

THINKING ABOUT THE MIRACLE QUESTION

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The “miracle question” is not a simple question with a ready answer like: “What time is it?” “10:15.” When it is mistakenly seen as a simple question, then therapists seem to get the idea that clients should answer in a certain way (an ideal answer, perhaps) and when they do not – which is most of the time – then they, the therapists, say that the MQ did not work. This idea or expectation handicaps both therapist and client. Of course a client cannot give “the” answer, he or she can only give “an” answer. The MQ is not delivered with the intent of eliciting a specific answer; this sort of “question” is meant to be heard as but one element in a longer statement, the longer one being the move to which the speaker intends his clients to address their responses. That is, I see the MQ as a frame-setting device, a way to initiate a language game that determines and defines what it is that the client and therapist are to talk about next. What the MQ asks is for the client to talk about their wishes for their life-after-the-problem-is-gone. And usually clients will do this. They say things like: “I’ll feel like pounds have been lifted from my shoulders.” “I’ll jump out of bed.” “I’ll go to work much the same as usual except that I will want to go to work.” As is frequently the case, the client begins by talking about how they will “feel better” immediately.

Don’t I look into myself and say: “What is the right word for this feeling, this mood?” – And is it clear that my mood isn’t intensified, for instance, by this looking? (Wittgenstein, 1982, p. 78e).

Indeed, exploring the “better feelings” involved in this initial response, by looking at more details and the surrounding context seems to intensify the feelings. This brings something else to mind Wittgenstein says about feelings that seems to apply in this situation.

picture will look like. (Therapists sometimes behave as if they forgot that listening is a normal part of any conversation.)