

THE NEW NEANDERTHALS

SAVING OUR RELATIONSHIPS FROM OURSELVES

From 'Relationship Neanderthal' to 'Empathic Intelligence' via 'Methodical Empathy' with Psychophonetics

By Yehuda Tagar¹

One late Spring evening on top of a mountain overlooking a beautiful valley in central Slovakia I stood with a group of seven men around a fire. All of us were men who are committed to personal development, all of us family men in committed marriages to the woman we love in families and in homes with our children, courageous and honest enough to look inside ourselves and see our personal reality: the good, the bad, the wise and the stupid, the successes and the failures, the courage and the fear, the love and the hate, the beautiful and the ugly.

We shared openly about our relationships with our women, our struggles to understand them, to be understood by them, to maintain the hope, the love, the passion and the life-friendship with them. We were painfully honest with ourselves and with each other.

These men meet regularly for years in a closed men's group. I was invited to join them that evening to lead a Psychophonetics personal development seminar and I conducted five personal processes with them that evening around the fire. I was deeply moved and inspired by the readiness of each one of them to open one's soul, to confront oneself and to become vulnerable to each other, which is very rare amongst men everywhere. Of course the details of what was shared there will remain forever safe and confidential with me. But there is one moment from that special men's meeting which I would like to share here which I am sure my comrade from the mountain would support, as it is so archetypal.

At some point after a few personal processes I posed them a question: *"if right now all your wives would be standing here around this fire, and I would ask them: who of you feel that your husband really understands you? How many of them will raise their hand? Please raise your hand if you believe that your wife would say 'yes, my husband really understands me"*

There was a long embarrassing uncomfortable silence. None of the men raised their hands!

This was a very sobering moment for all of us. I felt that we are standing there on top of that mountain on behalf of all men, even those who do not yet acknowledge that we, men, have a problem regarding empathy with our women. And I was proud of being a part of this men's group that evening, on top of that mountain, around that fire, in that comradeship, with this level of brotherhood, with this level of honesty and courage. For at least we, at that moment, faced the depth of this universal crisis: no, we do *not* understand each other in our most important intimate relationship, and that is, tragically, the norm. At least we, a group of eight men looking at our lives with some perspective, acknowledged that we have a problem, and that recognition is not normal at all.

What is that problem?

The problem is that in comparison with our own high hopes and expectations from the most important relationships in our lives – we are progressively more and more disappointed of ourselves and of our partners' inability to communicate effectively; that our skills of conscious, effective, sustainable, renewable intimate relationships are primitive by our own standards; that in comparable with our intellectual, technological, professional, economic and management skills in every other areas of our lives – our skills of conscious effective communication with our partners are left way behind since before the stone age; that we are 'The Empathy Neanderthals' and therefore 'The Relationship Neanderthals'; that in this most important area in our life we have not yet climbed down from the trees.

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We are all so evolved technologically, most of us upgrade our smartphones (they were not so smart just ten years ago) at least every second year; we regularly update the operating system of our computers and the hardware at least every few years. But when last have you consciously upgraded the operating system that controls the basic standards of your communication with our partners since you two got together? Why is the most important part of our life - the most neglected, the most 'innovation resistant' one?

Because a new cycle of human evolution has started in the middle of the 20th Century, and in regards to its high requirements we are all unequipped and unprepared. But the show of human relationship goes on regardless, couples, marriages and families keep being formed on the poor basis and the old programs that we inherited from our predecessors, and it does not really work. From the future, I am sure, we will look back at our present state of human relationship – and we will regard today's standards of communication as we today regard the Neanderthals phase of human evolution: primitive.

Imagine that a huge meteor hit planet Earth and knocked it out of its axis, orbit and magnetic field resulting in a progressive destruction of satellite-based telephones. An alternative technology is being developed based on biological computing but it is only accessible to users who are able to calculate instantaneous rates of change by the convergence of 'Differential Calculus' and 'Integral Calculus' through Fundamental Theorem of Calculus. Mobile telephone users have to choose between stop using telephony altogether – or upgrade their personal mathematical skills to Calculus. That is where we are today regarding interpersonal communication: the old technology and the old programs of personal relationship don't work any more and they are getting worse. No one wants to copy the relationship patterns of their parents. The new skills required to maintain human communication are in their infancy and we are all disappointed. We can only develop the 'Relationship Calculus' consciously. That is a fairly accurate metaphor for the present day situation. We are all 'The New Neanderthals'.

I have been conducting couple, marriage, relationship and parenthood counselling sessions for many years in eight different countries and I have been teaching it in my professional seminars for thirty years. Psychophonetics provides effective powerful processes and rituals for sustainable conscious relationship and I am happy with the results. But the chronically low, primitive level of understanding the reality of another person from their own point of view keeps surprising me. I keep meeting good-hearted, highly intelligent, highly informed and educated people who are deeply committed to their partners – and they keep stumbling helplessly across this invisible threshold: the challenge of understanding each other from the inside. That failure results in tragic consequences to the quality of marriages, parenthood, happiness, and often to the fate of the marriage itself. They just cannot make the shift between seeing the common reality from their own point of view – to seeing the same common reality from the partner's point of view. The shift that is required for sustainable marriage is not just a matter of intention, motivation, intellectual reflection, conversation, analysis and good will. It is a deep evolutionary change, a real step in personal transformation, like a slow and painful development of a new sense organ. As if we are required to construct our own eyes or our own ears by ourselves. But it must be possible, for there is no alternative to having relationships, intimacy, marriages, families, good parenthood, and community.

A man facing the possible destruction of his new relationship with a woman that he was committed to spend the rest of his life with. This was to be *the* relationship he was hoping for after a long and torturous journey of multiple failed attempts. A quarrel took place on a really trivial matter and they had different versions of the reality about it: she blamed him angrily for something he was innocent of. That was the end of a beautiful intimate short holiday together. He was giving up: yet again a woman that does not respect his feelings. His pain was deep, a culmination of all the previous disappointments. Where is the real woman of his dreams?! I challenged him that the destructive meaning he gave that incident is of his own making. He could not see it. So I helped him to 'slow down' and observe the process of that incident until he could see for himself that what he felt to be attacking his heart at the moment of her anger was not her at all, but a pain that he carries in him for many years. At that point he realised that *he* is the one that is projecting a destructive intention on his partner, not her. She just reacted for a moment to a misunderstanding. When he realised that *he himself* was the source of the destruction of the loving space between them – he was stricken by intense remorse. He suddenly realised his own contribution to the past destruction of all the relationships with women that he loved. He fell on his knees and apologised to all of these women for blaming them for something that actually came out of himself. He cried for a long time in what led him to this 'peak

experience' of self-awareness, what is universally called 'katharsis'. I believed that his present relationship now can be saved.

A married couple with children, highly educated professionals, came to me on the verge of giving up on the marriage. Endless fights on a daily basis destroying everything good between them: family, happiness, intimacy, health. I realised in the first 10 minutes that they live in completely separated realities in complete ignorance of the reality of each other. They were constantly fighting on 'who is right', as if there is only one truth, and it is 'mine'.

In Psychophonetics we call it 'The Fourth Condition' of the Seven Conditions for Spiritual Development: respecting the other's reality as much as respecting one's own. A culture of respect for the reality of the other was just not there. I call it '*The Pravda School of Epistemology*': there is only one truth, coincidentally it is mine, I have the KGB (now the FSB) – so you will go to Gulag or to hell. Why do people even try to establish long term relationship with less than this basic standard of mutual respect and tolerance to a diversity of points of view, different versions of reality, different opinions, values and feelings? That is 'Neanderthal Empathy' indeed.

So I took the role of 'The Translator' between them: everything said by one of them – I 'translated' to the other so that he/she hears what was actually intended and why – instead of what they feared/hoped/assumed that they heard, instead of what was actually said. Each of them started to acknowledge that they brought into the relationship patterns of interaction from their parents, repeating them unconsciously. Then, for a moment, there was peace. In that temporary peace – an 'upgrades' of the existing standards of their communication could be contemplated so their common life could become sustainable.

An upgrade of the way we interact in relationship is urgently needed, because the existing 'normal' standards of relationship are not serving us well. We became more and more complicated individuals over the past 500 years, especially over the past 70 years. What was considered a normal standard of personal relationship between a man and a woman a generation ago – does not work any more today. The development of the capacity of seeing and hearing and understanding the reality of people from their own point of view – is lagging behind. This capacity is a baby everywhere.

But while natural babies grow naturally and mostly unconsciously from babyhood to childhood to adolescence into adulthood – empathy does not. It can only grow consciously, by serious effort starting from the acknowledging that we normally do not see, hear and know each other's from the inside, even with people that we love; that falling in love is not the full reality of loving, and that sexual attraction alone is not a sufficient glue that can keep us together for the long term. Falling in love can be a good starting point for a long cultivation of loving the being of the other and sexual attraction can be the starting point for the creation of the deep bonding that can transform a romance into a lasting community.

Someone prominent in 2006 coined the term 'The Empathy Deficit'² in America as being more severe than the financial deficit. It was a moment of enlightenment for him. We all live in the time of the big 'Empathy Deficit': the gap between the level of our intellectual and technological achievements, caused by the process of individuation – and the level of our soul development, relationship development, Empathic Intelligence development.

We are all living in the age of 'The Empathic Neanderthal'. It can only be overcome by the conscious effort of Methodical Empathy, in all its shapes and forms, on all levels.

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² In 2006 Barack Obama addressed Northwestern University's graduating class: "There's a lot of talk in this country about the federal deficit," he said. "But I think we should talk more about our **empathy deficit** — the ability to put ourselves in someone else's shoes; to see the world through those who are different from us — the child who's hungry, the laid-off steelworker, the immigrant woman cleaning your dorm room."