

## It works!

By Dr Carlos A Raimundo

The application of the Play of Life used by a friend

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*"This is the time to test and prove to yourself and those around you, that what you have learnt is valid for life!"*

One day, in my youth, I was feeling down, pathetic, and feeling pity on myself. It was at a time when I had completed my medical degree and was doing my residency in psychiatry, studying philosophy and theology. My father approached me and saw me in this grey moment. He stood in front of me and softly placed his hand on my shoulder.

"What is happening?" he asked.

"I'm feeling very down!" I said and continued to explain to him how bad I was feeling, "It's like falling into a deep hole." I was looking for sympathy.

He looked at me with tender and firm eyes and suddenly (softly) slapped my left cheek.

"This, is the time to test and prove to yourself and those around you if what you have learnt is valid for life!"

This was one of the most encouraging moments of my life. In reality what he said was, "Come on! Stand up! You can make it!" I still often feel the smart of his hand on my cheek in moments when I lose perspective, when issues I am facing appear bigger than my ability to face them or be in control.

This story is about being slapped out of impotence with an outcome so different to what I was looking for. Throughout my life I have used this teaching on many occasions but it was recently that it became very relevant.

Life challenges our ability to respond to new situations. It stretches us beyond our comfort zone and known roles. I have never been stretched before as I have been during this year. In one really difficult moment I found myself like a prisoner in a concentration camp...trapped; but I felt my father's slap and realized once again that this is the time to apply what I learnt.

During this period of entrapment and reflection, I remembered the story of Moses that I have liked since I was a child. It was, coincidentally, Passover time a story of freedom.

I liked this idea, I liked to be free...I saw myself as wishing to be like Moses, when while in the land of captivity he found strength and the ability to cross the Red Sea into freedom. I felt locked in my mind, what could I do, where could I go to facilitate this process?

"I want to have a Moses experience", I thought within me. "I don't deserve to feel so low. I am a good man. God, let me out of here. This place is for those who are bad, not good people like me".

In that moment I felt within me a message that strongly said: "Before you can be a Moses you must recognize the Pharaoh within you!" What is that? Where is this coming from? There is a misunderstanding here! I'm in this (emotional) place to be out of misery not to jump into it.

The message became stronger and I resisted it until I couldn't resist any longer. I accepted the challenge of looking at the Pharaoh in me and suddenly images were passing through my mind. Images where I was the Pharaoh, the one that oppresses and robed people of freedom. The dogmatic, the one with a hard heart the dictator. I felt terrible but I accepted the challenge, without liking it. *"This is the time I need to show to myself if what I learnt is real or not"* If it works when I face the Pharaoh in me it will certainly work when I'll face the Moses in me.

The process was hard, I learned more about my own self and this made me more humble, need more work on this still, it made me see myself in the dynamics with others and helped me to say "I'm sorry" and to experience remorse and forgiveness.

After days of dealing with this I went visit a friend. She asked me how I was and I shared with her my experience in that process. I don't know how we started talking about my relationship with Stephanie, my 19 year old daughter, but I expressed my dislike in the way I was relating to her, the Pharaoh I had been with her. The most interesting thing is, that to help me, my friend used the Play

of Life on me! I must mention that she was not a Play of Life practitioners, she only attended a 2 day course on the Play of Life.

### **This is what my friend wrote.**

Carlos had been chatting about his parenting method with his older daughter, Stephanie. He found that she had been difficult and badly behaved and he had described his role with her as a Pharaoh.

I was not keen on his use of the word or what it meant and asked Carlos to show me what he meant, by using the Play of Life. (Incidentally I thought he should back off, as most bright 19 year olds need to be given more rope that they are asking for, so they learn life's lessons from personal experience)

Carlos positioned the little figures on the board and was immediately able to see that what he was describing was not his direct relationship with his daughter, but the



fact that his treatment of Stephanie was a response to other people's need for support in handling her. His placement of the figures, by adding other people into the situation gave Carlos (Picture 1.1) the insight to see that his treatment of Stephanie (Picture 1.2) was not really fair or appropriate (it was too close, within Stephanie's personal space) and that instead of rescuing other people (Picture 1.3), he needed to focus on the needs of his daughter.

describing was not his direct relationship with his daughter, but the fact that his treatment of Stephanie was a response to other people's need for support in handling her. His placement of the figures, by adding other people into the situation gave Carlos (Picture 1.1) the insight to see that his treatment of Stephanie (Picture 1.2) was not



By observing the full "picture" Carlos was able to create an ideal relationship with his daughter (Picture 2) and find the First Step, to "back off" from the scene and recognise that it was his relationship with other people that was the problem he was facing. He moved the figure that represented himself away (Picture 2.a) from those people and also away from his daughter. He saw that the best way to handle the situation was to respect his daughter's independence and give her the space and trust she was wanting.

In literally doing this, Carlos was able to observe his daughter differently. He saw her more as an individual and calmed down in his treatment of her. He became more of an observer of her behaviour and this distance allowed him to chat calmly about her issues and allow her to express her concerns in a more controlled, adult manner.



Three months after this time, Stephanie was able to tell her father how much she appreciated his relationship with her and that it was clear he had been able to change his behaviour with her, that gave her the opportunity to grow and be who she wanted to be.

### **Stephanie's comment**

Stephanie was asked to write this comment without any knowledge about this article

*The relationships between my dad and I has changed dramatically for the best. I had a period when I had difficulties to open up to him. Surely I was a stubborn teenager who didn't care about her dad's care and advice, so in a way I was shutting him out. I don't know if its because I am older now or perhaps both dad and I have opened our eyes and realized that our father-daughter relationship could be heaps better. Now we have a beautiful relationship, we support and respect each other and although we have our differences we are able to accept them, we still fight from now and then but it's Ok, because it's normal. I know he loves me and I know he knows I love him too. What more could you want!*

It works! I felt pleased to know that what I was learning and teaching to others for so many years really works. The use of the Play of Life between friends is one of the most exciting visions I have for the use of the method. My professional goal has been to demystify counselling and psychotherapy by providing simple tools and methods so that ordinary people can help oneself and help each other with the dilemmas and difficult situations we all face at some time of our lives.

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