SOME REASONS WHY I USE REBT IN MY PRIVATE PRACTICE AND PERSONAL LIFE

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There are many reasons why I use REBT. Perhaps the most important one is because it seems very logical and has a clear and focused practical application, in practice and everyday life. Since I first listened to some of Ellis’ tapes of therapy sessions with clients, and read a number of his article reprints, I was hooked. It appealed to my ‘logical’ understanding and ‘knowledge’ of psychology. I loved the straight forward, hard hitting, and forceful use of reason to ‘attack’ the ‘illogic’ and seemingly self-defeating thinking of the clients he was interviewing. I liked the fact that his articles, like his therapy dialogue, were clear and specific. His writings are well referenced. They seem particularly well informed (scholarly) and lacking in the fuzzy terminology many psychologists and other professionals seem predisposed to use. Ellis’ approach appears to weave the ideas and empirical findings of a broad range of individuals into a comprehensive, ‘common sense’ kind of approach.

Recently, I noted that Ellis and Abrams had commented that some problem-solving people, not trained in REBT, but faced with a terminal condition, find rational ways of coping that, like REBT, are “common sense” solutions to life’s problems. (1) This supports my own notion of REBT’s ‘common sense’ appeal and practicality, its non-mystical, non-magical, workable, approach to life’s often difficult challenges.

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Life Is Hassle with a Capital H

Part of a background of childhood illness (allergies and asthma) probably led me to push or pursue practical solutions to problems harder than average. To the best of my ability, I developed, and continue to develop, critical thinking abilities. I ‘understand’ Al’s comment that “Life is a hassle with a capital H.” I have been particularly interested in learning about medical illness(es), including ‘mental’ illnesses, out of personal concern, and a genuine desire to help myself and others. Being naturally curious, I find health issues quite interesting. At the same time, I gain pleasure out of helping others. I assign an important meaning to the term ‘fallible human being.’ No exalted reason here, just plain, simple enlightened self-interest (another Ellis term). No thought about ‘getting into heaven’ by helping others – just a sincere desire to help because I enjoy practical problem solving. I also hold some belief in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s statement that “It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life, that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.” Certainly, there are tons of evidence (metaphorically speaking), for human ‘fallibility’ and need for psycho-logical (Korzybski’s term) care and treatment. Unfortunately, the self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help prevents many from using this medium. (2) Becoming aware of the limitations and negative aspects of psychiatric labeling might help us improve attempts to provide help.

Ellis Incorporates General Semantics Concepts

Ellis’s continued references to Korzybski’s important work (3), beginning with his earliest writings (4, 5) and referenced in many later ones (e.g., 6, 7, 8) reflect a strong commitment to semantic accuracy. Having had classes with O.R. Bontrager1958, a student and associate of Korzybski, and believing Korzybski’s work as having profound significance for human well being, I was delighted to find that Ellis considered this work important. Language, how we use it, and its effect on our nervous system, both lower and higher brain centers, seems of primary importance in scientific advancement. So noting Al’s attention to general semantics was, in effect, a confirmation of my belief in its value. I felt confident that his awareness and attention to these ideas allowed a more accurate and concise approach.

An Attitude of Science

I am confident that Al’s emphasis on science, like Korzybski’s, as a process to pursue structures that most accurately reflect ‘reality,’ proves to be the most efficient method for progress in human affairs. The ‘attitude of science’ involves making hypotheses in clinical situations that ‘test’ a hypothesis and observe
whether it seems confirmed or disconfirmed by the outcome(s). It seems a method of approximation, one which can be continually revised as indicated, as new data becomes available.

Al has stated that he “…has a gene for efficiency” and an ‘unbiased’ observer, with specific criteria of observation, would presumably be able to confirm that. His prodigious accomplishments, in spite of a history of illness(es) beginning in childhood, great professional and societal resistances to his ideas, would seem to bear out this ‘efficiency.’

**Dealing with Illness Adversity**

Having a chronic illness since age two, I have been quite interested and curious about how Ellis dealt with his difficulty of childhood illness and later development of insulin dependent diabetes, for over 50 years. I am sure his strong motivation to develop a dependable theory and philosophy of life, based on the soundest ideas imaginable, was/is influenced by illness adversity. Presently, he is dealing with the greatest challenge(s) of his life and doing it stubbornly and courageously. This sets an example for anyone ultimately faced with issues of illness and ageing, who wants to handle adversities as rationally as possible.

**Flexible Standards Regarding Individual and Collective Actions**

An important part of REBT’s value lies in its offering a flexible, workable standard of evaluation to ‘understand’ “rational” or “helpful” emotions and behaviors, perhaps most importantly, to the problems of inherent aggressive tendencies of humans. (9) Our present world situation appears to be acutely increasing in violent rhetoric and action. Korzybski noted that, while the United States proclaimed “…the doctrine that man is ‘free and independent’…we are, in fact, not free, but are inherently interdependent (p. 270). We hear much rhetoric today about “freedom” etc., often by individuals who appear quite unaware of the assumptions and false-to-fact ‘reality’ underlying their thinking. Ellis, like Korzybski, believes we’d better take into account the effect of our individual, and collective, actions. In recognizing that human thinking often has both ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ aspects at the same time, and avoiding either/or, black/white, good/bad dichotomies of thinking, REBT ‘recognizes’ that terrorists, like Americans and others who oppose them, unsanely believe similar notions. When terrorists believe that Americans must be punished to prove that they (the terrorists) are worthwhile, that America must not oppose them, and that all Americans are bad and must be killed, etc. they act unsanely. Conversely, when Americans and others who oppose the terrorists believe similar ideas, it leads to an endless upward cycle of violence leading, possibly, to a world war and perhaps the end of our planet. By strongly
working for, and adopting a less blaming or non blaming attitude toward oneself and others, we increase our chances of getting along with others, at the same time, becoming less prone to anger and other emotional upset. (10)

While there are many other reasons why I use REBT in my practice and daily life, these seem to be ones with overriding importance, on September 1st, 2006.

Notes