

## **The Scary Unknown and The Reality of Negative Fantasies**

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Late one evening, the attractive teenage college student was walking from the college building exit to her car parked on the street about a quarter mile away. The rain was falling steadily and the wind was whipping up and howling. She had to pass a vacant lot filled with trees and shrubs and this was always a little scary to her. But, this night she distinctly saw and heard the bushes move and a figure began to jump out at her. She knew it had to be a rapist or murderer who was out to get her. Terrified, she leaped into the street, was struck by an oncoming car and died on the spot. There was no rapist, no murderer, merely the wind and rain and shadows with which she created the negative fantasy which killed her. We humans are 'fantasy creators' and always will be! Negative fantasies bring clients into our offices and are usually quite difficult to work with as these negative fantasies are deeply imbedded in the subconscious mind through the repetition of the thoughts over many years. Obsessive compulsive behaviors capture negative fantasies which in turn perpetuate the need to perform certain tasks to overcome the ill effects that would occur if the behaviors were not performed. Although this tale of the girl, rapist, wind and rain is not of an obsessive behavior, it is demonstrative of our thought processes regarding the 'scary unknown', and although there is not physical death with the behaviors there is surely a 'sort of death' by going through hell with behavior, thoughts and anxieties of the negative fantasies.

Julius Caesar was reviewing a passing parade and asked the person next to him who one of the riders was. Caesar was told that it was Brutus upon which Caesar said 'Brutus thinks too much. Such men are dangerous' We all know the ending....Brutus stabbed Caesar many times on March 15th, The Ides of March. I write today about people thinking too much, stabbing themselves and others with their thoughts and actions, not necessarily inflicting death, but inflicting great psychological harm, and almost total destruction of their lives.

Let's get a couple of things straight right in the beginning. If someone presents symptoms of OCD, obtain a written referral from a licensed medical professional as all OCD is covered in the DSM IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychological Disorders). Next, I personally do not know which technique works with which client....and, further because I do not know which technique works with which client, I do not care....and further, this not knowing compels me to use all of the techniques that I know until one of them strikes the right chord. You cannot say that a certain technique always works in any given situation, so you cannot be the judge of the effectiveness of the technique with each client, but your client will surely tell you when the issues have been resolved, and as always, the client is the 'final judge'.

Often, with other than smoking or weight, hypnosis is the 'court of last resort' or likened to the 'last chance saloon', when all else fails such as prescription drugs, and cognitive behavior therapy. Recently, I received a referral encompassing a young, married lady with children who was suffering from the text book case of OCD: she washes her hands 50 to 100 times a day and maybe more. But the hand-washing has turned out to be the trunk of the tree which grew many, many branches of obsessive thoughts and obsessive behaviors. My client has given me

permission to write about this in this article and naturally her identity will be hidden. We have used fantasies all of our lives but the ones we think of immediately when we hear the word 'fantasy' is the one that has the pot at the end of the rainbow, or the knight in shining armor, or hitting the lottery, or finding Mr. or Ms. Right, etc. Regardless of our age, we still fantasize. Now listen to the world of 'negative fantasies' as narrated by my client. She calls herself a 'germ-o-phobic' but claims that she is not worried about germs in regards to 'catching' any disease but only that she feels unclean and dirty if germs are on her clothing, or her children's or husband's clothing or skin and this necessitates constant clothes washing and showering. She now gets into specifics and tells us of the 'scary unknown and the negative fantasies' that she has created: 1. I wash my hands 50 to 100 times a day. 2. I use hand sanitizers a lot. 3. I take showers after I do the laundry (This is her own family's laundry whereby she feels she picked up germs on her clothing and skin) 4. I can't use public bathrooms or even be near them. (She creates the scenarios whereby people urinate on the seats, sides of the toilet and on the floor, and that their clothing rubs into the germs and then maybe rubs against her or that she would get germs on her if she used these 'urine-laden' toilets) 5. Port-A-Potties are worse for me than public bathrooms. (To her, these are the filthiest because there is no flushing, and the floors are usually not cleaned, and they are outside, and all of the waste material is right underneath, and anyone using them is necessarily contaminated) 6. I fear leaves around Port-A-Potties blowing on my car and carrying germs. (She created the scenario where even leaves blowing in the wind that had been near the port-A-Potty, touching her car, had deposited contaminated leaves with germs on the car and she had to rush home to wash her clothes and take a shower if she passed in close proximity to one) 7. I don't like strangers touching me or brushing up against me. 8. I think that money is dirty 9. I can't stand gas stations bathrooms, the ones with the key. 10. I don't like using public garbage cans if they have a push lid. I know that you get the picture. She is crying out for help and first and foremost we must recognize the seriousness of this real-life situation and be humble enough to know that with matters like this, there is so much trial and error, and that feedback is essential, and that we have been brought into the life of this client to help to the best of our ability and with all our heart. We must speak honestly and genuinely to the client, and listen, listen, listen, and then start formulating a session plan, which is bound to change anyway with the feedback, but nevertheless has direction. We must also forget about 'one-session cures', or I must forget about 'one session cures' any way, as I stopped trying to accomplish that 20 years ago.

The first session I did the usual one-hour confidential interview, long induction, safe and secret place, technique to break patterns and behaviors that I use with addictions, taught self hypnosis, read a list of Affirmations that I prepared about germs, and gave her a copy of them. I instructed her to practice self-hypnosis and read the Affirmations every day. But they were only about hand-washing as that is all that she discussed with me on the phone when making the initial appointment. There was no progress during the week in between the first and 2nd session. In the 2nd session we did Tad James' Time Line Therapy, and heard of a very excellent family life and upbringing with no OCD or phobias about germs etc until about 8 years earlier when she and her husband were dating. The male members of his family would not wash their hands when using the bathrooms and this began to upset her. She started creating the urine scenarios but over the years their habits did not bother her any longer because they

were overtaken and overshadowed by the hand-washing, public bathrooms, Port-A-Potties and other unclean situations that she created. I desensitized her to every incident that she could recall right until the time of that session. There was no progress at all during the 2 weeks in between sessions. The 3rd session we did a combination of hypnosis and EFT which Dr. John Gatto and I named 'hypnotapping'. We tapped the acupoints while repeating all of the negatives in her thoughts and behaviors and then turning them around and making them into positives. By the way, I do not shake hands with this client, nor touch her. After the first session when I touched the top of her head during the induction of the hypnotic state, and anchored a trigger by clutching her right wrist, she asked that I do not touch her. Co-incidentally, before she asked I thought that I would not anchor anything physically any more with her. The in between week brought the first glimpse of progress: She went to her daughter's soccer game, saw the Port-A-Potty and did not shower or wash her clothes when she went home after the game. Any progress is welcome. I then used in this session some healing techniques with positive imagery (fantasy). I had her imagine a healing home with a sparkling white healing room. All of the furniture inside was brilliant white and assembled there were the best medical and psychological doctors in the world who were expert in germs and OCD. She was asked to confer with these doctors and to arrive at the proper method of overcoming all of her issues. After thorough discussions, she became Dr..... who was taught how to treat herself. When I asked her what the doctors taught her, she said that they all agreed that she should 'Face it". I had her repeat 'face it' many times in the white room. I also brought into the room a spiritual being to sit with her. I knew she was Catholic and took advantage of that knowledge. The spiritual being asked her to imagine that she was standing underneath a pure white waterfalls that cleansed her from top to bottom, skin and clothes. The analogy naturally was made with the use of holy water in the baptism ceremony to cleanse original sin from the infant. And, that every time that she felt that germs were on her skin or clothes or on her children's or husband's skin or clothes, when she imagined the waterfalls all would be cleansed.

There was more progress between sessions and in the 5th session we used the 'Thought-Stopping' technique which involves her saying to herself immediately "Stop It' whenever she starts creating these negative fantasies about germs. and then saying the opposite such as 'I am germ-free. I am free' One day after the session, I received a nice email from my client in which she was happy and proud of her accomplishment. These are excerpts:

*Hi Dr. De Marco,*

*Overall I did very well today. .... A couple of times people rubbed up against me which I didn't like but I was able to deal with that and nothing happened to ruin my time. .... Next we had to go to a totally different school for my daughters soccer game. This is the field she will have all her games at. This field does have a port-a-potty to my dismay.... I wasn't happy but I kept telling myself to "Stop it." I did find myself looking at it a couple of times and I would say "Stop it" and tell myself, "germs don't transfer like that." It helped me a little but I was still bothered. I did my best not to dwell in it and I did have a good time at the game. I sat in a chair with my back to the potty so I couldn't see it at all.... When we came home I didn't make any shower or take a bath, I didn't do any cleaning. So I was able to enjoy the day and come home and not do any cleaning rituals. So I did make it thru today, but I will admit that I feel it's going to be a long, rough season of soccer. I am going to keep using the thought stopping and the other*

*techniques you've taught me, but I am going to need a lot of support to make it thru this. This is like my biggest nightmare.*

This is a marked improvement over the last 7 weeks but still very shaky. I have found that the thing upon which we can build is 'hope' and a day like this one for my client is like a day of calm, a day of being out of the elements. I think of an old story that I read when I was a child: It was snowing and storming outside and very, very cold and a bird in the storm flew into an open window into a warm home with a beautiful fireplace. The bird warmed itself and became strong in the minute that it was in that home and then flew back out another window into the storm knowing that it had to face the storm, but believing that there was warmth in its life, and being stronger for that brief moment to cope with the elements. Well this day of 'warmth' to my client may be the day that we can build upon for her life. In the next sessions I intend to use the 'Brickwall Technique' which I have written about in other columns and also the NLP 'movie theater phobia technique', an imaginary hose to cleanse all of the Port-APotties of th world and other unclean materials, and other stuff per the feedback I receive.

**CAVEAT:** In strict compliance with the Ethics & Standards of our profession, always advise your clients who demonstrate symptoms of medical issues or psychological disorders to avail themselves of the best allopathic medical and psychological professional services that they can obtain. Request a written referral when warranted. Hypnotism is complementary to these traditional disciplines