

YES, NO AND MAYBE

A lecture given on
30 December 1951

Handling Indecision

I received an interesting question on the subject of prediction along with postulates. A postulate is actually a prediction; that is what postulate means. But let me tell you something, and you should be very clear in your own minds concerning this: When a person lays down a statement to himself about the state of beingness, he is doing it on an evaluation of the past in order to take care of a situation in the future.

If you just have a fellow's postulate—"I'm nervous," or "I mustn't get nervous"—it doesn't blow if there was attached to it "I mustn't get nervous because Mother will get upset." That is the actual evaluation of the future situation.

So when you are doing Postulate Processing, remember that there is an evaluation in it and that it is conditional, ordinarily. And to get the whole thing you just ask them why: "Why did you make that postulate?" "What would have happened in the future if you hadn't made that postulate?" Ask them those two questions and generally you will get the whole thing and then it will blow. Otherwise, you will just get "I am nervous," and the fellow will go on hanging on to it because he has to be nervous or he has to be not nervous or something of the sort, because of something. If the "because of" is missing, then the mind cannot do a complete evaluation of it.

Now, I would like to review for you something which has not altered throughout Dianetics, and that is the yes/no/maybe condition of every problem. Every problem can have a yes, a no, or a maybe as its answer. Your preclear is as sane as he has yeses and noes and as he does not have maybes. The number of maybes which a preclear is carrying in his mind is directly proportional to the insanity which he is demonstrating. A fellow says, "Well, shall I go downtown?" If he says yes or no, he gets action or no action; if he says maybe, he gets turbulence.

Life consists of action or no-action—just these two things. As a result, you get turbulence when a state of beingness or a state of not-beingness cannot be entered with regard to any particular subject.

The thinking processes of the mind consist of handling numbers of facsimiles. These facsimiles are brought up to resolve a problem, quite normally. These are experiences of the past which are being compared one to the other in order to get an unbalance. It is said that some people are "unbalanced"; when people are "unbalanced" this would mean that they are sort of hanging up in maybes. But you don't really want them to be "balanced" because this would mean they were dead center on all these things.

You have to have enough facsimiles on the yes side to conclude yes or enough facsimiles on the no side to conclude no. And whenever an individual says maybe he is saying at the same time "I do not have enough data," and he will leave the whole problem in suspension.

As he goes through life these problems in suspension become more and more problems. They go progressively into suspension, and then much more actively and continuingly he will start to show manifestations of very bad indecision and eventually may even start to disassociate, just because of this. He had a problem to answer yes or no and he couldn't answer it; he answered maybe. And these built up through his life.

"Was it my fault or wasn't it my fault?" is the toughest of those problems. Was she to blame or wasn't she to blame? Was he to blame or wasn't he to blame? And where a person hangs up on maybes on major problems, he becomes uncertain.

Anxiety is simply the state of maybeness; it is “What will happen if . . . ?” That is anxiety—”What will happen if . . . ?” A person then doesn’t have a yes or a no. He has an inaction category which is a turbulent category. He does not dare act because he does not have an answer.

Answers are always held in suspension by two things: promotion of survival or the deterioration of survival. Anything which hangs up on maybe is more or less intimately concerned with failure or death. And what is the difference between extreme failure and death? No difference. So it is a gradient scale of death which hangs these problems up between yes and no, on maybe.

There must be something fatal about one of these problems for it to have any impression or magnitude on an individual. There is something fatal associated with the problem which is the really tough problem that hangs in the maybe category.

So, when you are looking for problems you hang up your preclear, actually, if you don’t run an emotional curve. He is trying to decide something in the past—make a past decision. That is one of the hard things for a preclear to do sometimes. “Was I guilty or wasn’t I guilty?” He is hanging up on maybe: he doesn’t dare be guilty and yet he thinks he was guilty. One of the ways of resolving that problem is to simply tip the whole thing over by reducing the data from one of its facsimiles. You just run one facsimile and it will tip the problem over and it will fall in a yes or a no.

The smooth functioning of a mind, a person’s reaction time and his ability to be decisive and therefore to be in action are dependent upon his capability of handling problems in yes or no categories. Fear of death or fear of having caused death or a failure leading to death is the only restraint on the resolution of a problem. There is no other restraint. So the tough problems on the line, you will find, are on the life-continuum level where you pick up this life-continuum curve and all of a sudden the person is hung up on maybe.

This, by the way, is a mechanical method of hanging a person in suspension—a life continuum. He is hung in suspension by that mechanical manifestation. The facsimiles are all there. They are too heavy, you might say, or too painful to closely examine, so he just sort of solves it one way or the other. If he couldn’t solve this at all he would die. And a person who experiences a death near him very often feels himself sliding in toward death himself. He goes down the tone scale toward it.

So, in processing preclears, here is another process which you could use all by itself: just get him off all the maybes in his life.

Now, if death continues to be a very, very serious thing to an individual, his maybes will be very, very serious. But if death becomes less serious to him, the maybes become less serious to him, too.

Whether or not people live one life or many lives is actually a point of maybeness which an individual should resolve for himself. An individual very often loses his hope because of a maybe. He doesn’t hope for the future anymore and if a person can’t think into the future he isn’t very sane. If he can’t hope, he can’t think into the future. He doesn’t dare hope because maybe he will fail. There is only one bar on it, then. Fail? Well, that is just death, that’s all. He doesn’t dare do these things because he would die. That is the automatic response you get from preclears. “What would happen if you did so-and-so and so-and-so?” “Well, I’d die.”

That is the big generality. He isn’t giving you any specific material at all. He means he would fail. Fail and die are approximately the same thing to him.

So you take some of the weight off death. “Too much hope of living and too much fear of dying,” somebody said one time.

Take a pilot, for instance. A pilot gets married and becomes responsible for a wife and a couple of kids and he loses his elan. He loses that sudden dash, that sudden spurt that will get him out of danger and so forth, because all the maybes back down the line begin to be hung up. He starts to hang up on this maybe: "Maybe I will die." Now it becomes important whether or not he dies because he has to live for somebody else and it is very important that they survive. If he died they would fail. So he gets hung up in a maybe.

You will find this sort of a situation in almost anybody's life. You will find young children or teenagers not at all reluctant on the subject of suicide. But if you go back and examine some early suicide impulse, you will find out that it hung up on a maybe and the maybe was simply that it would bring too much grief and sorrow to somebody else and that would be very serious. It would be serious because it might cause the other person's death. So it is fear of dying that causes the maybe line to hang up.

You will run across some preclear who doesn't know whether he should go to the store on the bus or whether he should take his car or whether he should take a bicycle or how he should go to the store, and he sits there and worries about it. He has completely lost sight of the fact that the problem is to go to the store.

You just start examining his computations along this line and you will find out that each time he has a common denominator on the thing. When he gets indecisive he isn't indecisive about the main problem, which is he has to go to the store. He becomes indecisive about whether he will go by bus or by bicycle or his own car or walk. There is a worry about transportation. So there is a big maybe hanging up on the line someplace about transportation. "Did he cause the wreck or didn't he?" Run an emotional curve on it and it will fall right out in your lap. It isn't the maybe on going to the store: it is the maybe on vehicles. Because you will find after you have asked him for unresolved problems and he has described many unresolved problems to you (they are usually very light problems; they don't amount to anything) that each one will contain a common denominator to all of them. That is the big maybe. "Did he cause it or didn't he?"

He isn't resolving that problem. You will find that he is stuck only in incidents where he is hung up in a maybe. So if you want to get an individual unstuck off the time track, clean up his maybes.

Now, there are several ways to clean up maybes. One of them is just to get him to face the problem with current data. Face the problem with current data and reevaluate and repredict from the point where he hung up in the maybe. He made a decision once: was it the right one or the wrong one? And that is the start of the maybes. Now he gets afraid to make decisions so he hangs these decisions up in maybe, and there is the anatomy of it.

You will find that any place an individual is stuck on the time track (I repeat this because you want to know how to free individuals on the time track; this is how you free them), if you don't immediately find the data which leads to a maybe—"Was he right or was he wrong?"—you run an emotional curve on it or just run the "doubt" button or the "I don't know" or the "I'd rather not decide" or feelings of indecision, till you get enough data to spot the place where he is stuck. This will tell you right away what this was. It is quite a valuable tool.

Actually, this tool comes out of Boolean algebra. They work out their big switchboard systems in Bell Telephone and so forth on yes and no, yes and no. And all these machines have to answer in terms of yes and no, yes and no, yes and no. All of a sudden all the machinery stops someplace. Somewhere along the line it didn't go into the slot on a yes or a no; it just didn't go anyplace, and the whole circuit will break down at that point. This is the way they break a circuit. Instead of hanging up in a yes or no, yes or no, yes or no, yes or no, sooner or later one of them is going to hang up in a maybe and the circuit gets broken at that point. They can set it up so that a circuit will break any time it hits a maybe.

This is very plain. This isn't very hard to understand, although it is mathematics and Bell telephones and all the rest of that. It is very simple.

Here is your problem: "Is John Jones home?" The switchboard system plugs itself in automatically—rings, rings, rings, rings, rings. It is waiting for you to say "No, he isn't home." But if you won't say that, then it will. After a while it will unplug on the line and it will find an operator. It will just unplug and hook into the operator switchboard. It can even wait. Some of these things can even unplug and then wait to find out if you hang up. This is how it keeps getting off its maybes. It keeps going on to a maybe and then getting off it again.

That is the way the mind does its thinking. It goes on to a maybe and comes off it and it goes on to one and comes off it and on to one and comes off it. There is always an instant of maybe before there is a decision. Even though it might be just a millisecond, there is still an instant of maybe, because the mind, in the course of resolution of a problem, does a scan across its data. It scans both sides of the situation to some degree and arrives at a decision.

You would be surprised how many individuals in a tough spot, just to get off a maybe, will make a desperate decision—really desperate. A criminal up for trial, for instance, would rather be found guilty and get electrocuted than to stay on that maybe. He will say anything, he will confess to anything sometimes if he is really restimulated, just to get off the maybe. Maybes are painful, somehow, because they hold all these incidents in suspension.

The point is that an individual goes through all of these various cycles of thought automatically when he is trying to sort out a problem.

You take an accident after which a person has become very anxious, and you say, "Well, he became anxious because of the impact against him." Rats! Individuals were made to be knocked to pieces. They can take a lot of that. There is a maybe in there someplace. You find that maybe and you will resolve the accident.

Now, if you look at this as a thought proposition, you will find the individual going down scale, actually, with thought: "Yes, no, yes, no, no, no, not yes, maybe, did I? did I? did I?" You will find him worrying. What is worry? It is "Was it yes? Was it no? Is it yes? Is it no? Is it yes? Is it no? Is it . . ." Maybe you have a parent who used to do this, and who would then suddenly make up his mind, only to go twenty-four hours and change it utterly. "You can't be right, you've got to be wrong," or something like that is entering in there.

You get somebody who wants to have his worries eased: You can just sit there and postulate-process him on yes and no—just that, running it back and forth. "What problem in your past did you fail to solve?"

"Oh, I didn't fail to solve any of them. Not me, not me, not me."

"Well, did you make a decision one time which you regretted afterwards?"

"Ye-e-s." You get an immediate response on that.

"Did you make a decision one time which you regretted afterwards?" It is quite interesting the variety of answers you get to this one simple question. It makes you an awfully smart auditor.

One of the manifestations of maybe is inefficiency and inaction. You get somebody who has gone into a great deal of inaction and you will find he is hung up on a bad maybe someplace, and you had certainly better process out that maybe as one of the first things you do with him. "When did you make a decision that you regretted?" Of course, to regret a decision is to hold it in suspension or try to put it out of time.

Then there is worry afterwards: "Was it right? Was it wrong? Was it right? Was it wrong?" But if it is irrevocable—he will never be able to get it back again—that is a bad one.

“Did it result in . . . ?” Take a decision which resulted in a death. That one is very heavy. That is what went wrong with flight commanders during the war. They would keep making these decisions; they were called on to make decisions all the time and of course in highly active combat and so forth, practically every decision they made would result in a death. After a while these men would get really wacky.

The flight surgeon should be in there pitching with Dianetics. After he sees the commander getting a little bit indecisive he will recognize that this man’s next few decisions are going to be very, very sour and that he is going to kill a lot more men than he would otherwise. He is going to start making decisions not out of reason but out of desperateness. He is going to spend much more time thinking about how desperate the situation is than he is going to spend on how to get the men back alive out of it. He is hung up on too many maybes.

At that time the flight surgeon should tell the executive officer that he had better take over because he is taking the other man off for a couple of days. He would give him some fast processing and kick him back in there again.

In an efficiently run country such as this, naturally this is the condition which obtains today in all of our air forces! It sounds sort of ridiculous to you that it doesn’t obtain, doesn’t it? Because the lives of an awful lot of pilots in just straight operation have nothing to do with war or combat.

You want to know why B-29s crash and stuff is going to hell in a balloon? We are getting terrific numbers of military crashes. It is not just the increased number of planes in flight nor the deterioration of personnel available; it is the continued utilization of operations officers who went through a war—operations officers who made a wrong decision once, twice, three times. After that they just make decisions—they have to. It says right there in the orders that an officer on this post makes decisions, so they have to do it. This will result in bad orders, bad routines, and the nervousness associated with this will go all the way through a squadron even to its maintenance and repair units. Everybody gets into a sort of an apathy about the whole deal.

“Well, so he didn’t put any propeller tips on number four. It’s going up today at four o’clock. Well, it’ll probably crash anyway; it doesn’t matter much.”

There has been a postulate for a long time in the railroads that when you get one train wreck, you get two more. So, a couple of engineers help out the human race—crash! This same thing happens in airlines and so forth.

It is not safe, in other words, to have individuals around operations of any character who are hung up in very many maybes, because they don’t think. After a while they are just desperate. They say, “All right, bring in your executioner. It’s just going to happen anyhow. I can’t stop it from happening.” The fellow has sat there at his desk and sent these men out; he ran the whole mission and he flew them all the way back home again. He counted them when they came back home and there were three missing—he was not able to make the grade. He will become psychosomatically ill because he will turn on all the efforts required to fly that mission; he will turn them all on and he will start going by the boards.

One of the efforts you turn on to make other people do things is the same effort you make to get little babies to eat. It gives people ulcers. You are not accomplishing the mission.

The answer to a bad maybe is double; there are two answers to a bad maybe. And don’t neglect the second one because this is life, living, processing: Go out and do it again, in action! The value of action is tremendous.

You would be amazed how much action anyone is capable of. When a person sits around and thinks too long he gets into trouble. The Indians used to have a name for it; it is called “the sickness of long thinking.” The person who starts dropping back out of action starts

restimulating some old maybes—anything to keep busy. The next thing you know, the fellow is really enforcing inaction upon himself because of this restimulation. If he can just pick himself up by the bootstraps and throw himself willy-nilly into some kind of action—preferably dangerous action—he sometimes comes up right as rain.

Why is it that an individual wounded in the front lines does not show any war neurosis of any character whatsoever as long as he remains in the front-line first-aid-dressing station? There he is, all shot up; if he could be sent back to duty he would stay as sane as they come. But when you remove these men back to the field hospital and then back to the base hospital, by the time they get back to the base hospital they are all messed up. They start to demonstrate all sorts of strange manifestations. They have been taken away from action, away from the imminence of action, and this has changed their action goals. You change a person's action goals and you have a lot of trouble with him.

The trouble is, as I have said before, man was built to be struck at by boa constrictors or lions or something about three times a day. There is nothing like being struck at by lions or boa constrictors three times a day to keep you up in present time. As a result, your action then utilizes all the past counter-efforts. These past counter-efforts become left over, unused, the second that you go into inaction. You start into inaction and you get a lot of leftover counter-efforts which you are not using.

The athletic heart is a physical manifestation of just this. The fellow has a lot of counter-efforts and he gets them left over, so he will exhibit them in some fashion. This is why the highly trained athlete goes to pieces when he is thirty. Bushwa! He doesn't have to go to pieces when he is thirty; there is no reason for him to go to pieces even when he is a hundred. But he just stopped his action goals; that is all.

You start looking down the track and find the action goals of a preclear and process these and you will get some interesting results on a case.

As a person goes into life, he will make a bunch of postulates about how he is going to keep on going. He makes these postulates about what he is going to do, and then after a while he makes postulates that he is going to do something else. So between the postulate he makes when he is twenty-one and the postulate he makes when he is thirty-five is a disagreement.

Then he starts to compare all this data and he will all of a sudden hang up in a maybe, and that is another way to do it. He tries to find out what is going on; he can't tell the difference between these two postulates as to which one is the most important. The earlier one to some degree has precedence. It has slightly greater precedence than the later one.

So get your preclears off the maybe and you will have people who will go into action. But if people are kept in maybe they will stay in inaction. You should know this very well and you should understand it thoroughly because the manifestation of neurosis or insanity is completely undirected action or inaction, and these two things have to be resolved by the auditor. And if they aren't resolved by the auditor, he might as well just skip the rest of the case, because the preclear will not go into action! The preclear will lie on the couch; he would rather go through Effort Processing or other kinds of processing ad infinitum than go into action, because action means he would have to make a decision. What is action? It is a continual running fire of estimation of effort—rapid estimation of effort. And action with good randomness demands all of the faculties and alertness of the mind.

If you feel you don't have time for processing, go out and get a racing car and drive it for a while. Drive it at 110 miles an hour if it will only go safely at 90. You will come up to present time. Go out and jump with a parachute or something—get into action, preferably dangerous action.

One of Hitler's men observed this empirically, so they handed a motto out to German youth: "Live dangerously!" Oddly enough, the German youth bought it, and a relatively small army

mopped up all the armies of Europe, England and Russia. But then America stepped in and finished them off.

All available recordings of this lecture end abruptly at this point, and we have been unable to locate any recording or transcript for the end of the lecture.

However, a very short tape recording was found of a discussion between Ron and the audience following this lecture. Ron spoke about plans for distributing Handbook for Preclears and ensuring its proper use in the field by restricting distribution to Foundation affiliates and those auditors who had attended the conference. He also discussed a prospective course for auditors so that more people could qualify to use the book, thus providing for wider distribution and expansion.

Ron spoke briefly of the need to produce enough miracles in Dianetics practice to really make an impression on the society. He then thanked the attending auditors warmly, and invited them all to a farewell and New Year's party to be held that evening at the Hotel Lassen in Wichita. On the day following the end of the Second Annual Conference of Hubbard Dianetic Auditors, several of the auditors and Foundation affiliates—people who were running Dianetics groups or organizations in the field—gathered at Ron's home for an informal discussion. In the following lectures we have reproduced all of the material which was recorded during the afternoon, including a lengthy talk by Ron on current theory and techniques, an auditing demonstration and discussion of the case, and a period of informal discussion during which Ron answered questions and clarified technical points for the affiliates.