Awareness and diminished awareness

The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself.

(H. Miller, 1957)

Just as we are always in contact so we are always aware, and just as the quality of our contact will slide along a continuum, so will the degree and quality of our awareness. We have seen some of the ways in which we diminish our awareness through moderating contact with our environment (see Part 1) and how contact with the novel can stimulate us.

To illustrate a healthy flow of awareness and diminished awareness let me return to the story of my granddaughter at the zoo discussed in the last point. When she was absorbed in her experience watching the meerkats they were the figural element in her awareness; my wife and I were a dimmer awareness in her background. When she eventually tired of watching the meerkats she turned towards us to move on and we became the sharp figure of her awareness with the meerkats now in her ground. Later she returned home and shared the experience with her mother, whilst doing so she was aware of the memory of what she saw and also aware of her contact with her mother. Hence, she had full awareness of both her memory of the past event and of being in full contact with her mother in the present. In figure and ground terms she would have rapidly and seamlessly shuttled between these two types of awareness as she shared her experience of the meerkats.

When our awareness is increased new gestalts form and in this process an integration of what was previously experienced as separate elements of the field takes place. An increased awareness can result in a complete reorganization of the person’s perceptual field, their old tried and trusted ways of viewing their situation are thrown into question. The process can be similar to that of a
scientific discovery that blows asunder previously held beliefs, and the resistance to such an emerging awareness can be just as fierce. Excitement can turn into its close bedfellow anxiety if the client is insufficiently supported during such shifts. Increasing the client’s awareness can bring about spontaneous change and if the field is unsupportive of this change clients may choose to diminish their awareness.

Such a movement needs to be considered in the context of the client’s situation with respect for their ability to self-regulate. I recall a useful diminishing of my emotional awareness in the days that followed my father’s death. I was able to engage in the ‘business end of things’, helping to arrange the funeral, arranging time away from work and cover for clients. However, it would have been a problem had I maintained my level of diminished awareness beyond this acute period of grief.

I would like to invite you to engage in two exercises, the first focusing on the value of diminishing awareness through modifications to contact, the second designed to increase awareness.

Experiential exercise 1
Complete the following sentences with examples from your experience (you may wish to refer back to Points 15 to 19):
A field-congruent way of me diminishing my awareness through desensitization is . . .
Then repeat through all other modifications to contact – deflection, introjection, retrojection, projection, confluence and egotism.

Experiential exercise 2
Take a piece of fruit and find a quiet place. I’d like you to spend ten minutes exploring this piece of fruit without eating it. Use your senses to fully explore it. Notice when your awareness drifts away or is interrupted (for example, with thoughts of ‘oh, this is silly!’ or what you will do next), pay attention to any fluctuations in your awareness.

The second exercise conflicts with our cultural norms and so may seem quite ‘foreign’. In therapy sessions we could work to heighten a client’s awareness through using an adapted version of this exercise in relation to awareness ‘blind spots’, for example in relation to how the client holds his/her body.

Patterns of contact
As we have seen, it is as possible any matter meeting with the client they can achieve this their way of being in (1962) referred to as carry such beliefs are of our situation.

Regarding sedative making. In the maki sufficient time to set Let us consider this gradually clearing figuring clear from the everything outside t undisturbed the sediment the sediment will settle with my analogy, the clarity (figure) will n new figure and group

In essence gestalt into how the client is in which the client c and what creative ad to gestalt therapy as

The patterns th can be seen as clues: ships outside the th tacting across a ran, discussed in Part 1. V we recognize that the I reach out to make