

The Magic Shop Technique *

The Magic Shop is defined as one that has things that are not available at any other shop. When using the Magic Shop Technique, I set up such a shop on the stage, and have a trained auxiliary ego play the role of 'shopkeeper'. I do not use this technique unless I have such a person available. The protagonist is asked to enter the shop as a customer and seek to purchase what he wants most. He is told that the shop is stocked with imaginary items representing values that are not for sale. They may be exchanged, however, for other values to be given up by the protagonist. No money or other material items are involved. This technique affords the protagonist and others in the group the opportunity to evaluate the price each is willing to pay for the things he wants the most. A hierarchy of values may be better defined and in the course of doing this the individual may achieve greater insight into the direction of his efforts. The Magic Shop Technique is most effective when employed early in the session as it results in producing many possible avenues for exploration. It may even be used as a warm-up.

I have used a version of the Magic Shop in dealing with husband-wife relationships where one or both of the parties was dissatisfied with aspects of the relationship yet each expressed the desire to continue the marriage if the other would change in some respects. The shopkeeper asks the husband the three changes he most desires in his wife. He then asks what the protagonist is willing to give up to achieve each change. The same procedure is followed with the wife. A price is established for each change desired. The parties are then placed back to back on the stage and asked to negotiate the changes. If an impasse is reached they are asked to make another deal with the shopkeeper. Once a deal is made the parties go into action in a scene in which each possesses the newly gained attributes. They may then find that they are not as happy

with the changes as they had imagined or that the sacrifices they made did not result in pain.

In the following session the technique proved extremely effective. The protagonist, a woman, went into her relationship with her husband. She reenacted several situations in which her husband was portrayed as indecisive and wishy-washy. She, on the other hand, wanted him to be powerful and decisive. As the session progressed it became apparent that she loved her husband and did not want to dissolve the marriage. In the group there was a woman highly skilled in the use of the Magic Shop Technique. I had the protagonist enter the shop and try to negotiate a deal. She asked for a more aggressive and decisive husband. The shopkeeper asked if she were willing to give up some of his sensitivity. She agreed. I then had a very domineering powerful man play the changed husband. He came on real strong giving her orders and disregarding her objections. She was not satisfied. She was then asked to reenter the Magic Shop. After much negotiation she acknowledged that she had wanted her husband to change and become more assertive and aggressive, yet she was not willing to change in any respect. Furthermore, she wanted her husband to be much more aggressive, and at the same time, remain as considerate and sensitive to her needs as he was. She recognized that this represented a contradiction. The Magic Shop, she said, had made it all too clear to her.