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## *Learning in Transition*

As my wife shifts from patient to survivor (as all indicators portend), I find myself in transition from caretaker/advocate to grateful spouse. As I adjust to the challenges of private practice I'm redefining my community and my professional identity is in transition, being kneaded and tested. And then there's the transition to licensure. Interestingly, this transition highlights the role which never changes in my life: Student. And it was while studying for my first licensing exam that a funny thing happened... I learned something that can make me a better therapist.

Whenever I'd miss a practice question I'd scrutinize the answer rationale. Sometimes it was an oversight and sometimes it was a bad guess, but sometimes I was answering an entirely different question than the one asked. How did that happen?

After enough of these I realized that some questions just irritated me. In my search for a way to conquer the exam I developed a sense for how the exam questions *ought to be*. I was so smug about it that when a question didn't seem fair or reasonable to me (i.e. didn't match my expectation) I'd get angry at the question! Next I'd start telling myself a story about how the question *should have been* written and now I'm fighting the question rather than reading it. Then I'd select my answer based on my story about the question

rather than the actual question itself. Ultimately I had to face the fact I was getting triggered by some of the exam questions.

"Seriously?!?!!" I told my mirror, "You're triggered by the MFT exam? Isn't that unethical? Or illegal?" And the mirror said, "Ethical or legal, cite the difference!" I needed exam therapy...STAT!

I began to see how, when triggered, I tend to hold on to my story so tightly it clouds my vision. I knew I needed to let that go for the exam, but where else is this happening in my life?

Just as fighting questions keeps me from seeing, fighting reality keeps me from being. When I'm overly attached to outcomes, when I need my world to be a certain way... then I get very busy rejecting everything outside my rigid expectation. I get so busy rejecting that I miss the bounty available in each moment. Can I let my story go and relax into the present?

Baggage weighs us down and exhausts our playful spirit, the child who sees with open eyes. The child who remains unfettered by preconceptions, dictums and agendas. Releasing is such a large part of what I recommend to clients. "Whenever you release baggage you can fit through more doors." It wouldn't do me any harm either.

So the more I let go, the more I have? No, but perhaps the more I let go the more I am able to be. I'm free

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***"Who knew  
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to acquire new things when my arms aren't full of old baggage.

We are always in transition. If nothing else we are always passing from moment to moment. Sometimes I think transitions are about picking a new destination and getting where you're going. But in order to get anywhere I must first let go of where I am. "Going" is an option, but "letting go" is mandatory. This means there may be a time when I've released where I was and haven't gotten where I'm going yet... that can be a very uncomfortable place. On the other hand, if I only set goals within my immediate grasp I may never get out of my neighborhood.

Transitions are a big deal to me because clients rarely come in seeking to stay where they are. Transition is what therapy is all about... and I am all about therapy.

When I consider my toolkit for dealing with transitions it occurs to me that maybe it isn't what I have but rather what I'm willing to release that's the greatest determinant of transitional success. Perhaps I should leave it at that, but I just have to say: Sometimes the biggest lessons come from the most surprising places. Who knew studying for licensing exams could be so educational?

