

WELCOME TO THE WILD & WONDERFUL WORLD OF META-STATES

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What is a meta-state?

How do meta-states work?

What's the value of knowing or working with meta-states?

How does meta-states (and the Meta-States Model) relate to NLP?

Suppose I offered you a way by which you could learn to "run your own brain" so that you could develop some high level state-management skills and live resourcefully? Would that interest you; would you like that?

In those two sentences I have just introduced both NLP and Meta-States.

In the first line I used three key phrases from NLP that highlights the value and important of our Neuro-Linguistic (or mind-body) states, namely,

Running your own brain

Managing your states

Living resourcefully.

And that's what NLP is all about. As a model of "mind," communication, and human functioning, NLP puts in our hands a highly efficient set of tools for updating our Model of the World so that we can develop more effective maps. In this way, NLP gives us some powerful tools for navigating life as it enables us to go places and to do things that we couldn't before.

The second sentence in the first paragraph implies and invites you into a meta-state. The question invites you into the state of interest in and liking for the NLP experience of running your own brain and taking charge of your own life. If you read and responded to that question by accessing the states of "interest" and "liking," then you accessed a state "meta" to the first state.

What does that mean?

It means that you have moved above the first state (of running and managing your own experience) and have accessed a second state (i.e., interest in and liking). This second state occurs at a higher level. It is a state about the first state. It is a state in reference to the first state. And with that, you now know the meaning of the term "meta."

So having just read that description, what do you think or feel about that? Do you have a clear understanding of meta-states? Or, perhaps confusion? Or maybe you are almost getting it?

Welcome, once again to meta-stating. You have just experienced it again!

"I did?"

"Sure, let me tease out the structure again."

1) Your first state was having "read a description" and presumably having been in a state where you were attempting to understand it. State #1.

2) Then, regarding that state and whatever "success" you had in it, what did you think or feel about that? Do you like understanding, confusion, on the verge of getting it? Do you dislike it? Bored? Excited? Curious? Intrigued? Do you feel controlled? Toyed with? Do you feel playful, creative, or intelligent? That was State #2-- a state about your first state.

Amazing, isn't it?

Ah, there I go again. Even that question invites you to step back yet again to register some thought or feeling about all of the previous feelings. And stepping back to gain yet even further perspective, awareness, clarity, etc., invites you to move up, that is, to take a "meta" move.

We create meta-states that easily, that quickly. It's the way our minds work.... and keep on working, forever thinking-and-feeling about previous thoughts-and-feelings. It's what makes us uniquely human, complex, and difficult to "figure out."

Does that now make sense?

Oops. I just did it again. Invited you into yet another state of mind and emotion about your ongoing experience of reading and seeking to comprehend.

Now I wonder, suppose I asked you a question that presupposed you jumped up and accessed a really powerful state about your learning and discovery? What if I asked you a resource evoking question like:

How playful can you be in thinking about these jumps as you read, knowing that you will get it and use it to enrich your life? Would that playfulness in your learning strategy generate more motivation?

Sneaky, eh? And yet, that's just the way our minds (and meta-minds) work. And when you know that, and know how to use it in powerful, effective, and delightful ways, it gives you the ability to operate from the higher levels of your mind. Interested?

Welcome to the Meta-Function

This meta-function of where we can respond to our responses describes the factor about our consciousness that is most human. Philosophers and psychologists say that we have "a self-reflexive consciousness." In our minds, we can step back to notice and react to ourselves. How often do you do that? For most of us, it occurs all the time! And it is this self-referential freedom of our thoughts that allows us and empowers us with a rich and complex kind of mind.

How many different states of mind, emotion, and body did you experience today? Did you get angry, afraid, frustrated, stressed, or disgusted during the day? Did you feel joyful, delighted, humorous, playful, curious, or contented? Did you get serious, upset, demanding?

To even answer these questions you have to step back from your experiences (your states) and access a state of awareness and mindfulness and observe your states. And doing that puts you at a meta-level. Oh sure, you're still in your body. And yet, in your mind, conceptually, you have layered another level of thoughts and feelings upon your thoughts and feelings.

Did you realize that? Doesn't that excite you about the power and possibilities of being a meta class of life? And isn't it fascinating that once you're made aware of these levels of awareness, levels of thought, that you can hear and see each of these questions as generating even more?

Well, welcome to the wild and wonderful world of meta-states.

They're Everywhere; they're everywhere!

Recognizing the ever-present reality of meta-states can be astonishing, mind-blowing, confusing, disorienting, and even disturbing at first. What does it mean? What do we do with this awareness?

This "infinite regress" (as the philosophers describe it) of thoughts and feelings about thoughts and feelings can, if uncontrolled, send a person into spiraling loops. We all have done that one.

We experience something upsetting and then feel ashamed of being upset. And then feel guilty for being ashamed, and then angry at our guilt, and then upset about our guilt, and then bad for feeling upset... The loop goes round and round without an exit.

We know we have to get to sleep, and feel the need to sleep, but then feel concerned and anxious that we might not sleep, so we try really hard to sleep and find that only makes matters worse, so we intolerantly demand in our heads to "just go to sleep," because we really need to sleep...

We realize that we have forgotten someone's name as we're meeting them and then feel stupid and incompetent for forgetting the name, it's such a simple task, and wonder what in the world is wrong with us, and then remember that we have forgotten to pay attention because our thoughts have been about feeling inadequate for forgetting...

These are the kind of vicious cycles and spirals that our minds can get into if we don't know how to handle the meta-levels of our mind. And it is these kinds of spiraling loops that scare lots of people from "thinking." They are the ones who are quick to warn others, "You think too much!" The very process of thinking about their thinking seems like a run-away train to them. So they fear their thinking-- a meta-state itself.

This, in fact, highlights one of the most important discoveries in Meta-States. Almost anytime you bring a "negative" thought and/or feeling (fear, anger, disgust, contempt, rejection, etc.) against yourself, your states, your thoughts, your feelings-- you put yourself at odds with yourself. And when we do this, we create internal conflict, incongruity, and "dragon states."

"What does that mean, never have a 'negative' thought or feeling?"

No, not at all. It means we need to use our "negative" thoughts and feelings as signals about our experience with things "out there" in the world: fear of provoking a wild animal, fear of driving dangerously, anger at the violation of our values, disgust about something that we deem appropriately "disgusting."

"So if our thoughts and emotions are about something out there-- external to us, that's better?"

Yes, precisely. Then the thinking-and-feeling can operate as a signal of the relationship between our Model of the World and our Experience of the World and let us know if it seems to be going in the right direction (the "positive" emotions) or in the wrong directions (the "negative" emotions).

"So what happens if I have 'negative' thoughts or 'negative' feelings about one of my states?"

That's when we essentially reject, attack, or insult ourselves. We do this with--

Fearing our fear

Fearing our anger, joy, sexuality, tenderness, playfulness, assertiveness, etc.

Being angry at our fear, our anger, our frustration, our stress, etc.

Rejecting and contempting our failure, weakness, fallibility, etc.

Shaming and Guilting ourselves over our fear, anger, frustration, etc.

"So what are we to do? How should we relate to ourselves and some of these negative states?"

First of all, access the state of acceptance so that you just fully and freely welcome them into awareness. Strange, eh? Paradoxical, huh? Yes, it certainly seems counter-intuitive. Our more "natural" tendency is to reject our fear, beat ourselves up for our anger, judge ourselves for our fallibility, shame ourselves for our mistakes, etc. Yet that is precisely how we get locked up inside ourselves, and set taboos against acknowledging our experiences for whatever they are.

Accepting our fear, anger, disgust, stress, etc. does not mean we approve of them or condone, but just acknowledge, witness, observe so that we can then decide the informational value of the emotion and take whatever steps are most appropriate. This is the first step in true State Management.

I acknowledge my fear and accept that I'm feeling afraid, knowing that it is just a feeling and then evaluate whether the fear state is appropriate or inappropriate, current or dated, information to take counsel from or to face with courage, etc. In this, by meta-stating acceptance first, we are then able to effectively master our fears and use them in an intelligent and human way.

Meta-Stating for Fun and Profit

I've described the negative side of our self-reflexive consciousness, yet that's only one side of the story. That's the dark side of this power. Un-appreciated and un-recognized, we turn our

mental and emotional states against ourselves and end up with all kinds of destructive and toxic frames of mind. We have designed them as "Dragon States."

So what's the positive side?

The bright side of our meta-cognition powers is that it gives us the ability to set the frames of mind that will support our resourcefulness. As we learn how to handle the infinite regress of state about state, we learn how to set the frames that we want at the highest levels of mind. And when we do that, we are able to access, create, and commission our executive levels. This brings about an inner alignment with ourselves so that all of our energies become focused like a laser beam. And that, by the way, describes the heart of the structure of genius. We can also take to layering into our state of mind-and-body the kind of resources that just perfectly textures our overall experience. Kind of like Design Engineering.

Since meta-states are everywhere and make up so much of the heart of the structure of experience developing awareness of the layering of thought upon thought, feeling upon feeling, state upon state develops our understanding of our experiences. Every meta-state sets another frame of reference for our thinking and feeling. As such it forms the very structure of how we give meaning to things. And that determines the games that we play in life.

This describes one of the other ways that we speak about meta-states-- Frame Games. You can see the "game" by observing behavior and listening to speech. The games that we play are all the actions and inter-actions that we engage in. The "frame" gives direction and meaning to the game. It includes all of the higher levels of mind about what we're doing, how, and why.

Meta-States-- Taking NLP to a Higher Level

Literally hundreds of NLP Trainers and Master Practitioners have commented that Meta-States has tied the entire NLP model together for them. They have said that in discovering Meta-States, it has given them the missing piece for how all of NLP works together. Using the Levels of Thought (or the Meta-States) Model has enabled them to more fully understand how many of the NLP patterns work so powerfully for changing things. Accordingly, we have re-ordered 30 of the basic NLP patterns using the Meta-States format. This has streamlined NLP in a way that many people didn't even think was possible.

And yet it does more. As you shall soon discover, because it provides a conscious understanding of the mechanisms of the mind, it opens up new domains for discovery and creativity. In the first four or five years, nearly 100 Meta-State Patterns were discovered, invented, and created. And there's no end in sight. Every week, practitioners and trainers are finding new and more exciting applications for Meta-States and using it to model even more complex human experiences.

In many of the other articles on this web site you will find descriptions of the Meta-States model-- some simple, others more advanced. Meta-States differs from traditional NLP in that it involves a much more systemic way of thinking. Instead of the more linear approach, as in the TOTE model of NLP strategies, Meta-States involves tracking "mind" around loops, backwards and forwards. It's truly a different way of thinking.

If you get lost in the process-- welcome to the Meta-Zone! It happens to us all. It's part of our heritage as a class of life that lives on symbols and that reflects back onto itself. Be patient and give it time, and I promise that new expansive worlds will open to you as it will bring you into the domain of Neuro-Semantics... that world of layered and textured meaning.

And when you enter there-- the magic really begins!

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