

The Healing Power of Metaphors

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Metaphors are a magical part of our language. A metaphor can be a figure of speech that directly refers to one thing by referring to something else. It may uncover or suggest hidden similarities between two different ideas. An example would be, “May the road rise up to meet you...”

Metaphors can be spoken, written, found in poetry, and can even appear in our dreams. A metaphor can be an abstract image such as “lightness prancing over darkness.”

Some say that a metaphor can be an expression of our psyche because of how deeply it affects us. It can increase our powers of perception, and it can awaken the psychological and spiritual dimensions of our mind. Our

perceptions of the world are uniquely personal. Everyone’s brain is different, and a metaphor may deeply resonate with one individual but not another.

Sometimes a therapist can help a client activate his or her hidden potential to heal through the use of metaphor. This happened for Marta...

Marta was a seventy-year-old wife who was depressed and sad. Her husband of twenty years had died recently of a terminal illness. She had been his caretaker during the last few years of his life. She had loved her husband and he had been her best friend.

Marta was now living alone in her home. She was self-isolating and not interested in being with

friends. In a sense, she had lost her joy of living. Several months later, Marta started working with a therapist to help her recover from her loss and isolation.

After several sessions, Marta told her therapist that she had the same dream several times. In the dream she was looking at a large plant in a small container. It needed to be repotted in a larger container so it could grow and develop strong roots in the new soil.

The therapist recognized that Marta’s dream could help Marta heal. Marta had been a gardener most of her life. She used to spend hours most days growing vegetables and flowers to sell and share with friends. With her husband’s ongoing illness, she had no time or energy to garden.

With the therapist’s help, Marta realized she *was* the potted plant that needed a larger container. Gradually, Marta began to work more and more in her garden. She planted and repotted many of her plants. Marta’s work in her garden gave her pleasure. She renewed contacts with friends and in time, Marta recovered from her depression and sadness.

The repotting of the plant in her dreams was a metaphor that Marta resonated with, and it had emerged from her unconscious psyche to her conscious level of awareness. Some would say her dream had emerged from her innate ability to heal from her spiritual self.



After about an hour, Joey realized he had to get back to the lodge. His parents would be looking for him. However, in Joey's enthusiasm to follow the deer, he had not noticed what trail was nearby. Joey kept walking through the woods until he came to an intersection of three trails. There were names posted for each trail, but he did not know which trail would go back to the lodge.

Joey was an avid fan of the *Star Wars* movies. He had often heard different characters say, "May the force be with you." Joey said to himself, "The force is within me."

Standing at the intersection, Joey slowly turned towards each trail and waited to feel if there might be an "energy" to guide him back to the lodge. As he faced each trail Joey said, "Is this the trail to the lodge?" And each time he asked that question, he added, "The force is within me."

Facing the middle trail, he felt a slight difference in the energy that he hadn't felt at the other two trails. With confidence, Joey took the middle trail through the forest. After about a mile of hiking, Joey came to a high point of land, and he saw the lodge in the distance. He was smiling as he hurried back to the lodge.

Some might say Joey was just lucky to find the correct trail. Others might say that his trust in the "force" gave him the confidence to follow his hunch about the middle trail. Perhaps his belief in the "force" was a metaphor, which helped him tap in to his personal spiritual guidance.

I urge you to be alert to the metaphors that impact you in some way. When one appears, say it out loud and notice how you feel inside. One of my favorite metaphors is, "The eternal lightness of being." ■

Metaphors can enrich our lives even with a simple phrase that we might read in a book or poem or see in a movie. Our ability to resonate with any particular metaphor will depend on our unique life experiences. Sometimes the effect of a metaphor can be transformational.

Joey was an active ten-year old who spent much time alone. Both parents worked many hours during the week. Joey was an independent child with his hobbies and outdoor interests. Last summer, he and his parents took a week's vacation at Yellowstone National Park.

Joey was excited to visit the park, to be in wilderness, and to see and hear the wild animals. Joey's parents wanted to rest and enjoy the views of the lake from comfortable chairs at the lodge and maybe take a few park bus tours.

On the second morning, Joey was up very early. He left the lodge to explore the area. He saw a doe and fawn walking nearby and decided to quietly follow them as they walked into the forest. Joey was excited to follow the deer. There were no wild animals where he lived in a busy suburb in Ohio.

Catherine Nelson, Ph.D., has a counseling practice in Bozeman with many years of experience working with individuals and groups. She has taught at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing and is a certified Pathwork Helper. She offers workshops on personal transformation and energy healing and is available for individual sessions. Call Catherine at (406) 585-8025. E-mail cnhobbitt@gmail.com. Visit: RockyMtnPathwork.org.

