find the time to relate more closely to my two children before they leave home to find their own life.

So, yes, I would like to work with you and find out a bit more about myself. The person I really am right now, rather than just looking at the future and forgetting the present.

Sonya is taking notes while Katherine speaks about the challenges she is facing. Sonya then sets aside her notepad and talks more about the approach she would take in working with Katherine. The session ends with a homework assignment: Katherine is to record a moment in her life during the coming two weeks (before their next session) when she feels particularly “sensitive” regarding something that is beautiful in her life. This could be physically beautiful, or it could be a moment of interaction with another person that is beautiful. Katherine is to record her own feelings upon encountering this beauty. She is also to note how this moment of beauty influences her sense of “being” in the world. Does she in any way feel that she is somehow different from her usual self during this moment of beauty. Katherine leaves this first session with a sense of intrigue regarding the journey she is about to take with Sonya as a guide.

Session Two

Katherine entered Session Two with several pages of a journal that she had filled with a description of a moment of beauty in her life. After being offered a cup of herbal tea by Sonya, Katherine settled in on a couch in Sonya’s office. For the first time, Katherine noticed the paintings and photograph on the wall opposite the couch. One of the paintings was of a very colorful mandala. The other painting was of a stern looking man. Kathrine asked Sonya about the man. Sonya indicated that this was a young Krishnamurti. Sonya then inquired about the homework assignment. Kathryn responded with enthusiasm:



It was wonderful. I opened my journal for the first time in years and wrote down what I had observed and experienced. I purposefully took a walk around my college campus during my lunch break on Wednesday. I usually don’t take this break and spend it wolfing down a sandwich I picked up in the morning from our cafeteria. Between bits, I would be looking over budget sheets or reviewing an email from our president. My job is Vice President of Strategic Planning, which means that I am involved with everything and responsible for both everything and nothing. The joys of strategic planning !!

Well, on to my walk around the grounds of our campus. You know, it really is a beautiful campus. I rarely pause to appreciate the setting in which I am working. One of the remarkable places on our campus is a deep ravine. A bridge crosses the ravine. During the late spring, we actually have a lovely chorale festival with the male singers in our coral group singing on one side of the ravine to the female singers on the other side of the ravine. It is a lovely occasion.

Sonya comes in:

I have heard of this event. It must be something special. Young men and women at this time in their life and attending a lovely college must be totally enthralled with the singing across the ravine.

Katherine responds:

Yeh, this is one of the wonderful things about experience at college for our students. This is one of the special things we do at our college—and have been providing this Springtime experience for many years.

Well, anyway. I walked down to the bottom of the ravine. We provide a lovely set of stairs down to the stream that runs through and forms the ravine. I sat on an old stone bench beside the stream. I viewed a lovely old Willow Tree that is being nurtured by the stream. Several birds were sipping water from an eddy in the stream located near the tree. And then they lifted off the water and soared around my head. This was pure bliss for me. Everything was beautiful and serene. I felt deep contentment.

You asked about how I was viewing myself. While sitting on this stone bench, viewing the beauty swirling all around me, I felt like I was in some other reality. At the bottom of the ravine, there was no strategic plan of the future for my college. There was only the reality of this stream, this tree, these birds, and the memory of the two chorale groups singing to one another at the top of the ravine. There were no budgets or numbers; there were only songs, sounds, and memories of past beauty.

Sonya gently asks:

And were you alone?

Katherine responds with considerable emotion:

Yes, I was alone. Thankfully alone.

Sonya:

And did you feel lonely?

Katherine:

Yes, in some ways I did feel lonely. But it was an enriching loneliness, if you know what I mean. For some reason, I enjoyed feeling a bit lonely.

Sonya offers a couple of reflections:

Krishnamurti suggests that this loneliness concerns being estranged from oneself. We are lonely for our own company. You found time and a lovely place to sit down on the stone bench with yourself. The world around you provided you with information about yourself. There is the gently moving stream that flows through your being. This stream nurtures your trees—the things you value that provide stability and continuity to match the dynamics of your stream. And there are the brief beautiful glimpses of special places in your heart and soul that are represented in the birds flying around you. All of this was accompanied by the love that was conveyed by your memory of the chorale singing.

I refer once again to the insight offered by Krishnamurti. He suggests that love and beauty are not something to be thought of or even contemplated. They are to be experienced and elude all rational consideration. It is through our experiences of love and beauty that we gain some sense of our true being. We “know” at some deep level who we are at this specific moment in time. There is no past (though there are memories) and there is no future (though there are emerging aspirations about our life to be led).

Katherine sits forward on the couch and dabs her eyes with a tissue she pulls from a container on the table in front of her. After about a minute, Katherine offers a comment:

What you have said about my experience in the ravine rings true at a level I don't often access. I am often surprised by the numbers that are revealed on the Excel sheets I review; now I find that I am even more surprised and much more emotionally touched by the reflections you have offered. Your balance sheet certainly beats the hell out of my budget sheets!

Both Katherine and Sonya quietly laugh. Katherine then offers some experiences in her recent life that connect with some of the images that Sonya offered. Most of these experiences reveal ways in which Katherine's feelings of joy, bliss and contentment are thwarted. She has had few experiences of beauty in recent years and has not journeyed down to the ravine since she first arrived at the college as a young administrator 12 years ago.

The session comes to an end. Sonya suggests another homework assignment for Katherine.

Katherine, I am going to give you an even more challenging homework assignment. Before our next session I would like you to prepare two lists. The first list contains brief statements about what you believe to be true and important in your life. The statements on this first list are based on facts, evidence, expert opinions. What you read in credible books or articles. What you were taught when you were in college and what you hope are being taught in your current college. Don't make this a long list. Just identify 5-8 beliefs that seem quite credible for you. The second list is more important. I would like you to prepare a list containing about the same number of statements. However, this list should be comprised of your own personal hunches about what is happening in your world or the world more generally. These are strong opinions that you don't often share. There may be little empirical evidence to support these hunches, but they are important to you and you hold on to them firmly. Does this assignment make any sense to you? Do you need more clarity? I don't want to offer examples, because this could bias the two lists that you prepare.

Katherine responds:

No, I think I am clear about what you want, though the second list is a bit challenging. I hate to reveal my hunches and biases. I get the sense that they are often based on my fears.

Sonya:

No problem. Tackle this second list with courage. This list might be full of fear, but that makes the list that much more important and filled with insights. So, we will see you in two weeks with both lists in hand. . .

Kathryn walks out with both the insights gained from this session in mind, and the potential candidates for both lists swirling around her head.

Session Three

Katherine enters Sonya's office. She is once again holding her journal. She now notices a second photo on one of Sonya's walls. It is a picture of Sonya standing with Krishnamurti and several other people. So, Sonya is "the real thing" when it comes to acquaintance with this Indian man of wisdom.

Sonya opens the session:

How did it go with the tough assignment I gave you at the end of our second session?

Katherine responded:

It was difficult, but I did come up with my two lists. The first list actually ended up being harder to produce than the second list. On the one hand, there are many beliefs that I have been taught over the years, so it was hard to narrow this list to 5-8 items. On the other hand, I found that I was being quite judgmental. I was throwing out beliefs that I have always passively accepted, but don't really believe wholeheartedly. These include many of my old religious beliefs, as well as a host of political beliefs and even, nowadays, beliefs about education and its benefits to society.

Conversely, my list of hunches and biases emerged easily. I was taking a hot shower and suddenly the whole list tumbled out in front of me. I had to leap out of the shower, dry off, and start writing. This list includes such items as what I think certain other people really think of me, how I know that someone else is being honest with me, and what I really think are the most important goals to achieve in one's life.

Katherine then went through both lists with Sonya. Katherine was surprised to find that Sonya did not question or challenge any of the items on either list. Instead, after Katherine finished both lists, Sonya had the following to say:

One of the things I found most challenging in what Krishnamurti had to say, was that thoughts about beliefs are just that. They are thoughts and don't really touch our soul or guide our actions in life. It is the second list that provides an on-ramp to your true self – your being. Much as beauty and love are on-ramps, the unstated, non-certified statements you deliver to yourself—and nobody else—are what guide your actions and your relationships with other people. For instance, you mentioned that you “know” someone is being honest with you when they are willing to disagree with you. This statement tells you something about the dynamics of disclosure and feedback upon which you rely when interacting with people in your life. This statement is indeed based on your fear. In this case, it is fear of being lied to or being deceived. It is also based on your strength. You are willing—perhaps even eager—for other people to disagree with you. Part of the truth being told by other people will inevitably bump into a separate truth that you hold. The two of you might agree on many statements to be found on your first list. However, these are often platitudes or very general statements that are not easily disproven—so everyone agrees with them. They are like motherhood and apple pie, or perhaps the “fact” that your political attitude is the correct one. Or your notions about educational reform are the correct ones.

Katherine:

Ouch! Some of the items on my first list are a bit arrogant regarding education. However, what you are saying about honesty rings true to me. I must confess that I often push other people with my beliefs, sometimes even offering outlandish ideas, just so they will disagree with me. If they don't push back, then I am likely to consider them to be capable of dishonesty and am likely to avoid them in the future.

Katherine and Sonya now went through the rest of Katherine's second list, and generated insights about how Katherine really moves through her world of educational administration, interpersonal relationships, parental relationships, religious affiliations, and, basically, her relationship with herself. Sonya continued to point out the strengths that Katherine brought to her relationships. However, Sonya also pushed back at what Katherine was saying at several points during this third session—knowing that Katherine appreciates the “honesty” that she associated with disagreement.

At the end of this session, Sonya has another homework assignment for Katherine. This assignment is greeted with enthusiasm by Katherine, though she assumes that this assignment will be even more challenging than the first two assignments. The assignment was actually not that difficult. Katherine was to compose another list. This list was to contain the various roles she is now playing in her life.

What are the labels that might be assigned to you by people in your life? What do you call yourself when other people ask: “what do you do?” When the obituary is written about you after you pass away, what will be the elements contained in this document to describe who you were during your lifetime. If you constructed a shield representing the values for which you stand and the person identify you wish to guard at all cost, what would be portrayed on the shield.

Sonya noted that Katherine didn’t have to respond to all these options. This wide array is being offered to give Katherine great latitude in preparing a list regarding her many identities. As soon as Katherine settled into her car to return to work, she pulled out that small pad of paper from the glove compartment that she always keeps in her car when compelled to write down a note or two. Katherine started scribbling down some ideas regarding who she see is—especially those related to her job.

Session Four

When Katherine entered Sonya’s office, she noticed that Sonya had a small bookcase over on one of the side walls. Katherine asked Sonya if she could walk over to this bookcase and look at the objects Sonya put on the shelves. There was a small statue of Buddha, a collection of seashells gathered in a small ceramic bowl, a picture of two small children, a book by Krishnamurti and a book called *Love and Will*. There was also a Bonsai tree sitting on top of the shelf. Katherine asked Sonya what these objects represented for her. Sonya was eager to share:

Actually, your question is directly relevant to what we will be focusing on today. For many people, there is an alter in their home. This is not an actual religious alter. Rather it is a bookcase or a small table on which precious objects have been placed. We can often tell what is valued by a person by looking at their bookcase or table. While I want to focus on your list during our session today, I would be pleased to share a couple of things about what I have placed on this bookcase, since you asked. The seashells were gathered by me during a very special time when I was living by the ocean. They bring back memories of wonderful times spent on the beach—much like you shared about the ravine at your college. The picture is of my two children, who are cherished by me. My book written by Krishnamurti obviously represents my respect for his work. The Love and Will book is by a famous existential psychoanalyst called Rollo May. My own quest for a different way to view the world and be in the world began with my reading of this book.

Katherine indicated that she appreciated Sonya sharing something about herself:

I know that we are supposed to focus on me. However, it is wonderful to know a little bit about what you value and what brings you to the work you are now doing.

Sonya (with a smile on her face):

It is always a relief to say a little bit about myself, after listening to the wonderful stories told by my clients. And now it is time to hear from you . . .

Katherine (with her own smile):

Yes, I know it is all about me!! [Both Sonya and Katherine gently laugh.] I found this latest homework assignment to be both challenging and enjoyable. I began by identifying the many roles I play at the college, then shifted to how my friends see me, and finally took on the difficult job of identifying activities and achievements that would appear on my obituary. However, late last night before going to bed, I drew a shield on a piece of flip chart paper that was left over from a planning session I had conducted last week. It was on the shield that I placed six words that really hit home. These words all began with “C.” They were character, caring, committed, concerned, complex, and a strange sixth word: convoluted. I don’t know where this sixth word came from. I’m not even sure what it means. But there it is . . . Convoluted!!

Sonya asks Katherine to share some of the items on the list she prepared about work. Then she inquired about the list Katherine created based on what Katherine imagined her friends would place on the list. After clarification regarding some of these roles and images, Sonya asked Katherine about her obituary. While the first two lists were presented by Katherine with some energy and even enthusiasm, the list of obituary items was presented with considerable hesitation and some emotions.

Sonya commented on the differences in Katherine’s presentation of the three lists:

It seemed much easier for you to present the first two lists. Perhaps these lists represent your current identities and are related to the self that you present in public. The obituary list seems to be not only focused on the future, but also on your more private self. The obituary list also seems to be closely aligned with the six “Cs” on your shield. Am I correct in my perception?

Katherine is silent for several moments and then comments:

Yes, I think you captured something of what I was struggling with.

Sonya:

I suspect that your struggle has partially to do with the fundamental sense of self that are to be found in your obituary list and on your shelf. Krishnamurti suggests that while we may have many different displays of self when operating in the world, there are several fundamental features that underlie all these selves. He calls these features, “desires.” I think the six “Cs” on your shield represent some of your own desires. While your list of roles played at the college is quite long and diverse, and your list of perceptions held by your friends is also rather lengthy and broad, there are some fundamental features on your shield that may represent your desires. The extensive roles you play at the college might represent your commitment, concern and certain aspects of your caring. The friendship list suggests that there is a different side of caring in your life; this is the deep caring for your children and your friends. The word “character” also suggests something about your internal valuing of purpose and meaning in your work life and personal life. Unless, by “character” you meant that sometime you act weird!! [Both Katherin and Sonya laugh] Perhaps of greatest interest is your other two words: complex and convoluted. These would suggest that you have many different selves and that other people might at times find it hard to “figure you out” or predict how you are going to behave at any one point in time. The people with whom you work and your friends might wonder about which costume you will be wearing when you meet them. Which role is Katherine playing today?

Katherine responds:

You have just provided me with an important insight. I think you are right about the many costumes I am wearing in my life. I usually describe this as wearing many different hats. However, you might be right. I am wearing more than a hat. I am fully costumed and fully absorbed in a particular role. This might even take place with my kids. I can be the caring mother at one point and the stern task-master at another point. You know, I suspect I was also many different people and often unpredictable with my husband. Maybe this was one of the problems we had in our relationship over the years.

Sonya:

I wouldn't be quite so hard on yourself. We all embrace many different selves in this crazy, complex world in which we are living. The important thing is that you have established a foundation of desires in your life. These have to do with deep caring, sustained commitment, and a concern for displaying virtue and character regardless of the setting in which you find yourself. You might wear many different costumes; however, people will know that there is a strong woman wearing this costume who will always be there to do the right thing—at least as she sees what the “right” thing is. Am I being accurate and honest with you; or is this all just being “nice” to you?

Katherine:

God, I hope you are being honest. I do hope that there is some consistency in my underlying concern for other people. Perhaps I need to add the word “Consistency” to my shield. I think the word “Character” for me has to do with this matter of consistency. I try not to be expedient or play politics when engaging in strategic planning at my college. And, as I have already pointed out, I value being honest with my friends and tell them what I think even when it might be a bit hard for them to hear. And with my children . . . This is very hard . . . I'm not sure if I am doing my best job of being caring and consistent with them. This is something I really need to work on.

Sonya:

We can spend a bit of time on your relationship with the children in your life if you would like. I'm not a family counsellor; however, your children are obviously a very important part of your life. Furthermore, I noticed on your obituary list, you focused on being remembered as a great mother by your children.

Katherine [with tears in her eyes]:

Yes, this was the most difficult and important part of the obituary list to write. I find that my relationships with both Scott and Trisha are always pulling at me and sometimes pulling me apart, especially when placed up against my ongoing commitment to my demanding job at the college. This might be one of the reasons I am considering an alternative job.

Sonya:

Let's plan to take up this issue during our next session. I don't think we need any homework assignment. You have plenty to ponder from what we have considered in this session and our previous sessions.

Katherine got up, preparing to leave Sonya's office. She paused for a moment, grasped Sonya's hand and said "thank you." She left the office relieved that she had no new set of difficult issues to consider. There was already a whole lot to ponder.

Session Five

Katherine was looking forward to this next session with Sonya; hopefully, they can work on the struggle about priorities—work versus family. When Katherine sat down on the couch with her cup of tea in hand, Sonya asked her a challenging question: "what is it that you love about your children? And what did you once love about your husband?" Sonya had to think for a moment:

It's hard to say. I find many lovable things and moments when relating to my kids. My ex-husband. I guess I was most in love with his humor (that was missing in recent years) and his graciousness (always lending me a hand with meals and offering me little surprise gifts). I don't know. I can't get my head around your questions.

Sonya comments:

Of course one can't answer with your head. Krishnamurti believes that feelings of love elude our rational and thoughtful self. When we are loving with our heads, the temptation is to cling on to this love. We end up craving love yet are not sure what love really is. Our head seeks out certainty, but love is often elusive. It is only in our heart that a genuine enduring love is to be found.

Katherine sighs and responds to what Sonya has offered:

Yah, my love for my kids certainly eludes my conscious thoughts and seems also, sadly, to elude the priorities I set and decisions I make. My rational mind focuses on my work. I know what must be done and can plan carefully for the completion of work-related tasks. I don't have this rational clarity when it comes to my kids. I can't rationally justify spending time playing with my kids, or taking them to their soccer matches, or to events held at their schools. It gets even worse. Why attend a silly school play featuring very bad actors, when I can attend an award-winning theatrical performance featuring skills actors. All too often I make a rational choice and am punished as a result by feeling guilty and then resentful.

Sonya comes in:

Katherine, you are getting at the core of the issue. When you consider love to be a "thing" then it will always lose out to other "things" that are more concrete and provide you with an immediate sense of accomplishment. It's once more a matter of focusing on the present and on the immediate experience. The goal kicked by your child or even just watching your children race around the field "warms" your heart—and perhaps even your soul. These feelings of pride and of joy in observing your child's growing sense of self, come from and reverberate in your heart, not your head. The bad acting by those in the school play provides evidence of a young person's striving toward some goal. This is "touching" and worthy of your attention. Does any of this make sense? Am I speaking from my own experience as a parent? Does this match your own experience and your own feelings?

Katherine responds:

These are not all of what I feel, but I must admit that I often feel pride, even excitement when watching my kids run around the soccer field. And there are moments when I do attend the school

plays that I smile and recall my own terrifying, yet gratifying, experiences of acting in a school play. These feelings are very different from what I feel when finishing a project at my college, or when applauding at the end of a great performance at our regional theater.

Sonya comes in:

That is a major part of the conflict you are having about setting priorities. You are measuring your feelings about work against your feelings about time with your kids. These feelings are not comparable. You are weighing apples against oranges. And this weighting doesn't work. You need to place considerations of your head in one location and considerations of your heart in a different location.

Katherine:

So, how does this work?

Sonya:

There are many different approaches that can be taken. The obvious thing to do is find a time when you are home when you find a safe place to sit and feel. Or it might be sitting on the bench by the stream in your ravine. The main thing is to find or create a sanctuary. You let your feelings run free, recall special moments with your children (and perhaps your whole family, including your ex-husband), and let these feelings tell you something about how you should not spend time with your kids. The values inherent in your relationship with your children will be manifested in your feelings and memories experienced in your sanctuary. Love will appear. Often as a bit of sadness about moments lost in the past. Or as a deep sense of appreciation for moments that were blessed with warmth, tenderness and shared caring. This is a quite different experience from the consideration you give to work-related priorities and planning. This kind of mental process should never be done in the ravine or in your special sanctuary at home. . . What do you think?

Katherine:

I think you are on to sometime. Yes, the ravine might be a nice place to sort out my feelings and plans regarding my kids; however, I also have an old wood glider out in my yard where this kind of pondering and remembering might take place.

Sonya:

Just remember to let the feelings and memories flow. You are in the business of managing the strategic planning operations at your college. Please leave your planning expertise at the office or at least in only one room at your home. It is great to have an active and accomplished mind; but this mind can mess things up when it comes to love and matters of the heart.

Katherine:

I will keep this in mind. . . . You know, I was just thinking about the special times my ex-husband and I spent on the glider behind our home. Ouch, I just called it our home rather than my home. Anyway, it was on this glider that he and I were most likely to express our love for one another and were most caring about one another. So, what about with my kids. I think we are most loving with one another at our kitchen table. We used to hop on the glider together but not now. Just the kitchen table. . . Maybe I should find time to be with them at this table so that we can talk

about our relationship. As you suggested, this should not be a place when we engage in planning; rather, the kitchen table can be a place where we share memories of the past—perhaps with the aid of the many pictures on our smart phones. We can also begin to share some of our feelings for one another. Will have to do this slowly. My kids are hesitant to be “touchy feely” with me, except when they are having a very disappointing day at school or their heart is broken over someone they with whom they want to spend time. And it is beginning to be a matter of “puppy love” or “infatuation” . . . whatever they call it these days. Is it “Cuffing” or “Simping.” [Both Katherine and Sonya chuckle.]

Sonya:

I think this is enough for today. I hope our exploration of love and “cuffing” has been of some help.

Katherine:

This has been of great help to me. And I have some ideas about how to work with the priorities I set regarding work and family.

Sonya:

We can work on this priority setting more if you would like during future sessions. However, right now, I have a homework assignment for you. It is actually a sleep-time assignment. I would like you to record some of your dreams. In doing so, I will be asking you to do something that might seem a bit strange. I am asking you to make a request of yourself before falling asleep one or two nights. The request you make should do something like this: “my dear, caring self, I would like you to provide me with guidance tonight regarding my family and my work.” You don’t have to say anything more than this. And you certainly can use your own words that would be familiar to that self that resides within you.”

Katherine was a bit uncertain about what this request would really do. She asked herself: “who or what is there inside me that would hear and respond to this request?” She left Sonya’s office with this question lingering in her head and heart.

Session Six

Katherine once again entered Sonya’s office with her diary in hand. In this case, the diary contained notes on several dreams she had after the last session. Almost immediately, Katherine asked Sonya if she could share notes that she took on several dreams she had during the week since her last session. Sonya immediately said yes, but first asked Katherine if the dream request did any good.

Katherine replies:

I’m not sure if the request was heard by me; however, I do know that I dreamt more than I usually do. Or at least I recall more of my dreams than is usually the case. If you don’t mind, let me share my notes about one of the more vivid dreams.

Sonya:

Please do. I’m anxious to hear what you are telling yourself in your dreams.

Katherine:

This dream took place late at night three nights ago. It began with my walk through a beautiful garden. In my dream, I could even smell the flowers. It was late at night and quite warm and humid. It was like I was walking through one of the famous gardens in a Spanish castle. I think the most famous one is the Alhambra. I love a piece of music about the Alhambra. It is a piano composition. I used to play this work, but have left the piano behind, with all the work I must do at my college and with my family obligations.

Anyway, as I was walking through the garden, a strange man joined me. I was initially afraid of him; however, he offered kind, assuring words that removed my fear. He talked about the importance of love in one's family and picked a flower to show me how the petals of the flower were all interlaced, like the relationship between family members. This man seemed to come from some Asian country. Perhaps he was Indian. After offering a few words of encouragement about the time I was spending with my children, he suddenly was gone. I don't know how he knew about my kids or about my struggle with finding time for my two special children. I spent a few more minutes walking through the garden. Then my mother suddenly appeared in the garden. She offered me a flower and soon disappeared herself. I started to cry in the dream and soon woke up. I was still crying.

Sonya asked a very gentle question:

Katherine, what do you think your inner-self was trying to tell you?

Katherine answered:

Obviously, the dream has something to do with encouraging me to spend more time with my children. But, you know, there was something else in this dream. And this something else led me to cry. I'm not sure what this something else is that my dream was trying to tell me.

Sonya:

Maybe it has something to do with the garden and the strong smell of the flowers. And it might have something to do with Spain and with the man you met in the garden. This whole dream seemed to be very "steamy" and verdant in the best sense of these words. You seem to have been caught up in the sensory experiences of this garden of the Alhambra. Krishnamurti often talked about strong sensory experiences as suggesting something about the power of love. And in your case, love seems to refer not just to your children but to your past life as represented by the piano composition that you played earlier in your life and by the appearance of your mother. Were you perhaps crying about what was lost in your life when you became an adult?

Katherine:

Yes! I did feel like I was floating back in time, with all the smells of the flowers, and the warm humid weather. It reminded me of the summer evenings I spent in my Midwest hometown. I also recall spending time in our garden at home when I was young. I loved not just the scent of the flowers, but also the soft texture of the petals. . . And, wow, I remember looking closely at the intertwining of the petals, I would pull one of the petals away from the flower. I noticed (or at least imagined) that the remaining petals trying to take the place of the missing petal. They never were successful. . . .

Wait, wait. I think this dream is partly about my divorce. My ex-husband is no longer living at my home. As a petal on the flower of our family, he is now gone and we haven't been able to fill the gap. That might be part of reason I was crying. I don't think I have ever really processed the loss of a loved one in my family. I think my mother showed up in the dream to provide me with some comfort and support. However, she soon left the dream; and I was left to struggle with the loss of my husband by myself. And then I started to cry. I think I was grieving both the loss of my childhood and the loss of my husband. This was a double header!! [Katherine begins to both cry and laugh.]

After a minute during which nothing was said, Sonya enters the conversation:

Katherine, you have said quite a bit here. When you talk about balancing the scales between your job and your family, there is an additional weight on the side of the family that must be taken into consideration. This weight is your ex-husband. Even though you are now divorced, here are feelings for him and memories of him that can't easily be dismissed. I would suggest that you still need to appreciate the important role he played in your family. While you need to move beyond his presence in your family, you do need to appreciate the contributions he made. If nothing else, you need to identify how these contributions will now be offered by other members of your family. These contributions might now be offered by you, as you spend more time at home and less time at the office. Or your two children are now growing older and can provide some of the things your husband once offered. It could be as simply as one of your children making the dinner for your family once a week, or for your other daughter taking responsibility for shooting pictures of your family when you are on vacation or taking charge of decorating your home during the Christmas holidays – doing something that your ex-husband used to do.

Katherine comes in:

All of this makes sense. Perhaps this reassignment of roles will help all of us deal with our shared grief regarding the loss of our fully intact family. I know these have been hard times for the kids. And I suspect that I have spent more time at work in part to avoid living with and dealing with the shared tears that my kids and I must begin to share.

Sonya:

This all sounds reasonable. You indicated that there was more than one dream you wanted to share. I would love to hear what else your dreams are trying to tell you – or perhaps even teach you.

Katherine:

There was a second dream that I had last night. It was quite different. Just before going to bed, I had spent some time thinking about my meeting with you today. This second dream took place on a beach that I love to visit in Hawaii. My ex-husband and I traveled to this beach several times to celebrate our anniversary. Surprisingly, I was walking on the beach not with my husband, but rather with that same Indian man. He was talking this time not about love or family relationships; rather, he was talking about my career and my future plans. Mostly, he was telling me not to care so much about my career or my future life. It was a big like what you were saying during one of our first sessions together.

Sonya:

I wonder if this wise man from India could be representing Krishnamurti, the person I have mentioned several times, who has offered a perspective on life that I have often shared with you.

Katherine:

Yes, it could be this man with the long name. Am I falling in love with him rather than with you—like I am supposed to do in psychotherapy [both Katherine and Sonya begin to laugh a bit.]

Sonya:

I don't think it is about love or lust on your part. However, your dream might be representing the way in which you are beginning to absorb some of that strange man with the long name is teaching you through me. Krishnamurti often suggested that we learn through falling in love with someone or even more frequently with a strong personal experience. You may have been open to new ideas when in that fragrant garden of the first dream, or when suddenly trusting that man you met in the Garden. This has little to do with lust, but a lot to do with learning.

So, tell me what happened when you were walking with this man on the beach at your special location in Hawaii.

Katherine responds:

It is a bit embarrassing for me to recount what this man said and how I responded. He asked me to describe who my "outside person" is. He used this phrase: the "outside person." I began to mention how other people see me and how my children and ex-husband see me. The wise man and I walked to the end of the beach, where there were large rock formations. I spend the entire time during this walk talking about my "outside person." He and I then climbed up a set of rocks and sat down on a long bench-like rock. Both of us were silent and simply looked out at the ocean and the waves breaking on the rocks. The wise man then made a second request. He said: tell me about your "inside person." I was stumped. He gently prodded: what are the characteristics of the person who resides behind the mask? I still had nothing to say. And then I cried a bit. I soon became quite angry with the way this man whom I don't really know were pushing me to disclose very personal things about myself. I scrambled down off the rocks and ran back across the beach. I woke up and felt many different things: anger, fear, sorrow . . . and even a bit of joy. I rapidly wrote down the content of this dream in this diary.

Kathleen showed Sonya the pages of the diary on which she had recorded this dream. Sonya noticed that there were also drawings on the page. There were skillfully and carefully drawn sketches of sea birds and of waves. There was also a drawing of a young girl running on the beach.

Sonya asked Katherine about the drawings.

Katherine responded:

Oh, those were just my doodling with my memories of the beach. I often draw a bit to capture my memories of special scenes and special events. I am usually trying to capture what occurs when I am awake. These drawings are unusual in that they are about a dream rather than real life.

Sonya offers a comment:

Perhaps this dream is just as real as what occurs during the daytime. And perhaps, the drawings represent a nonverbal response to the wise man's inquiry about your inner life.

Katherine is quiet for a moment and then speaks:

Are you suggesting that the seabirds and the waves are somehow representative of my “inside person.” And maybe the girl running on the beach is somehow me? Is that what you are suggesting?

Sonya:

Does this interpretation make any sense to you? And what might seabirds, waves and girl represent?

Katherine:

I’m not quite sure. I do know that I was feeling free and even light-headed when sitting on the rocks with the wise man. In some ways, I guess this was a good time for this man to ask me about my inner self. Perhaps I should have tried answering him rather than getting angry and running away. Maybe my inner self has something to do with this sense of freedom. I might be running away for this freedom.

Sonya:

This makes a lot of sense. Tell me a bit about this inner self and feelings about freedom as they exist in your waking life. I guess I am asking you to respond to the wise man’s questions – but pleased don’t get angry or try running back down the beach!! [both Sonya and Katherine laugh.]

Katherine

I think these feelings about freedom relate to the sense I get that I am living only with the demands of my job . . . and even the demands being made by my children. I even felt trapped in the demands made by my ex-husband. He always said that he was making no demands. However, there were demands embedded in his words . . . or at least our society demands that I act a certain way as a “dutiful” wife.

Sonya:

But you end up running down the beach. You were escaping the confrontation with this desire for freedom.

Katherine:

Yeh. I feel that I am all messed up about this issue of finding freedom inside myself. I have always been a dutiful employee and dutiful wife. . . However, I don’t feel that I have been a dutiful mother. I feel like I have failed to be a great mother.

Sonya:

That wise man who might be my mentor once said that we must never compare ourselves to some ideal, for this ideal never exists and we are trapped by this outside-induced goal. There is no ideal mother. And you have already mentioned some special moments you have spent with your kids. . . Have you often taken them to the beach?

Katherine:

Yes . . . and we often have been running up and down the beach and climbing on the rocks. And we often just sit on the rocks and look out at the waves like I did in my dream. . . . You know, the girl running down the beach in my dream might not be trying to escape. She might have been enjoying herself. Maybe the freedom inside me gets expressed in my sheer enjoyment of time on the beach and watching my children light up while running “wild” – perhaps running free.

Sonya:

This dream might be providing you with important guidance. Krishnamurti, my wise mentor, often said that “the greater the outward show, the greater the inward poverty.” You have put on a great show as a highly productive worker; however, your inside self that is associated with your work might be quite hollow. This might relate to your inability to fulfill the wise man’s request regarding your “inside person.” You were still focused on the self you were presenting while walking with him down the beach. It is only when you were sitting on the rocks and simply experiencing what was there in front of you that something about your “inside person” was emerging. While you ran away from this inside person, who was seeking freedom, this running away on the beach was itself evocative of memories associated with other pleasant elements of your inside person. These memories are specifically associated with times when you are being a wonderful mother who is sharing the joy of freedom with her children.

Katherine is in the midst of full-scale crying. Sonya hands her a tissue and asks if she would like another cup of herbal tea (having already given Katherine a cup of tea when she entered the office). Katherine accepted the tissue and the tea. She sat quietly with Sonya for several minutes, then got up holding Sonya’s hand, and left the office. No need for a homework assignment. There was plenty to ponder before the next session.

Session Seven

Katherine enters the office seeming to have a slight air of defiance about her. She opens the conversation with Sonya by making a statement:

Sonya, I want to check a couple of things with you. I have been doing a lot of thinking and a whole lot of feeling during the past couple of weeks. Several themes keep running through my brain and perhaps my heart. I am trying to figure out whether they come from me or come from you. Do you mind if I spell some of them out and determine where they come from?

Sonya:

Sounds like a beneficial plan.

Katherine begins:

First, it seems that I should consider staying in my current job, but setting clear boundaries regarding what I should be doing during the workday and what other people should be doing, so that I don’t have to bring this work with me when I go home. Is this my idea or your idea.

Sonya:

I think this is mostly your idea. However, it ultimately is not important where the idea comes from. It is much more important to know if it makes sense for you. I know I have offered you a few of my

suggestions; however, I am not remotely an expert on your life. I only know what you share with me over a very short period of time and in the very artificial setting of a coaching office.

. . . So, tell me more about why you think this idea lingers with you.

Katherine:

I guess I should have known that the matter of ownership is not that important. The validity of a specific idea in my current life or in the life that I envision—that is very important. Boundary setting has lingered with me, because I know I can do this, but find it hard to become more of the “tough broad” in my college. People I work with don’t expect me to say “No.” So they are surprised when I decline to take on a new task.

Sonya:

Can you identify a recent time when you did say “No” and the outcomes were quite positive. I would greatly appreciate your reflections on one of these successful moments. And I would encourage you to include the feelings you had during this moment. Can you do so?

Katherine:

Let me try. . . . There was a time last week when one of my friends at work asked me to review the draft of a written proposal she had prepared. She indicated that she needed to prepare a final version of this proposal by the end of day tomorrow: “Could you review it this evening? I know this is last-minute and that I have been putting off preparing this proposal until just before the deadline. It would be absolutely great if you could look it over and suggest improvements. You are so talented at preparing proposals and have been successful in getting many of them accepted.

Sonya:

So, how were you feeling at this point?

Katherine:

There was a big mix of feelings. At one level, I felt angry. My friend had procrastinated and now I was to ruin my evening at home so that her failure would be covered over. This is not the first time that she has come to me, asking for last-minute assistance with a proposal. At another level, I felt honored that she had turned to me. I am always vulnerable to praise. And she had effectively praised my ability to deliver compelling proposals at our college. There was a third feeling that was not very clear for me. This was a feeling of sorrow. I got very sad thinking of what would probably happen if I said “No.” I know my friend would be disappointed and that she probably would be turning in a proposal that was unsuccessful. At some level, I was sad for her because I think she was in the wrong job. Her skills and knowledge resided elsewhere. I think her procrastination is based on her recognition that she needs to be somewhere else. But how do I tell her this? And what do I do about the assistance she has requested?

Sonya:

This is quite a mixture of powerful feelings. I suspect that they were a product of many interactions with your friend. Some successful. Some unsuccessful. Some joyful? And others like this were probably stressful. So, what did you do and why did you do what you did?

Katherine:

I told her that I would help her with the proposal, but only if she came over to my home while I was reviewing her work. I could comment right there and then on what she had done that was effective and what was not working as she hoped. I indicated that I would rather not have to help her meet a tight deadline and that I think the work we could do together this evening would not only enable her to meet the deadline with a compelling proposal—but also learn something about more effective proposal writing.

Sonya:

That sounds like an effective way to demonstrate that you care about your friend, but that you don't appreciate this late request. Most importantly, you reframed the request to include some teaching and mentoring along with the direct assistance you are providing.

Katherine:

And there was something more than occurred. My friend brought over a fully prepared meal that the two of us and my children ate. The meal was great and my kids love talking to my friend about the latest movies they have seen. My friend is very knowledgeable about the latest films and about the tastes of young people. She writes a weekly column in the local newspaper about the latest movies to come out.

Sonya:

This must have made your friend feel good about imposing on you and your family. She expressed her appreciation and was helpful in preparing the meal.

Katherine

I think she also felt good about exhibiting her competence in the review of movies. This was important because as we got to work on her proposal it became immediately evident that it was in sorry shape. I started working with her on the corrections to be made, and she became increasingly quiet. I scratched out excessive verbiage, turning many passive voice sentences into active voice, and invited my friend to articulate what she thinks is the real, tangible purpose of the proposed project. What would be a set of outcomes that are related directly to the mission of our college. What would be convincing? How does this project relate to previous successful projects?

Sonya:

These sound like helpful suggestions. How did your friend respond?

Katherine:

This is where assisting my friend became beneficial. As I mentioned, she tended to shut down while I was working on her proposal and mostly just sat there when I asked questions about the purpose and desired outcomes of this proposal. At one point, my friend held up her hand and said with considerable emotion: "Please stop. This is not working for me. I am simply not any good at doing this kind of work. I can write a terrific movie review and my work on our company newsletter is widely applauded. So, why can't I write a god-damned proposal!"

Sonya:

What did you do at this point?

Katherine:

I stopped working on the proposal and gently asked: “What would you like me to do right now?” My friend indicated that I had already been of great benefit. In working with her as teacher and mentor, I had brought to the surface a fear about being in the wrong job: “You know, this kind of work is not for me. I need to find a different job in our college or elsewhere—perhaps outside of the collegiate setting. Could you help me give this proposal enough polish for me not to feel like a complete incompetent. I will submit the proposal tomorrow but also meet with someone at HR to survey the availability of other jobs at our college.”

Sonya:

How did her reactions and decisions make you feel?

Katherine:

Once again, there were mixed feelings. I felt a bit guilty about pushing her over the cliff. However, it was also clear that she had been considering this change in jobs for a lengthy period of time. My work with her only illuminated her need to move into a job that fits better with her skill set. I also felt a bit annoyed that I will still have to do work on her proposal. However, this annoyance was balanced with a sense of relief, that hopefully I won’t have to do this kind of last-minute work for her in the immediate future.

Sonya:

So, what occurred that evening and later?

Katherine:

Well, I did patch up the proposal. My friend submitted it the next day and got it back several days later requesting some further work. Fortunately, this additional work would be assigned to another person, because my friend has been assigned to a new position in the communication division of our college. She will be devoting more time to the company newsletter as well as other projects that are more aligned with her current skill set.

Sonya:

How have these outcomes made you feel?

Katherine:

I feel good about the way in which I assisted my friend. I also enjoyed doing the teaching and mentoring—even though the outcome was my one student deciding to leave the course! [both Katherine and Sonya chuckle a bit.] I went to the head of new project development at my college and indicated that I would love to conduct a workshop or two on proposal writing. However, I also indicated to her that I would not be able to do these workshops unless I received some release time from my boss. This was my way of indirectly saying “No” while saying “Yes” to something I wanted to do.

At this point, Sonya invited Katherine to describe and analyze other recent instances when she has been able to say “No” or reframe her response to the request (as she did with her friend). Katherine concluded

the session by suggesting her own homework assignment: “I am going to jot down notes in my diary regarding how I best say “No” and set boundaries in my current job” I will bring these notes to our next session. Sonya agreed that this was an excellent but challenging assignment and indicated that she looked forward to reviewing this list with Katherine. Sonya also reminded Katherine that this next session will be the final one, so Katherine might want to also take some notes about what she has gained from these coaching sessions.

The session ended with Katherine once again warmly shaking Sonya’s hand and saying: “I guess my ideas are ultimately my own. But thanks for helping me give birth to them.” Katherine leaves the office with diary in hand.

Session Eight

Katherine entered Sonya’s office with a full diary and a resolute air about her. Almost immediately after sipping on her herbal tea, Katherine spoke up:

Sonya, I decided to combine my two homework assignments into one project. First, I recognized that I have been focusing during our sessions on what I can do right now to make my life a bit less insane. I have come to recognize that thoughts about changing jobs is actually an escape from confronting and seeking to improve my current job. And I can work on current relationships with my kids right now rather than waiting until I get a new job. I think this refocusing of my work with you began when you referred to your mentor’s belief that we should first attend to right-now rather than the future.

Sonya:

That’s not quite what Krishnamurti has said. But it is close enough. And I am pleased that you are facing your current challenges rather than looking into the future. So, what’s on your list? And did you identify some of the moments when you have been successful and pleased with your work and relationship with your kids.

Katherine:

Yeah. Let me first talk about my children. I realize that a couple of times I have set up my computer on the kitchen table after dinner and began to do my work alongside my kids, while they were doing their homework. This seemed to be a big success for all three of us. We were all focused on our work, but also occasionally broke in to tell a joke or comment on the way we are solving a problem. After about an hour, the three of us would take a break and get a snack. Then about another half hour of work for each of us, and off to bed. You know, we could do this more often. I notice that my kids often seem to have the greatest amount of homework on Wednesday night. So, the three of us could set aside this evening each week for our “kitchen table study hall” as the three of us have called this session together. . . . This seems to be a way in which I can combine my work with my family time. I know we need other time together that is just for fun rather than work, but these kitchen table sessions can also be of value.

Sonya:

I love the way that you have reframed this challenge of work/family relationships. Much as you have done in shifting work for your friend to a teaching session. What else is on your list?

Katherine:

I like the term “reframing.” It’s like what I do when taking pictures. I look at the image on my smart phone and then move my phone a bit to get a different image that I like better. I am reframing the picture, much as I can reframe with my friend and children. So, there is another reframe I plan to do in my job. Since I am apparently good at preparing proposals, I am going to write one that focuses on my job. I am going to suggest to my boss that I cut back to ¾ time and begin working with our head of HR to do some training of administrative staff and faculty at our college on how to write effective proposals when seeking to obtain outside funding. Our college is struggling to make our financial ends meet and federal dollars are harder to get these days. It makes sense for us to request nonfederal dollars for new programs and research at our college. This means that we must write compelling proposals. And I can make this happen. This all came out of our discussion during the last session about working with my friends.

Sonya:

Glad to know that this was a successful session for you. Are there other items on your list?

Katherine:

Yes, there are several more. I won’t bore you with all of them. Some are rather mundane, such as setting up a clock on the wall of my office, so that I can point to it when I tell someone in my office that it is time for me to head home. [Both Katherine and Sonya briefly laugh.] A much bigger item on my list concerns my friends at work. I know that they care deeply about me and are concerned about how I am coping with my divorce. I also care deeply about them and at times feel like I sacrifice too much in attending to their needs – like I have done with my friend who needed help writing the proposal. I have decided that I want to ask them for help in firming up my boundaries regarding work. I will tell them about the conversations I have had with you. And ask them to help me remember to set aside time for my kids and for my own alone time. This will hopefully mean that they will not only be more respectful in asking for my assistance but will also be pushing me not to take on too many formal and informal assignments at the college. Once again, this action comes out of my conversations with you about my feeling of sometimes being burdened by my friends.

Sonya:

I think this was mostly your own solid work, reflecting between our sessions on the emotions associated with your friendships. How about one more item on your list. I am very impressed with the hard work you have put into this assignment.

Katherine:

Unfortunately, this is like the hard work I do when taking on an assignment at my college. It’s the old adage of asking for someone who is overworked to take on a new project since you know they can get things done. So, another item on my list has to do once again with my children. When I was thinking of setting aside Wednesday evening for work at the kitchen table, I also began to think about other evenings to set aside time for a shared activity. I immediately came up with the love that my kids and I have for old movies—especially *Film Noir* flicks like those of Humphrey Bogart and the screwball comedies of the 1930s. I have suggested that we set aside Friday evenings for what we can identify as our “Noir and Screwball Affair.” My oldest kid loves to prepare pizza, and my youngest child is an expert on cooking popcorn. Not very healthy food, but

great for bringing the three of us to Friday night movies while dining on pizza and popcorn. {Both Katherine and Sonya smile and clap their hands.}

Sonya:

What a great idea!! I might try something similar with my own kids.

Katherine:

Great to know that you are also open to advice. And I would charge you for this advice . . . So, these are some of the items on my list. The main thing is that I am trying to make my own job more gratifying and less stressful. And I am trying to find a richer way of being with my two children, especially as they grow older and will soon be leaving home or at least devote most of their time to relationships outside the home. All of this has to do with experiencing some moments in which I am being helpful to other people, while also finding my own area of competence and fulfillment. You have been of great value in this regard. . . Thank you.

Katherine and Sonya hug. Katherine searches for a tissue and dabs the tears that have welled up in her eyes. She leaves Sonya's office with her diary in hand, looking forward to enacting the formidable list she has prepared. Lingering in her head and heart is the warning not to take on too many tasks from the list at the same time. If she overburdens herself then she will be back with Sonya wanting to plan for a new job or new family!! Katherine chuckles to herself, delighting in her own increased self-awareness.

Krishnamurti and Beyond: Reality, Experiencing, Self-Other and Relationships

Sonya, our hypothetical personal coach, had learned many important lessons from her mentor, Jiddu Krishnamurti. She applied some of what she learned in her work with Katherine. While Krishnamurti was not in the business of personal coaching, he did spend a considerable amount of his adult life in the United States and was addressing the American population in his writing – such as *Commentaries on Living* (Krishnamurti, 1956).

I would also suggest that his Eastern-oriented perspectives have also been aligned with many perspectives and findings coming from American psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and theologians—as well as thought leaders in other 20th Century and 21st Century societies. I conclude this essay by offering relevant quotes from Krishnamurti's *Commentaries*, as well as complementary thoughts and findings offered by others who come from Western traditions.

Reality and Verification

The first and most fundamental question that most philosophers and spiritual leaders of the Eastern world must address concerns the nature of reality: what is real and how do you know that it is real. While most Western philosophers and religious leaders don't have to address the first of these two questions (what is real), the second question resides at the heart of philosophical debates about the verification of real things. We find Christian Science to be one of the few western religions to question the presence and nature of a real world, this questioning is common in Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism and Daoism. In the West, serious attention is given within the philosophical traditions of Logical Positivism and Logical Empiricism (the Vienna Circle); less attention is given within the Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions to the matter of verification.

In the case of Krishnamurti, an interesting and important distinction is drawn that impacts on what he considers to be the nature and verification of reality. Krishnamurti 1956, pp. 31-32) differentiates between the idea of an experience and actual experiencing:

Experience is one thing, and experiencing is another. . . . Experience is already in a the net of time, it is already in the past, it has become a memory which comes to life only as a response to the present. Life is the present, it is not the experience.

While on the surface this highly abstract distinction would seem to have little to say about the focus on personal coaching, there are several important implications that can be drawn from this distinction made by Krishnamurti. Most importantly, for Krishnamurti (1956, p. 13), the process of ongoing experiencing and engaging in personal growth is not easily engaged. We seek to escape from the absolute freedom of experiencing, by relying on established knowledge (Krishnamurti, 1956, p.26):

Knowledge is essential . . . as coal to the engine; but it cannot reach out into the unknown. The unknown is not to be caught in the net of the known, Knowledge must be aside for the unknown to be; but how difficult that is!

We have our being in the past, our thought is founded upon the past. The past is the known, and the response of the past not the future, but the present. The future is but the past pushing its way through the uncertain present. This gap, this interval, is filled with the intermittent light of knowledge, covering the emptiness of the present; but this emptiness holds the miracle of life.

. . . The mind is frightened of this unknown, and so it escapes into knowledge, into theories, hopes, imagination; and this very knowledge is a hindrance to the understanding of the unknown. To put aside knowledge is to invite fear, and to deny the mind, which is the only instrument of perception one has, is to be vulnerable to sorrow, to joy. . . Understanding of the self is freedom from knowledge.

Krishnamurti (1956, p. 13) suggests that we often seek to escape from direct experiencing and evolving a distinctive sense of self by identifying with a group or ideology:

To experience, there must be no fear. Fear prevents experience. It is fear that makes of identification – identification with another, with a group, with an ideology, and so on. Fear must resist, suppress; and in a state of self-defence, how can there be venturing on the uncharted sea. Truth or happiness cannot come without undertaking the journey into the ways of the self. You cannot travel far if you are anchored.

Krishnamurti (1956, p 23) describes the way we turn to labels of experience and to group identities and ideologies (collective beliefs) as a substitute for direct experiencing:

You can be converted from one belief to another, from one dogma to another, but you cannot be converted to the understanding of reality. Belief is not reality. You can change your mind, your opinion, but truth or God is not a conviction, it is an experience not based on any belief or dogma, or on any previous experience. If you have an experience born of belief, your experience is the conditioned response of that belief. If you have an experience unexpectedly, spontaneously, and build further experience upon the first, then experience is merely a continuation of memory which responds to contact with the present. Memory is always dead, coming to life only in contact with the living present.

We can change window-dressing on our belief system and our group affiliation, but still find little guidance regarding an authentic sense of self (Krishnamurti, 1956, p. 23):

Conversion is change from one belief or dogma to another, from one ceremony to a more gratifying one, and it does not open the door to reality. On the contrary, gratification is a hindrance to reality. And yet that is what organized religions and religious groups are attempting to do: to convert you to a more reasonable or a less reasonable dogma, superstition or hope. They offer you a better cage. It may or may not be comfortable, depending on your temperament, but in any case it is a prison.

I would suggest that Sonya was not trying to convert Katherine to some Krishnamurtian philosophy. Rather she was helping Katherine exist her own prison. This prison was built with expectations placed on Katherine by other people in her life, as well as her own belief about herself and her self-imposed expectation.

In offering support and guidance to Katherine, regarding her release (or escape) from prison, Sonya was relying heavily on the wisdom offered by Krishnamurti. Beyond his general statements regarding experiencing, knowing and identifying, Krishnamurti offers many insights concerning the role played by interpersonal relationships, the way in which we should address the past, present and future, and the guidance in our life that is provided by our inner self and our external world. These insights were evident in the personal coaching that Sonya offered Katherine.

Similar insights have been offered by Chris Argyris and Don Schön (1974). They provide an assessment of interpersonal relationships, and even more broadly, the way in our thinking operates in the world, by differentiating between the way in which we think about and describe about our relationships with other people and about the world in general and the way in which we actually act in the world. The way we think and describe is identified by Argyris and Schön as *Espoused Theory*. This closely aligns with what Krishnamurti identified as the idea of experience. Conversely, Argyris and Schön identify the way in which we actually behavior in the world as *Theories-In-Use*. I would suggest that this second way of being in the world aligns with Krishnamurti's experiencing in the world.

While there is no apparent intention on Krishnamurti's part to abandon the idea of experience, there is a push in Argyris and Schön work for one's *Espoused Theory* to more closely align with one's *Theory-in-Use*. Put simply, these two psychologists and organizational consultants are suggesting that we "practice what we preach." For Argyris and Schön, the theory-in-use is all-too-often self-fulfilling and self-sealing, meaning that we act in ways eliciting responses which confirm how we tacitly think the world operates and that we rarely "own up to" this self-fulfilling strategy. For instance, if we believe that another person is likely to become defensive if we share some negative feedback with them, then we are likely to appeal a strategy (our theory-in-use) that is usually called "easing-in." In our conversation with the other person, we cover over the negative feedback with false or partially true positive feedback. This so-called "feedback sandwich (positive to negative to positive), is likely to make the person receiving the feedback quite defensive ("what is this person really trying to say to me?"), thereby reinforcing the assumption of defensiveness.

Similarly, in the world of Krishnamurti, we are likely to find that a life filled with talk about experiences, memories of past experiences, and articulation of experiences hoped for or expected in the future is actually quite hollow. It also is a life that is protected and isolated from the experiencing of relationships. We live within what Kevin Weitz and I have called a "bubble of belief" (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). In alignment with Argyris and Schön's views, this bubble would be saturated with self-fulfilling assumptions.

These assumptions would never be tested in the real world, nor would the “true believer” (Hoffer, 1951) spend much time listening to people who live in differing bubbles-of-belief.” Without direct experiencing of one’s world, there are only thoughts and assumptions about this experiencing, leaving one comfortably living in a constructed world rather than in a world that is always filled with surprises, new learning and the growth of self.

Experience vs. the Past and Future

As noted by Krishnamurti, it might be advisable when engaged in personal coaching to focus on one’s current experiencing rather than either one’s past or one’s future. This is the perspective that Sonya took when first meeting with Katherine. Throughout his writing in *Commentaries on Living*, Krishnamurti (1956) shares exceptionally beautiful experiencing that is being engaged by other people in his life. I have already proposed that exceptional experiencing that breaks the barrier between one’s inner self and the external world might be found when encountering Awe (Keltner) or engaged in an activity that produces Flow (Csikszentmihalyi).

Beauty might provide entrance to our inner journey. They could be the on ramps to our psychic freeway. As the author of the *Celestine Prophecy* (Redfield, 2018) noted, there are moments when something scintillating appears before us. This thing or event of sparkling beauty seems to be connected to something deep within us. Much like Carl Jung (1931), James Redfield speaks of these “minor miracles” as *Synchronistic*. The sensitivity associated with this experiencing might be based on what George Klein (1967) identifies as the appearance of peremptory ideations.

In essence, Klein is suggesting that we often have a train filled with images, emotions, and expectations (ideations) that runs through our unconscious mind. This train, like an avalanche that is coursing down a mountain side, picks up additional ideations as it courses through our psyche. While the ideational train can pick up fears and apprehensions arising from our confrontation with threatening people or events, it can also pick up moments when we are experiencing something beautiful. The synergy involves a temporary joining together, within the experiencing, of the outside object or event of beauty and the inside ideational train that is filled with many memories, feelings, and expectations. “Sparks fly” and we find ourselves experiencing something that is not only “breath-taking” but also rich with insights regarding our authentic self.

Dacher Keltner (2023) has recently written about this kind of experience in his book about *Awe*. He identifies the wonder to be found in music and in visual designs (such as those found in the terracotta warriors in China). Awe is found in what Durkheim (1912/2008) described as collective effervescence, which is the emotional core of religion. This effervescence is evident in the “buzzing and crackling with some life force that merges people into a collective self, a tribe, an oceanic ‘we.’” (Keltner, 2023, p. 13). Awe is also evident in spiritual and religious texts. And in stories of life and death. These texts and stories “lead us to epiphanies—when we suddenly understand essential truths about life.” (Keltner, 2023, p. 17)

Krishnamurti’s experiencing and Keltner’s Awe can be quite horrifying—yet still somehow enthralling. Keltner (2023, p. 13) writes about the inspiring natural Awe to be found in witnessing a cataclysmic event such as an earthquake, thunderstorm, or wildfire. Horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures continue to attract us—think of the superhero movies that populate our movie theaters and cable channels. These competing images elicit feelings of profound admiration or profound disgust—often both. This is the perfect psychic storm associated with direct experiencing. Somehow, a power from outside time or space seems to intervene, and, I would suggest, interplays with the content of our

ideational train. It leads us to an experiencing that penetrates and changes our inner psyche. And we don't know how this will happen. It is beyond our control or true comprehension. We can't readily generate an idea about the experiencing. Our conscious mind plays a secondary role (or no role at all). The unconscious ideational train does play a role.

Using more contemporary psychological terms, the boundaries between internal and external locus of control seem to be shattered when one is experiencing the outside enters the inside, and the inside is drawn to the outside. As an example, we point to the horrible and dreadful images and pictures of gods in primitive cultures. They continue to enthrall us, leading to feelings of profound admiration. Often, at the same time, they produce profound disgust. We view a miracle in the form of a newborn child or the recovery of a loved one from a life-threatening disease.

Somehow, a power from outside time and space seems to intervene and lead us to experiencing that penetrates and changes everything (though we don't know how). This sense of Other that is beyond knowable time and space is what Carl Jung (1938) builds on when he is extending Rudolph Otto's (1923) portrayal of what Otto calls the *Numinous*. Jung describes a numinous experience as one that "seizes and controls the human subject . . . an involuntary condition . . . due to a cause external to the individual. The numinous is either a quality of a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence causing a peculiar alteration of consciousness." (Jung, 1938, p. 4)

At the present time, this experiencing is often described as a "thin place" where the secular (earth) and sacred (heaven) seem to join together. Thin places exist not only at physical locations (such as Lourdes, Findhorn, and Sedona) but also as moments or spaces in everyday life where the sacred is felt more intensely. They can be the sources of Awe that Keltner identifies—such as enthralling landscapes, beautiful or historic architectural sites, or dynamic, changing seashores. Krishnamurti's experiencing may occur in a thin place that brings forth clarity, spiritual renewal, and a sense of intimacy with the Divine.

Keltner (2023, p. 39) offers the following example of outcomes that can emerge from a thin place filled with awe and wonder:

. . . a mental state of openness, questioning, curiosity, and embracing mystery, arises out of experiences of awe. In our studies, people who find more everyday awe show evidence of living with wonder. They are more open to new ideas. what is unknown. To what language can't describe. To the absurd. To seeking new knowledge. To experience itself, for example, of sound, or color, or bodily sensation, or the directions thought might take during dreams or meditation. To the strengths, and virtues of other people. It should not surprise that people who feel even five minutes a day of everyday awe are more curious about art, music, poetry, new scientific discoveries, philosophy, and questions about life and death. They feel more comfortable with mysteries, with that which cannot be explained.

The moments of experiencing identified by Krishnamurti and the state described by Keltner contain not only Awe and Wonder. These moments and state also contain what Mihali Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identifies as *Flow*. While Awe tends to be a passive experience with powerful forces being observed and absorbed in a psychic storm, Flow tends to be an active experience, with power residing in one's engagements existing at the threshold between boredom and anxiety. When Flow and Awe join forces,

one may find the kind of openness, questioning, curiosity, and mystery that Krishnamurti and Keltner have described.

Building on the work of Victor Turner (1977), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identifies temporary settings—and moments of experiencing—that provide a unique threshold between boredom (lack of challenge) and anxiety (too much challenge). He identified this threshold experience as “Flow.” He suggests that flow can be found in the many enthralling moments we have all experienced as rock climbers, jazz musicians, or chess players. Sonya might have experienced a bit of flow when working with Katherine on her proposal, this experience of flow residing in her teaching and mentoring (challenging) rather than her work on rewriting the proposal (boring).

We can even experience a “micro-flow” when twirling a pencil or paper clip in our hand during a particularly boring meeting. Keltner (2023, p. 25) speaks of something similar when he notes that in our daily life we frequently “feel awe in encounters with moral beauty and . . . in nature and in experiences with music, art and film.” We have “fun.” Keltner considers this a “self-transcendent” state in which we feel truly free. In what could be labeled a state of “micro-awe,” we are transported “out of our self-focused, threat-oriented, and status quo mindset to a realm where we connect to something bigger than the self.” (Keltner, 2023, p. 28)

Before fully absorbing and even applauding this highly personalized vision of human growth, it is important to acknowledge that at some important level, this vision is quite conservative and individualistic. As Sonya noted in conveying one of Krishnamurti’s favorite stories during her first session with Katherine, the perspective being offered is focused on immediate, personal experiencing rather than any future-oriented collective efforts to reform the society in which we are now living. There is a tendency toward acceptance of the world as it now exists, versus a striving for reform and improvement of the human condition. This is the dilemma inherent in Eastern thought. One remains in a Yuga posture while the world around the contemplative person is “going to hell.” One retreats from the world when it gets too messy or one devotes their time to healing the wounded rather than seeking to prevent the wounding.

There is no compelling image of the future in the writing of Krishnamurti or in the writing of many other spiritual leaders. There is just a focus on the “now.” We are invited to relate to some higher order being or cause, rather than relating to members of our own community. Attention is given to Being rather than Becoming at a personal and collective level. While a focus on the “here-and-now” for one’s client is very appropriate when someone like Sonya is providing personal coaching, it is also important to encourage rather than block aspirations of one’s client to seek future improvement their organization or community.

Relationships

Part of the “here-and-now” of Krishnamurti concerns our relationships in the world—especially our relationships with other people. Relationships provide the pathway to authentic and direct knowledge of self (Krishnamurti, 1956, p. 47): “Self-knowledge is to be discovered in the action of relationship; and all action is relationship. Self-knowledge does not come about through self-isolation, through withdrawal.”

He offers the following reflections on the challenges and opportunities associated with relationships (Krishnamurti, 1956, p. 41):

Relationship is complex and difficult, and few can come out of it unscathed. Though we would like it to be static, enduring, continuous, relationship is a movement, a process which must be deeply and fully understood and not made to conform to an inner or outer pattern. Conformity, which is the social structure, loses its weight and authority only when there is love. Love in relationship is a purifying process as it reveals the ways of the self. Without this revelation, relationship has little significance.

Krishnamurti (1956, p. 41) identifies some of the challenges associated with the forming of relationships:

. . . [H]ow we struggle against this revelation [about love]! The struggle takes many forms : dominance or subservience, fear or hope, jealousy or acceptance, and so on and on. The difficulty is that we do not love; and if we do love we want it to function in a particular way, we do not give it freedom. We love with our minds and not with our hearts. Mind can modify itself, but love cannot. Mind can make itself invulnerable, but love cannot; mind can always withdraw, be exclusive, become personal or impersonal. Love is not to be compared and hedged about. Our difficulty lies in that which we call love, which is really of the mind. We fill our hearts with the things of the mind and so keep our hearts ever empty and expectant. It is the mind that clings, that is envious, that holds and destroys. Our life is dominated by the physical centres and by the mind. We do not love and let it alone, but crave to be loved; we give in order to receive, which is the generosity of the mind and not of the heart. The mind is ever seeking certainty, security; and can love be made certain by the mind? Can the mind, whose very essence is of time, catch love, which is its own eternity?

It is as if our mind and love live in two different realms (like our inner self and our environment). The integration of me and you, according to Krishnamurti (1956, p. 42) “comes into being only when the mind is utterly silent, having reached the end of its own tether. Only then is there no pain in relations” and only then is there a shared sense of being—perhaps resembling what Martin Buber (1958) calls “I/Thou” and what I have identified as the ingredients found in enduring relationships (Bergquist, 2023).

Ironically, it would seem according to Krishnamurti (1956, p. 17) that we are positioned to love without possessiveness or mind-based love only when we also are willing to be alone in a particular way:

[This is an aloneness that is] not aching, fearsome loneliness. It is the aloneness of being; it is uncorrupted, rich, complete. . . . One can truly communicate only when there is aloneness. Being alone is not the outcome of denial, of self-enclosure. Aloneness is the purgation of all motives, of all pursuits of desire, of all ends. . . . Aloneness is indivisible and loneliness is separation. That which is alone is pliable and so enduring. Only the alone can commune with that which is causeless, the immeasurable. To the alone, life is eternal.

It is in this distinction drawn between aloneness and loneliness that Krishnamurti seems to be redefining what it means to be capable of love. While as a Jewish theologian, Buber writes of a loving relationship that is based ultimately on a higher cause or devotion to a superordinate entity, Krishnamurti, as an Eastern spiritual guide, writes about a loving relationship that is devoid of all outside agendas. His portrayal of love seems more closely related to a mandala depicting two lovers intertwined eternally, rather than being a portrayal hanging in a synagogue of two lovers, as in *Song of Songs*, kneeling in reverence to the all-powerful and ever-present Yahweh (Shekhinah).

Inner and Outer Realms

Like many of his spiritual colleagues coming out of Eastern traditions, Krishnamurti devotes considerable attention to the matter of relationships that exist between our inner self and the external world in which we live and work. As another spiritual leader with whom I am acquainted has declared, there is a “delicate” interplay between the inner and outer realms. I would phrase this a bit differently. I would say that the “membrane” between the inner and outer is quite permeable. Our inner self strongly influences how we view our world (Piaget’s assimilation); conversely, the external world has a major impact on the structures and content of our inner world (Piaget’s accommodation) (Piaget, 1923/2009) I think Carl Jung would concur with both statements.

Krishnamurti (1956, p. 54) would press on from these statements to suggest that the invasion of the inner into the outer and the outer into the inner creates the conditions for us to experience the true state of being. An exclusive focus on either one’s inner self or one’s environment prevents us from directly experiencing and from gaining an authentic sense of being. Our one-sided focus leaves facing a state of nothingness in either our inner self or our outer self:

The greater the outward show, the greater the inward poverty; but freedom from this poverty is not the loin-cloth. The cause of this inward emptiness is the desire to become; and, do what I will, this emptiness can never be filled. You may escape from it in a crude way, or with refinement; but it is as near to you as your shadow. You may not want to look into this emptiness, but nevertheless it is there. The adornments and the renunciations that the self assumes can never cover this inward poverty. By its activities, inner and outer, the self tries to find enrichment, calling it experience or giving it a different name according to its convenience and gratification. The self can never be anonymous; it may take on a new robe, assume a different name, but identity is its very substance. This identifying process prevents the awareness of its own nature. The cumulative process of identification builds up the self, positively or negatively; and its activity is always self-enclosing, however wide the enclosure. Every effort of the self to be or not to be is a movement away from what it is. Apart from its name, attributes, idiosyncrasies, possessions, what is the self? Is there the “I,” the self, when its qualities are taken away? It is this fear of being nothing that drives the self into activity; but it is nothing, it is an emptiness.

Krishnamurti returns to his emphasis on direct experiencing rather than just relying on memories of the past or planning for the future. The mutual invasion of inner and outer realms occurs in the present; there is no past or future. There is only the direct, present process of experiencing that brings about the integration of the inner and outer realms (Krishnamurti, 1956, p. 30):

Life is a total process, the inner as well as the outer; the outer definitely affects the inner, but the inner invariably overcomes the outer. What you are, you bring about outwardly. The outer and the inner cannot be separated and kept in watertight compartments, for they are constantly interacting upon each other; but the inner craving, the hidden pursuits and motives, are always more powerful. Life is not dependent upon political or economic activity; life is not a mere outward show, any more than a tree is the leaf or the branch. Life is a total process whose beauty is to be discovered only in its integration.

I would put this integration of inner and outer realms a bit differently, suggesting one again that the mutual invasion is most likely to occur when our experiencing is filled with Awe (Keltner) and/or Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Jung’ Mask: Carl Jung also suggests that we put on a mask (persona) when engaged with the outside world (Jung, 1972). I would suggest that this is especially the case in our world of work. Our inside self is

hidden away—often even from ourselves. As I have noted, it often may take a special moment of awe (Keltner) or an experience of flow (Csikszentmihalyi) for our inner self to break through. At other times it takes our shadow to do something (such as tripping us up) that shatters or at least puts a big dent in our mask. Only after feeling like a fool or appearing naked in our dream, do we experience our inner self.

Conclusions

As we review what Katherine plans to do in seeking to improve her work life and life at home with her children, three strategies are being engaged. These three strategies were originally identified by Goodwin Watson, an educational innovator and respected change-based consultant. Strategies that focus on structure, process and attitude were identified and described in the social psychology textbook he wrote with David Johnson (Watson and Johnson, 1972). I suggest that this use of multiple strategies aligns with Krishnamurti's repeated suggestion that we become unbridled from static belief systems and sets of ideas. According to Krishnamurti (1956, pp. 56-57), belief systems can be "confusing and destructive. [While they] may at first seem orderly and constructive, . . . [in their] wake there is conflict and mystery." Similarly, when we cling to a specific idea, we fail to recognize that it is "self-projected, it is a form of self-worship, or self-perpetuation." (Krishnamurti, 1956, p. 86)

By looking from multiple perspectives at the ways to enhance our lives and by adopting multiple strategies for engaging in this enhancement, we avoid getting stuck in a rigid belief system – the forementioned "bubble of belief (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024). We also avoid becoming enamored with one "correct" idea that we have generated. When there is no one right answer, then there is the opportunity, as Krishnamurti advocated, to learn of alternative answers while experiencing the implementation of several different change strategies. Following the lead taken many years ago by John Dewey (1929), the advocates of action research (Lewin, 1946), action science (Argyris, 1985) and reflective practice (Schön, 1983) have proposed that we are most likely to learn something new and something important when we "kick the tire" (take action) and note the reaction to this kick. We try out an idea, and test out a belief system, by experiencing the enactment of this idea and the guidance of this belief system. And then we learn. And then we modify our ideas and our beliefs.

Given this orientation to multiple perspectives and strategies, let's briefly consider each of Watson's three strategies. First, the structurally oriented change strategies concern modifications in that which is visible and readily articulated. In an organization this can be the organization chart and reporting relationships, buildings, technologies, and official strategic plans, etc. They are the stable, enduring "snapshots" of the organization. In the case of Katherine, there are personal structures to be introduced or modified. Two of these changes concern the scheduling of special nights with her children: the Wednesday evening "Kitchen Table Study Hall" and Friday evening "Film Night".

Watson's second change strategy (process) provides guidance regarding the ongoing way in which people inside the structure operate. This dimension is best conveyed not through a static snapshot, but rather through a movie that documents the behaviors taking place. The process dimension includes behaviors related to interpersonal functions, such as communication, conflict-management, problem-solving, and decision-making. For Katherine, the change in process involves asking her friends at the college to lend her a hand in finding an appropriate work-life balance. While Katherine is usually providing help, this shift in her interpersonal relationships provides her with a good reason to ask for help.

The third dimension (attitude) identified by Watson can't be seen or viewed either as a snapshot or a movie. Attitude is felt but not seen. It concerns perspective and "frame of mind." As I have already noted,

Chris Argyris and Don Schön (1974) offer a distinction between “espoused theory” (what we say) and “theory in action” (what we do). Attitude is inferred from how people communicate with one another, manage conflicts, solve problems, and make decisions. Attitudes are seen but rarely articulated. As the old saying goes: “Watch what they do rather than what they say.” This saying can even be directed toward our own attitudes: “Watch what I do rather than what I say.” For Katherine, a change in attitude is manifested in her focus, with Sonya’s guidance, on what has been working in her life rather than what she might do in the future. A focus on the here-in-now (Krishnamurti) is complemented by an appreciative perspective (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005). Katherine is encouraged by Sonya to identify and learn from the moments in her life when she is successful. Sonya is helping Katherine discover and appreciate the times when and places where “she is doing it right!”

Katherine might find that her structural changes and changes in process don’t all work as planned. Her children might not want the “regiment” of a prescribed “kitchen table study hall” or a Friday evening “Fillm night.” They might prefer spontaneity. Similarly, the friends of Katherine might not be too keen on taking on the “burden” of ensuring her work/life balance. They are Katherine’s “friends” not her “counsellor.” In the midst of all these possible sources of resistance, Katherine should be taking notes. Her diary can now be filled with “lessons learned” and modifications to be made. She might even set up a new set of appointments with Sonya—or at least one follow-up session—to review what has occurred and what might be done differently.

The one thing that hopefully will not change is the attitude that Katherine has adopted from her work with Sonya. Ultimately, it is Katherine’s establishment of a new mindset that Krishnamurti’s perspective has the greatest potential impact on her life. It is in Krishnamurti’s focus on experiencing that she finds a leverage point for identifying what is most important in her present life. For Katherine and other personal coaching clients It is in the moments of immediate Flow, and the experiencing of Awe that one finds arrows pointing to the purpose and source of meaning in one’s life. Within the framework of experiencing rather than thinking about or talking about one’s experience, one finds, as did Katherine, that there are ways to enhance one’s current life rather than remembering and returning to some life being lived in the past or seeking to somehow re-invent one’s current life in the future.

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