One of the peculiarities of this third ear¹ is that it works in two ways. It can catch what other people do not say, but only feel and think; and it can also be turned inward. It can hear voices from within the self that are otherwise not audible because they are drowned out by the noise of our conscious thought processes. The student of psychoanalysis is advised to listen to those inner voices with more attention than to what “reason” tells about the unconscious.

Theodor Reik

INTRODUCTION

Among Freud’s (1912/1958) basic ground rules for establishing the psychoanalytic situation, he describes the appropriate stance for listening to the patient and refers to the proposed technique as “a very simple one” (p. 111).

It consists simply in not directing one’s notice to anything in particular and in maintaining the same “evenly-suspended attention” (as I have called it) in the face of all one hears. . . . Or to put it purely in terms of technique: “He should simply listen, and not bother about whether he is keeping anything in mind.” (pp. 111–112)

¹The expression the third ear, which I borrowed from Theodor Reik (1949), was, according to him (footnote, p. 144) originally borrowed from Nietzsche (Beyond Good and Evil, 1891/1967, Part VIII, p. 246). The influence of Reik’s work in writing the present chapter is not intended to suggest any formal connection with the interpersonal approach to psychoanalysis, but rather an appreciation of the similar humanity in Reik’s clinical thinking and the richness of its expression, particularly with regard to the experience of becoming an analyst.

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Few analysts today would agree that what Freud described is simple, and few psychoanalytic supervisors would consider it simple to teach. The Zen monk Takuin, when asked how long it took him to paint one of his portraits of the legendary Daruma, is said to have replied: "Ten minutes and 80 years." It is an answer that expresses a non-western view of both the nature of man and the nature of education. A Westerner who says it takes 10 minutes and 80 years to be able to do what Takuin did is usually talking of the years of study and practice necessary to develop the skill, compared to the brief time spent in rendering the particular piece of art. To the Japanese, the 80 years refer to the self-realization needed to become the person who can paint Daruma, while the 10 minutes signifies the study and practice of the necessary technical skill no matter how lengthy that "10 minutes" might be in measured time.

In the following pages I will outline my current clinical perspective on the process of psychoanalytic supervision. It is a process that, when it goes well, I see as bridging the boundary between the "10 minutes" and the "80 years" in the development of a psychoanalyst. But in order to be as clear as possible about how I see supervision of psychoanalysis, I feel it would be helpful to first clarify how I see psychoanalysis itself, and the interpersonal approach in particular.

In a paper attempting to compare the interpersonal paradigm with the classical Freudian model, Merton Gill (1982) stated tongue in cheek that "an analyzable patient is a patient with whom the analyst can maintain the illusion of neutrality." It is precisely because this remark from a classically trained analyst was made with humor, that it so beautifully underlines the weariness with which psychoanalysts continue to grapple with an unresolved philosophical dilemma that has its roots as far back as man has systematically thought about the nature of his own relationship to the universe.

Consider, for example, the two neo-Confucian schools of thought. The first postulates "the investigation of things leading to the extension of knowledge" and implies the objective study of things within the universe from the stance of an outside observer. The second holds that "the universe is the mind and the mind the universe." This position teaches the realization of what is already within oneself by allowing full confrontation between the self and the other so as to reveal the psychological realities behind appearances. Now consider a statement from the current psychoanalytic literature (Abrams & Shengold, 1978, p. 402). In discussing the differences between what they call "the traditional model and the new model of the psychoanalytic situation" and the fact that "some analysts have developed substantially different views of the psy-