

# Neuro-Linguistic Programming And The New Age Movement From A Judeo-Christian Perspective

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## **Foreword**

In this brief treatise, we have presented a vital distinction between NLP (Neuro-linguistic programming) and the New Age Movement from a Judeo-Christian perspective (as represented in the Bible). We do so as believers with psychological and theological backgrounds and who also utilize modern tools like those found in the domain of Neuro-linguistics.

We have utilized the NLP model for several years because NLP operates within the larger domain of cognitive psychology and information processing. If you would like to see specific integrations with that model and the Judeo-Christian perspective, we have following available:

Metamorphosis: *Resourcefulness* (1991-1992)

Metamorphosis: *Trauma Recovery* (1993)

Metamorphosis: *Linguistic-Semantic Empowerment* (1994)

Metamorphosis: *Managing Consciousness* (1995)

Metamorphosis: *Adventures in Time* (1996)

Patterns For Renewing the Mind: *Christian Communicating and Counseling Using NLP* (1996) by Dr. Bob Bodenhamer & Dr. Michael Hall.

E.T. publications publishes things that contributes to empowering (strengthening) people so that they can become all that God has designed them to become. We take as our theme a central Judeo-Christian truth, namely, "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love, and sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7).

**NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) And The New Age Movement From A Judeo-Christian Perspective**

Since I conduct NLP trainings in communication and modeling, I often hear questions on this order: "What in the world is NLP?" Or, "What does neuro-linguistic programming stand for?" From church people, however, the first question asked focuses on a different direction. "Isn't NLP New Age stuff?" "Isn't it about weird stuff like channeling?"

Before either Dr. Lloyd or I moved into the field of psychology, we each received ministerial training and spent several years in the pastorate. After we became increasingly influenced by cognitive psychology, information processing theory, cybernetics, studies in perception, etc., we became acquainted with NLP.

After I (MH) discovered that this field developed from the combination of a linguistic and computer programmer and that it addressed many of the cognitive questions I had about how the human brain processed information, stored its "programs" (beliefs, values, ideas, etc.), I went for practitioner, master practitioner and trainers' training in NLP.

When I began studying NLP, the problem of people confusing it with "the New Age" did not exist. That linkage had not been made at that time. After all, at that time the field of NLP had just become a new discipline. Further, those from the New Age movement, who later used NLP to promote their religion, had not yet gotten involved with it. In recent years this has changed, and that change has created this question.

To address these concerns and this highly erroneous connection between the two, as well as to encourage believers to study, use, and integrate the NLP communication model, the following has been written along with the consultation and contribution of Dr. Carl Lloyd.

## **GETTING CLEAR ABOUT OUR DISCUSSION**

NLP refers to the psychological model of personality and communication, more fully known as "Neuro-Linguistic Programming" (NLP, 1975). A basic presentation of NLP follows to provide the reader with an understanding of this model, its origin, presuppositions and nature as a communicational model.

The term "*New Age*" and "*New Age Movement*" refers to the cultural phenomenon which arose during the 1970's in the United States. It attempts to offer a syncretization of Buddha, Krishna, Hinduism, pantheism, and Christ. It offers something predominantly religious.

The New Age movement has appealed primarily to two groups of people: those basically unfamiliar with the Judeo-Christian perspective, worldview, and ethics, and toward those traumatized or disenfranchised by various churches or persons representing Christianity. In both of these groups, people who move into the various brands of the New Age Movement tend to look for something (sometimes anything) to fill their perceived and felt void. The very presence of this void should get those of us who take a Judeo-Christian perspective asking questions about how to most effectively address the needs presented by this emptiness.

These two disciplines represent two entirely different phenomenon, as we will quickly make evident. In spite of this, many continue to associate NLP with the New Age movement. Our purpose here lies in identifying how these two cultural forces and movements to become linked, to what extent they have been linked, and how they represent completely separate and distinct disciplines. We also want to address the worries and concerns of those who might have apprehensions that something inherently "bad" or "evil" exists about NLP, or that it functions to compromise the Judeo-Christian perspective.

## **THE STORY**

### **Neuro-Linguistic Programming**

The founding of NLP probably dates back to 1972 (*The Wild Days: NLP 1972-1981*, Terrence L. McClendon). Yet the co-founders did not bring their first work to publication until 1975, *The Structure of Magic: A Book About Language and Therapy, Volume I*. This work arose as the creation of a linguist, Dr. John Grinder, and a computer scientist and Gestalt psychology student, Richard Bandler. Together they produced a linguistic model that identified the language patterns as used by such gifted clinicians in psychotherapy as Fritz Perls of Gestalt therapy, Virginia Satir of family-systems therapy, and Milton Erickson, M.D. Their linguistic model identified the language patterns and how they used language behaviorally to generate amazing results.

Bandler and Grinder, combining the latest state-of-the-art models and technologies from Transformational Grammar, Information Processing theories, Computer programming, and Family Systems created a twelve-distinction model about language. It also identified methods for how a person could learn to listen for certain linguistic distinctions in everyday language. From there they offered an explicit set of questions that one could learn in order to respond (or challenge), in useful and

productive ways, to those ill-formedness patterns. To do so then "enriches the client's model of the world."

If you take to reading *The Structure of Magic*, you will find it both a simple and complex book (and that it has nothing to do with "magic"). The theoretical part of the book arises from the understandings Dr. Noam Chomsky developed in the field known as Transformational Grammar (1960s). Transformational Grammar refers to the technical process for exploring how meaning (semantics) becomes conveyed by language forms (linguistics) from the deep surface structure of meaning to the surface sentence structures that people use in thinking, talking, and communicating. I used to read Transformational Grammar texts in the late 70's to deal with insomnia!

Yet Bandler/Grinder's brilliant use of this formal and academic field manifested itself in their translate this complexity into twelve simple language distinctions. They wrote with clarity about the nature of these distinctions and then suggested some simple "responses" or "challenges" to them that would "recover the fuller linguistic map" that they implied.

In the utilization part of *Structure of Magic*, the authors demonstrated how a person could just use this meta-model with a client to effect significant transformation in thinking and feeling. Many have commented to me that the dialogues within the book make the theory and model seem very simple. "Yes, and that represents the beauty of this model. Yet behind this simplicity lies a very solid communication theory."

In 1981, Robert Dilts provided the definition of NLP which continues to serve that function.

"Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a model of communication that focuses on identifying and using patterns in the thought processes that influence people's verbal and non-verbal behavior as a means of improving the quality and effectiveness of their communication." (*Applications of NLP*, p. 1).

## **BACKING UP TO THE BEGINNING**

How did Bandler and Grinder get together to produce this marvel? At the time, John Grinder had become a significant contributor to the field of Transformational Grammar itself, and a University professor. Though twenty years older, he noticed the special genius of his student, Richard Bandler, in handling language and in

quickly adopting (or modeling) language patterns. By mere coincidence, Bandler happened to have opportunity to demonstrate his modeling skills of the language patterns of Gestalt therapy (Fritz Perls) and Family Systems therapy (Virginia Satir). This amazed both Bandler and Grinder. Thereafter, they set about to figure out how Richard, only 21 years of age at the time, could duplicate the skills of the masters so quickly and proficiently.

One situation that brought this awareness about occurred when Richard had been house-sitting a certain professor's cabin. While there, he picked up a book from the library on *Gestalt Therapy Verbatim* by Fritz Perls. When Richard read about people imagining their parents setting in a "hot chair" and talking to them about their emotional hurts and disappointments, Richard thought the description served as a joke.

Later, he commented to the professor that he "could do that!" In response to the brash Bandler, the professor took him up on it. The next day he had Bandler show up at one of his graduate level psychology classes to demonstrate Gestalt therapy. Bandler did. And the professor became impressed.

As it turned out, Bandler, who was studying mathematics and computer sciences, had a genius for hearing "patterns" (linguistic, non-linguistic, musical, mathematical). In information processing talk, we say that he could transcend the content of the information and process the meta-level patterns.

He later met Virginia Satir while running the sound equipment for a weekend seminar. As he half listened to her presentation while recording it, and listening to Rock 'n Roll with his other ear, he detected that she used "seven patterns." Later, he mentioned this to her. She immediately inquired about those seven patterns. When Bandler enumerated them explicitly, it left her absolutely amazed. Similarly, he later demonstrated his skill in replicating her patterns with proficiency.

This began the Bandler and Grinder search for the "magic" behind such unexpected and fabulous experiences. The result? Their technical book about language. *The Structure of Magic* dealt with how words work in human consciousness, how meaning become transformed from one level to another in linguistics, how people "process" information in their heads using their sensory systems, how pattern and syntax govern the structure of language, etc.

The piece about sensory systems, in fact, offered an incredibly profound and obviously simple distinction. No one had made this "discovery" in previous

formatting of language use. *Sensory systems* refers to the fact that when we "think," we think using the same sensory modalities in our heads that we use to input information in the first place. This means that as we use the visual (sights), auditory (sounds), kinesthetic (sensations), olfactory (smells), and gustatory (taste) modalities to become "aware" of things, so we represent thoughts or ideas.

For instance, when you think about a strawberry, notice how you do that "thinking." How do you process the information of that word? Do you not "see" a strawberry on the screen of your mind that you pull up from some memory bank? Do you not "smell" and "taste" that strawberry? Perhaps you "listen to the sounds" of pulling it off a bush or biting into it. Perhaps you "feel" the texture of the strawberry in your hand, or on your tongue.

Using these sensory "modes of awareness" gave Bandler and Grinder a neurological "language" of more simple components (sights, sounds, sensations, smells, tastes and words) than the abstract words "thinking" or "thoughts." And since this corresponded so well to the neurological fact that human brains actually have a visual cortex, an auditory cortex, a motor cortex, an associative cortex, this became the "neurological" part of NLP.

Some years later, Bandler realized that behind, and within, these modalities we find sub-qualities. You can represent a picture in black-and-white or in color; close or far, fuzzy or clear, big or small, etc. You can represent sounds as loud or quiet, close or far, from one location or panoramic, etc. These became known as "submodalities."

In the NLP model, people not only process information according to their senses, but they "make sense" of things by another uniquely human sense modality, i.e. via words and languages. By this sixth sense of language, we "make sense" so that by saying the word "strawberry" it can access and symbolize all those sights, sounds, sensations, smells, and tastes. This became the linguistic part of NLP.

From there, the original founders and thinkers in NLP began modeling other famous people in therapy, business, education, sports, etc. Using the NLP language for subjectivity experience, they began noticing the distinctions in language and physiology that enabled highly skilled people to do what they could do. Thus, they began identifying the "strategies" these geniuses used to produce excellence in their respected fields. NLP calls this "modeling," and out of such modeling, many have published scores of books. They have identified the "strategy" for excellence in a wide range of areas.

## **THE NLP PRESUPPOSITIONS**

From the communication theory of Transformational Grammar and the information processing models of the computer sciences, *Neuro-Linguistic Programming* arose as a way total about and describe human experiences. It offers a model about how brains work (neuro); about how language interacts with the brain (linguistic) and about how to use what we know about these components to systematically get the results we want for ourselves and others (programming). Rather than re-inventing the wheel, the NLP co-founders modeled what they found already working efficiently in the fields of Gestalt, family systems, hypnosis, brief psychotherapy, etc.

Then they created their paradigm of human subjectivity (regarding how human thinking, emoting, behaving, etc. works) as a "model" rather than a theory. This means that NLP focused on offering step-by-step modeling procedures for what actually works in practice to bring about change, skill or excellence. They offered no theories conceptual models to explain why things work as they do. Bandler and Grinder called such explanations "psychotheology," and would have nothing to do with it.

Yet they were not so foolish as to suppose that they could somehow operate in a totally neutral or value-free way. They knew better than that. So they began to specify several of the key working presuppositions which their model "assumed without proof." Today, these presuppositions identify some of the general content of the NLP paradigm for human "personality" and functioning. And out of them have arisen the developed techniques which enable people to develop more choice and flexibility in their responses. What presuppositions does NLP start with?

## **PEOPLE WORK PERFECTLY WELL!**

People are not broken, but simply are operating out of impoverished maps. People work perfectly well! Every experience or behavior that someone can produce actually represents an achievement. Richard Bandler says that whatever a person produces, he or she produces regularly, methodically, and consistently. "The one who procrastinates does it regularly and systematically. They never forget to do it." And whatever manifests itself so systematically must have an internal structure to it.

Question: "Does NLP therefore promote a concept that human beings are 'inherently good' or 'inherently bad'?" Answer: Neither. NLP takes a non-theoretical position on all such theories and philosophies. In contrast, the New Age movement

postulates that people "are" gods or can become gods. NLP, like all descriptive sciences, takes a neutral stance on this moral question. It simply deals with the person without a theory as to inherent goodness or badness.

Framing thinking, emoting, and behaving as "accomplishments" enables an NLP practitioner to view the "problems" of individuals in a positive light. This then evokes the questions, "Useful for what?" "Useful under what circumstances?"

Take procrastination --the skill of putting things off. NLP reframes this as an accomplishment that you can powerfully use to "put off" doing things that should be put off. Like what? you ask. Like putting off going into a rage, acting stupid, acting impatiently, things like that. This shift enables one to see the procrastination process as a highly value achievement if contextualized better.

## **BEHAVIOR AS PURPOSEFUL AND POSITIVE**

All behavior is geared toward adaptation and is therefore purposeful. Every behavior/experience therefore has a positive intent. Individuals become internally organized (or structured) to accomplish some positive value. This, in turn, generates the questions, "What positive intention does this behavior hold or seek?" "Positive under what conditions?" "Positive how?"

This corresponds, in the Judeo-Christian perspective, to the model that Jesus used about "evil." The two boys in the story of the Loving Father (Luke 15) each produced behavior which we would characterize as hurtful, wasteful, ugly, and "sinful" (it "missed the mark"). One boy did so outwardly. He went to the far country and blew his fortune. The other did so by staying at home. There he developed a bitter and arrogant spirit. Yet both did the best they could with what they had. When the younger one "came to his senses" ("came to his right mind"), he accessed reality and adjusted himself to it. In spite of how we might evaluate their particular behaviors, they adopted them because they thought of them as adaptive to their situation. At the moment of action, they had positive intents in spite of how things turned out.

Scripture always portrays God as being in the business of directing people toward the contextually useful. When Cain got caught up in a bitter win/lose spirit, God's word came to him. "Do well and you will be accepted" (Gen. 4:6). This was also the power within Jesus' encounter with people. He masterfully framed questions and problems in such a way that redirected people away from wallowing in self-pity to rising and taking effective action (John 5:1-19).



Often a "problem" functions as a problem one of context. Sometimes the behaviors and responses that once had a positive value cease to be useful under other circumstances. Sometimes they simply outlive their usefulness. At other times, we can accomplish the objectives in more elegant and effective ways. "Keeping quiet and not speaking up" may once accomplished something useful in a home with an angry, abusive parent. Yet the lack of basic assertiveness does not serve adults well in the world.

Searching for the positive intent behind every behavior reframes that behavior and frees one to search for more productive methods. Search for the positive intent becomes a graceful intervention assisting clients to reorganize themselves. This fulfills the verse about "thinking" about things that are true, honorable, just, lovely, gracious, etc. (Phil. 4:8-9).

## **DISTINGUISHING CONTENT & PROCESS**

Subjective behaviors and/or experiences are composed of both content and process. These reflect different logical levels of information. Content refers to "what" a person understands, perceives --the meanings attributed. Process refers to the psychological structure of that content --how one puts it together or organizes it. Of the two, process provides a means for transforming things in a more pervasive and less conscious way.

To relate this to the Bible, think about the difference in content between the propositional statement, "Believe in God," and the story of how Abraham and/or David lived their lives trusting in him. Note that here the content refers to the same thing. Here form (in terms of the structure of the literature) radically differs. Or take the same message but coded in the form of poetry as in Job. In the Psalms, theology takes on an entirely new and different form (wineskin) from that of Deuteronomy. But which has more impact on you? Perhaps structure utilizes many diverse forms (genre) of literature precisely because of this transformational principle.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF EXPERIENCE**

Every subjective behavior and experience has a structure which you can identify, model, modify, alter, and improve. We refer to the structure of subjective experience in NLP as a "strategy." The strategy language, that enables a practitioner to specify the component pieces of a experience, used to describe and code this involve a person's sense-modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic,

olfactory, gustatory), language (auditory digital), plus the kind of responses between these pieces (congruent/ incongruent/ meta/polarity, etc.).

What strategy did Jesus use and opt for in dealing with his disciples? Did he utilize the same or a different strategy with the Pharisees? What strategy did he have for staying resourceful when facing the cross? Luke hints at it, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Paul utilized the strategy/ modelling process, "What you have learned and received and heard and see in me, do" (Phil. 4:9). Paul here presupposes that if they identify and model his behavior and experiential patterns, they can learn his strategy for following Christ.

## **IDENTIFY AND DEVELOPING RESOURCES**

People have all the component pieces (or resources) in order to live productively. Since people do not manifest inherent brokenness, how would you describe what goes wrong with people? What goes wrong in human nature? The difficulty lies in the ability (or lack of it) that people have in building and accessing their resources to effectively deal with things. What people may lack rests in the very methods for finding, eliciting, accessing and stabilizing their resources.

This wonderfully fits the Judeo-Christian perspective, does it not? Paul wrote, "I have learned to find resources in myself whatever my circumstances" (Phil. 4:11 NEB). (See our booklet, *Christian Resourcefulness* on the book of *Philippians*). The very process of developing and growing toward spiritual maturity (Hebrew 5:11-14) presupposes that people have the inherent component parts, resources, and abilities to so develop. That is, if God has provided "all things that pertain to life and godliness." Then we can "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue..." (II Peter 1:1-11).

## **DISTINGUISHING MAP AND TERRITORY**

The perceptual map of a person's reality does not accord with the territory of that reality. This classic statement originated from Alfred Korzybski in his work, *Science & Sanity* (1933). That work established the phenomenological foundational structure of NLP. The driving and determining factor about any given person springs from the mental maps and perceptual understandings from which they come. All of their thinking, perceiving, reasoning, emoting, behaving, responding, etc. arises from their "model of the world."

Accordingly, what all successful therapies ultimately do simply involves effecting change in that "model of world." This, in fact, describes precisely the transformation that Christianity offers. "Be transformed by the renewing of the mind" (Romans 12:2). Apparently, the ability to shift perspective, to open up one's mind to new and different information and to think in a new way (a paradigm shift) portrays the God-given way that transformation and renewal occurs (Eph. 4:20-24).

Typically clients experience "pain" and stuckness because their model of the world creates limitations and pain for them. Rather than describing them as broken, the NLP model says they just have an impoverished map that they need to enrich and expand. The "meta-model" of language in NLP provides the linguistic tool that enables a therapist to work with the client's linguistics (which reflect their model of the world) and challenge it appropriately so as to expand and enrich it. By doing so, the client creates more empowering meanings (semantics).

## **RECOGNIZING STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

A person's state of consciousness arises systemically from an interaction of internal representations and physiology. The state experienced results from all the information stimulating the brain and nervous system. This information includes sensory based stimuli which leaves representations in visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory terms. It results from a multitude of other stimuli received from physiology--the way one holds his or her body, moves, breathes, etc. It results from the evaluative or semantic stimuli of one's more abstract conceptualizations.

This simply indicates part of the way God, so marvelously and wonderfully, made us (Psalm 139:13-14). Moses' entire state or mood changed (altered!) when he encountered God in the bush that burned without being consumed. On that "holy ground" he removed his sandals. Suddenly, his internal representations shifted. New thoughts, awarenesses, and understandings arose. In this encounter, Moses' physiology changed, his actions, his way of listening, etc.

To shift or change state and move from an unresourceful state to a more resourceful one involves changing and shifting one's internal representations (mental and linguistic maps) and/or physiology (neurological experience).

## **COMMUNICATION'S REDUNDANCY AND MEANING**

A person's communication manifests redundancy. Quoting Gregory Bateson, Bandler/Grinder recognized that the redundancy between the observable

macroscopic patterns of human behavior and patterns of the underlying neural activity governing this behavior. Viewing the human nervous system as a cybernetic system, they said that many behaviors function as transforms of internal neural processes and therefore carry information about those processes (*Roots of NLP*, p. 191). Lateral eye movement, breathing patterns, muscle tension patterns, etc. therefore carry information about how a person currently processes information.

The response you get from another person is the meaning of your communication to them, regardless of your intent. Moving to the social realm of interactions between persons, NLP asserts that "you never know what you communicate to another." This arises from the fact that we never know what that other person heard, sensed, or perceived. We do not know their phenomenological world that well. Yet the response we get from that person tells us something about the meanings from which they operate and their attribution of meaning to our verbal and non-verbal stimuli. In exploring their responses, one can begin to gain an understanding of what we must have communicated.

Communication involves a systemic process involving inputting, processing, and outputting by two or more individuals using different models of the world. Therefore if we want understanding and clarity, we must meta-model the other's words and analogue (non-verbal) communications. This necessitates sensory acuity ("uptime"), awareness (attentive listening) to language as a reflection of the other's reality, utilization of the responses received, feedback, pacing, etc.

Creating and utilizing social feedback loops to gauge the effectiveness of one's communication describes a well-known and widely recognized methodology. In doing this, others can serve as "mirrors" of our reality. "As in water face answers to face, so the mind of man reflects the man" (Proverbs 27:19). NLP trains people to embrace this feedback process rather than deny it, reject it, or interpret it as "failure" or "criticism."

By contrast, many other professional therapies or models actually train people to ignore client feedback. Rather than starting with the client's reality, such models condition the client to come to the therapist's reality, to learn his model, his language, etc. A client has to first be trained to think like the counselor before treatment can begin. Upon whom does this put the focus if not the therapist? Why the ignoring of feedback? NLP does not encourage such a practice.

## **THINKING SYSTEMICALLY**

In any inter-connected system, the element with the widest range of variability will always function as the dominating influence. This "Law of Requisite Variety," from the field of cybernetics, identifies the value and power of flexibility as a success mechanism. Accordingly, NLP facilitates a person becoming highly creative and innovative as it frees them to keep trying new things, shifting stimuli, exploring what works and what does not work.

What a contrast this offers to the ruts that we can get in when we let the habits of our "old nature" prevail! No wonder the early Christian writers talked so much about "putting off the old man" (what doesn't work at all) and putting on the new (Col. 3, Eph. 4).

Mind and body operate as part of the same holistic system which inescapably affect each other. Actually, the word "and" misstates the case. In reality, no "and" separates these as distinct parts. What we have in actuality involves a systemic process of mind-body. "The spirit apart from the body is dead" (James 2:26). As a consequence, we reflect much of our internal sensory processing by sensory-based words (predicates) and by certain behavioral cues (eye accessing cues, breathing patterns).

## **THE LEARNING OF SKILLS**

Skills arise in our mind-behavior as a function of the development and sequencing of representational systems. We can break down any skill or ability into these basic components of human experience and then installed in ourselves or others. In NLP this represents the domain of "strategies."

Humans can develop a conditioned learning with even a one-trial learning. Accordingly, we do not live in the mechanical stimulus-response (S-R) world of animals or machines. Rather, we exist as rampant learning machines! In NLP, we apply the term "anchoring" to label the process whereby a response becomes strongly linked to a stimulus.

There is no failure; there is only feedback. Whatever response you get from someone simply represents feedback from them. It speaks primarily about their "model of the world" and the phenomenological perspective that their meta-programs for attending data have created. It speaks about their perceptual grids for processing information since it arises from their internal world of meaning. When you get an undesirable response, you have not "failed," you have only received an undesired response. You have discovered what does not work.

In the Judeo-Christian perspective, the word "sin" literally means to "miss the mark," namely, the "glory of God." Many today cannot hear this word ("sin") without attaching to it all kinds of negative and aversive emotions. They cannot hear it simply as "a miss." They over-moralize it. Yet a sign of spiritual maturity involves learning from our misses, using our misses for information about what not to do anymore so that we can continue to develop (Heb. 5:14).

In NLP terminology, we could describe such as "having learned what doesn't work!" We could then experience it as an "insight." As a "change of mind" (literally, "repentance"). Without this positive attitude, people tend to strive to hide their "sins" (misses) which then condemns them to negate the learning and evade the growth. By so shaming themselves because they "missed," they get stuck at that very point. An NLP practitioner takes an entirely different approach to a difficulty or miss. Rather than shaming ourselves or someone else for a miss, we look upon it as an opportunity to learn what to not do. The client simply confront the problem, learns from it, and develops better ways of responding.

This indicates the importance of accessing flexibility as a resource. When you do not get the response you want, try something different. If we do not find that our actions attain the results we want, we no longer have to keep on trying to do the same thing (that does not work) more, harder, louder and with more pressure. We can try something else, anything else, and notice if doing that gets us any closer to our outcome. This demonstrates true flexibility. The theological correlation to this exists in the meaning of "repentance" which means changing, heading in a new direction, making specific improvements, etc. (See our booklet, *The Art of Repentance or Mind-Change.*)

## **THE HISTORY OF NLP'S "BAD PRESS"**

Sometime after NLP's introduction, criticism and controversy began to surround it. Most of this focused on the person of co-founder, Richard Bandler. You only have to meet Richard once to realize the reason for this! Richard's style of expressing himself come across as very aggressive, and sometimes obnoxious. As a product of the 60's who loved Rock'N Roll, drugs, and partying, for years Richard kept up that image and style. Even today, though Richard has settled down, has become drug-free and less radical, he can still come across as brash, outrageous, insulting, aggressive, unpredictable, and "scary."

In his personal demeanor, I personally believe that he modeled Fritz Perls of Gestalt therapy too well! One counseling textbook wrote this of Perls.

"Personally, Perls was both vital and perplexing. People typically either responded to him in awe or found him harshly confrontive and saw him as meeting his own needs through showmanship. He was viewed variously as insightful, witty, bright, provocative, manipulative, hostile, demanding, and inspirational." (*Theory & Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Gerald Corey, 1991, p. 231).

In the 1980s, Bandler and Grinder parted ways on less than cordial terms (e.g. bankruptcy, lawsuits, etc). The congruency and believability of NLP suffered. Apparently, the founders themselves could not stay in resourceful enough states to pace each other, bring out the best in each other, etc. Later, the police brought charges of murder for the death of a young woman against Bandler. And though the court completely acquitted him, the rumors continued. None of this helped NLP's reputation at all! In addition to the infighting that went on among the original founders, many less than reputable persons who received NLP training and began combining it with all sorts of left-wing and "weirdo" causes.

## **HOW NLP OPENED THE DOOR TO "NEW AGE" IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE**

Without question, today many "new agers" use and promote NLP. This becomes obvious when you read the advertisements and articles in the NLP publications. (We could also say the same thing of self-improvement seminars, educational conferences, health workshops, etc.! The New Age Movement has attempted to enter and synthesize with a great number from other movements.)

What has brought this about? As mentioned earlier, NLP proffers no theories, let alone any metaphysical beliefs or systems. How then has it come about that many today associate the two?

In addition to the very fallible qualities of the founders (i.e. Bandler's reputation for "partying"), NLP training seminars and trainers have made it their policy to require no prerequisites for those wanting to study to become practitioners. I believe that this policy itself has opened the door to all those "whackos" from the left and "new agers." For them, this provided a quick and easy way to become "certified" in a form of therapy which they could then use to promote their metaphysics.

And they did. As centers for NLP training began springing up throughout the United States and internationally, the policy of no prerequisites like a college education (B.S., B.A) or graduate studies (M.A., M.S.) continued. Accordingly, today in the various journals and publications within the NLP community, you can find all kinds of

individuals running trainings and integrating NLP with their "New Age" beliefs and practices.

Tad James, under whom I received some of my master practitioner training, runs such a center in Hawaii. There he integrates his NLP with Huna healing and meditation as he seeks to put followers in touch with the Higher Conscious Mind or Higher Self "responsible for the most part of intuitions, for our universal connectedness, expanding our consciousness..." (*Anchor Point*, March 1994, p. 44). An educated and intelligent man, Dr. James holds to many New Age metaphysical beliefs and mysticism and openly seeks to integrate it with such.

Additionally, Milton Erickson, M.D. stood as one of the first persons NLP modeled. They modeled Erickson for his amazing skill at hypnosis. They presented it strictly as a communication model, exploding the myths about it being mind-control, mysticism, etc. (*Trance-Formations: The Structure of Hypnosis*, 1981). Yet because of the fears, misbeliefs, and confusions about the underlying structure of hypnosis as a form of how language works in human consciousness, many in the New Age Movement who had already made use of hypnosis found this a way to legitimize their practices.

## **RADICAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN NLP AND THE "NEW AGE" MOVEMENT**

What does NLP have in common with the "New Age" Movement? Both hold a post-Newtonian and Einsteinian orientation in their approach to "reality." This means that both begin from the understanding that the material universe does not necessarily consist of all that we perceive to exist. We simply do not have access to many facets of reality. With our natural eyes, we cannot see many of the dimensions of the electromagnetic light spectrum; we cannot hear many of the dimensions of the sound spectrum. The universe, as it really it exists in itself, does not offer all of itself to us through our sensory experiences.

From that philosophical understanding, the two disciplines depart. Those within the "New Age" movement draw a very different conclusion than those who accept the scientific model of NLP. Those of the New Age Movement conclude that there no physical reality exists outside beyond the nervous system. They think that everything operates as a function of the human brain and of the human powers of imagination. Then they jump to the unfounded conclusion that the universe itself operates as a function of one's thinking(!). Accordingly, a person can imagine anything into being. From there, they then take the small step that accepts the



Buddhist thought that objective reality itself exists as an illusion (maya), or that we represent the ultimate reality (*When The New Age Gets Old*, Vishal Mangalwadi, InterVarsity Press, 1992, p. 8-10).

Of course, NLP draws no such conclusions! Rather, the founders drew the conclusion that we live in (two "realities"). We deal with and face objective reality which lies outside our skin and we deal with internal subjective reality inside our skin --our mental and neurological "representations" of the territory outside. These represent two radically different dimensions indicating different logical levels. We experience the first as a given, the other we create in our minds-emotions. The Proverbist wrote the same, "As a man thinks (evaluates, interprets, attributes meaning) in his heart (literally, soul), so he is." (Proverbs 23:7). His thoughts become his subjective reality.

Shirley MacClaine's writings best illustrate some of the fuzzy thinking, muddled cause-effect reasonings, and erroneous conclusions of New Agers. She declares there that she "is God" ("Out On A Limb"). New Agers, in fact, tend to confuse the Judeo-Christian concept that the Bible describes Christian believers as the "sons of God" by inheritance through Jesus and Jesus existing as "the son of God."

The new age movement differs also from NLP about the reality of truth. Regarding the New Age Movement, Vishal Mangalwadi wrote.

"An essential feature of the New Age is its conscious rejection of reason as the means of discovery of truth" (Ibid. p. 14).

Not so with NLP. NLP offers but one model within the category of *the Cognitive Psychologies* (Theories & Strategies in Counseling and Psychotherapy, Gilliland, James, Bowman, 1989, p. 249). They founders based the model, in fact, upon correct reasoning and, in fact, challenging ill-formed cause-effect relationships in language and logic. This shows up in the meta-model itself and in such distinctions as the "Cause-Effect" distinction that challenges ill-formed and non-logical cause-effect statements.

New Age ideology quotes the Hindu mystics that "I and the universe are one," and that therefore

"individuality is only a temporary phenomenon of the ocean. It is not real. Just as a wave merges back into the ocean, during the mystical experience the individual

consciousness also seems to merge into a larger, 'expanded' consciousness" (Ibid. p. 18).

Not so with NLP. NLP, like the Judeo-Christian perspective, holds (a high view of the individual person). Its goals and purpose being to make an individual more resourceful and more conscious of themselves and their world. It moves one toward more individuation and autonomy, not less. And since NLP began by modeling Gestalt and Family Systems, it has become associated with the humanistic psychologies that affirm the value and importance of persons.

New Age ideology thinks of each person as part of God, therefore as divine. Not so NLP. The NLP model carries no such presuppositions about theology. Rather, it recognizes that people manifest themselves in quite fallible ways as thinkers and suffer to the extent that their mental maps do not accord with external reality. If they feel limited, stuck, or experience pain, these feelings do not necessarily indicate an illusion. They indicate what the person experiences as subjectively real and may be a function of their impoverished way of thinking or of the reality outside their skin with which they must deal! They need to adjust their maps so that they more accurately fit the territory.

Regarding astrology, the Age of Aquarius, zodiac causation, spiritism, channelling, etc. NLP says nothing directly. Applying the NLP model to such things, the model itself would ask a lot of hard questions to deal with the vagueness and unrationality of such ideas. "How would the stars influence human personality and destiny?" "Do people therefore have no choice?" "If they exercise their choice and go against what the stars indicate, what does that say about the star's influence over human destiny?" "How do stars take away choice from people?" With regard to someone claiming such, NLP would engage in a reality testing response, "Specifically show me how you do this. Demonstrate it and I will model the steps you take to produce this behavior."

For channelling, clairvoyance, traveling in astral/spiritual bodies, mind-reading, telepathy, crystals vibrating at our God-frequency, again, NLP speculates nothing. After all, it presents itself not a theory, but only as a model. Using the meta-model of language to de-fluff such fluffy ideas and language, it would again ask the "how" question to discover what processes are suppose to be functioning.

NLP's meta-model, in fact, is so powerful for defluffing such non-sense, it continues to amaze me that those of the new age movement would want to have anything to do with it. So how is this scientific model that demands precision in communication

and behavioral specifics for criteria tolerated by many who believe in the New Age? One answer lies in the fact that many of them do not know the meta-model.

When I went for my master practitioner training, a good half of the participants there did not know anything about the meta-model. After day two, during which we experienced many drills on those distinctions, a large number of the participants made a beeline for the books table to buy materials on that linguistic model. Recently, at an NLP conference, I meet several individuals who had their master practitioner certification and who also had experienced almost no training in the meta-model of language.

Superficially, the "magic" that many new agers seek and long for may sound similar to the "magic" that NLP talks about. But the book, "The Structure of Magic," presents information about transformational grammar, syntax, etc. and how that "words" can have a "magical" effect upon people. Yet NLP uses this word ("magic") metaphorically, as a figure of speech, and not literally.

## **"NO! YOU CAN'T USE IT! IT'S MY WORD! I WAS PLAYING WITH IT FIRST!"**

In reading over the first rough draft of this presentation, Dr. Lloyd said that we would have to address the subject of words, linguistics, and terms. So here goes. In this area of linguistics, many people and some Christians in particular seem to lack a mature and scientific understanding of how language works, what "words" consist of, their nature, their use, etc.

To summarize a very broad, complex, and intricate subject, language essentially functions as symbols for and referents to a reality beyond themselves. They always point to something else. As symbolic reality, words "are" never real. You can't eat the words on a menu and receive the same satisfaction as eating the salad or hamburger to which they refer. (Words function at a different logical level) than the sensory-based reality to which they have reference. No identity (sameness in all respects) exists between words and the territory to which they refer.

Words, in fact, only become meaningful when they have a referent within the understanding grasp of the receiver. If someone speaks Greek to you, do the words "work" effectively to evoke within you the same referents as in the mind of the speaker? No. They cannot. This introduces the semantic (meaning) dimension. Meaning significance does not, never has, and never will occur in the word. Words function only as symbols and referents of meaning. The meaning only, and always,

occurs in the mind of the speaker or recipient. Words work only used as vehicles transporting those meanings. (Write the 1994 series, *Linguistic-Semantic Empowerment*.)

Yet some people, not knowing that words "are" not real (do not represent the same logical level as the territory) treat and behave toward words as if they contained the reality. In so doing, they not only engage in sloppy linguistic, but they condition their nervous systems and neurology so that they become word-phobic. This then leads to a semantic sickness called "semantic reactions" (Korzybski, *Science & Sanity*, 1933). They react to words with their nervous systems forgetting their symbolic nature.

Like Pavlov's dogs, they salivate when the bell of a certain word rings. Off they go reactively thinking and feeling. They do not seem able to step back and think about their thinking, to take into consideration that the other only offered them symbols and not reality. This explains why "verbal abuse" does not exist merely with the saying of unpleasant and obnoxious words (*Mastering So-called "Verbal Abuse"*, 1994 #5).

This becomes relevant with some words that people in the New Age Movement use which then become semantic triggering terms for some believers. All too often, this has become the case with the following: centering, empowerment, visualization, meditation, trance, states of consciousness, unconsciousness, hypnotism, etc.

Now most of these words also occur in scripture. Joshua meditated in the word day and night (Joshua 1:8), Peter was in a trance at the tenth hour (Acts 10:10 RSV), Paul prayed that God would empower the Colossians (Col. 1:10-11), the Proverbists talked about the issues of life coming out of their center of a man (Proverbs 4:20-24), etc.

The key here does not lie in the use of the words, but the meanings attributed to them by any given speaker or writer. They do not necessarily exist as New Age words; nor is baptism, holy spirit, Christ, etc. necessarily Christians words. These written marks function as words. And just become someone else utilizes a word or term and attribute different meanings to it doesn't mean that we can't use that term any longer.

Some people have word-phobia so bad they cannot even read literature that uses such words without the words radically rattling their nervous system. They could not read a treatise like this very far.

## **DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU ALREADY USE NLP?**

If NLP refers to how your linguistics and neurology function to produce your behaviors and responses, then the patterns and technologies that NLP (as a discipline) have created and identified, do not represent new techniques that no one has ever used before. They only seem new in the sense that this model provides a way of sorting out the pattern into component pieces that we now recognize and can use repeatedly in a more effective way.

For a full account of NLP patterns in the Bible, see our issue, "NLP and the Judeo-Christian Perspective." In that issue, we identified many passages in the Bible where a knowledge of the NLP communication model helps to understand the passage and replicate its patterns. It already existed. This model only provides some new and different ways of thinking about it.

Knowing, studying and utilizing NLP as a model enables any speaker to enhance his or her skills. The same holds true for any, and every, other model of human nature. Every theory enables its practitioners to develop and use techniques which enhance their functioning. Models serve this function.

If you know how to attribute a new meaning to something, you know how to reframe. Check out Matthew 5 for reframing at its best; there Jesus created an entirely new and powerful frame (of reference) for the Torah in his "you have heard, I say unto you..." statements. His "Blessings" ("Blessed are...") represent reframes (Matthew 5:1-12).

Since "brains go places" then swishing a brain to a new and enduring referent, as an NLP technique, offers a way to directionalize consciousness. Check out Jesus way of doing that with his parables. If I ask you, "How often must you forgive?" has not Jesus already "swished" your brain to a particular story about that (Matthew 18)? If I ask you, "Who's the greatest in the kingdom?" has not Jesus swished all of our minds about that one also (Matthew 20:20ff)?

## **CONCLUSION**

On the surface, a few features of the Neuro-Linguistic model seem similar to those of the New Age movement. Yet hardly any more than the Christian model of human nature and reality --Christianity also affirms that the materialistic world does not represent all of reality. A more thorough investigation reveals that there exists a world of difference between the two movements.

The New Age movement functions primarily as a religious and metaphysical domain; NLP presents itself as a scientific model about human subjectivity. It adopts as its viewpoint the process of information transformation (input, processing, output) which you can analyze scientifically and then replicate.

The New Age Movement adopts and uses lots of religious, theological, and philosophical beliefs which find their primary source in Hinduism and Buddhism. Many Westerners who end up buying into that system of belief do so more as a reaction to the loss of credibility and relevance which they attribute to the Judeo-Christian perspective.

If we begin by acknowledging that there has occurred an incredible loss of credibility among Christians, we can then ask some truly useful questions. "How can the Judeo-Christian perspective address this void?" "What factors create this credibility gap?" "What tools within NLP can assist us in perceiving and thinking about this need in new and different ways?"

The New Age movement begins with several assumptions that totally contradict the Judeo-Christian perspective and the NLP perspective. Which assumptions do I refer to? The assumptions that "all is God," that all perception of reality beyond one's skin stands as pure illusion, that reincarnation indicates the process whereby souls transmigrate from life to life to deal with their karma, etc. You will (not) find any of that in the NLP model or in the biblical model.

The assumption that "evil is an illusion." NLP's meta-model would respond by saying, "The word 'evil' refers to an adjective, not a thing or entity, therefore it implies a standard by which we judge something as good or evil." Scripture would concur. The Bible pictures the human project as facilitating the moral and spiritual development to "discern good and evil" (Heb. 5:14).

The NLP model strictly represents a scientific model about the process of how communication, language (linguistics), and meaning (semantics) work in terms of "programming," or ordering, people to behave the way they do. It posits nothing metaphysically as it does not even claim itself as a theory, but merely a model of what works in human experiences.

In other words, NLP functions almost exclusively as a tool, a technology. And as with any tool, it only operates as "good" or useful as the craftsman who wields it. A hammer functions quite differently in the hands of a carpenter and in the hands of

a maniac. One builds, the other destroys. As a tool, the problem does not with the NLP model, but with those who use it.

I consider it as unfortunate and deceptive that New Agers have received NLP training and currently use it as a context from which to preach their particular brand of religion. The positive intent (to use an NLP presupposition of NLP!) of this policy probably involved avoiding the over-rating of degrees and emphasize learning and education. But my personal observations of many of those with whom I took my training would indicate that they had not done the basic NLP readings before coming to the trainings.

As Christian believers, we strongly disagree with the focus, the teachings, and the presuppositions of the New Age Movement. We have not found the movement to intellectually, philosophically, or personally credible. On the other hand, we have found the NLP model to function as a powerful and useful tool for communication, relationship, influence, and therapy.

## **POSTSCRIPT**

If you would like to dialogue about this subject, please feel free to call or write. NLP stands as a new and developing field.

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