Exercise 4 - APPENDIX 1

WHAT ARE PRIMAL REACTIONS?

Our forefathers had 3 survival strategies for when they found themselves face-to-face with a lion: fight, flight or hide/freeze.

These reactions are still useful today in situations of acute danger. For instance, think about having to brake when someone suddenly walks onto the road or running away from a fire.

You can't choose a primal reaction, it's innate. The reaction is ingrained in your reptilian brain. It's important to determine what your particular primal reaction is. Then you can recognise it as an explanation for how you react.

Stress hormones are released and the body switches to high alert:

- the heart beats faster;
- the blood pressure increases;
- the muscles tense;
- the senses are on alert;
- sensations of pain lessen.

Automatic reactions

In daily life, primal reactions crop up uninvited.

The reaction you have can vary according to a situation and from person to person.

Example 1: You witness a serious traffic accident and you:

A. Fight: spring to action immediately and see if there are any victims.

B. Flight: turn around and walk away.

C. Hide/freeze: stand there watching without knowing what to do.

People who portray the flight or freeze reaction often ask themselves why they did not spring to action. They feel guilty. However, these are automatic reactions that occur beyond your thought processes; in the initial moments you do not have any control over your reaction.

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Example 2: Your client makes an extremely unpleasant remark:

A. Fight: you defend yourself or shout.

B. Flight: you walk away or retreat and don't respond.

C. Hide/freeze: you hang on tightly to your opinion or go silent and become incapable of uttering a word.

An unpleasant reaction gives you a feeling of anger, fear or powerlessness, for example, reinforcing the fight, flight or freeze reaction.

Other people's inappropriate conduct often provokes these primal reactions. Therefore, it is important to know what your personal primal reaction is. You cannot choose it; it's your basic reaction. By recognising this, you can work with it.