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“David Viscott “... live

Interview by Rev. Patrick J. Harbula

I have been a longtime listener of Dr. David Viscott's radio show, Getting in Touch. Sitting in the studio before our interview, I observed him counsel people calling in, crack jokes during breaks, instruct the switchboard personnel as to which calls were entertaining and pose for our cameras. He exhibited versatility as a caring therapist, efficient manager, entertainer, publicist and a man enjoying his success. At times, I wonder if Dr. Viscott's to-the-point, no-nonsense and sometimes-

opinionated approach create an unnecessary distance between himself and those he wishes to reach. At other times, I am in awe of his sensitivity and ability to connect with the essence of being. In any case, I am certain his motivation comes from the heart. His down-to-earth philosophy has inspired me to examine the ways in which I look outside myself to metaphysical forces, from a sense of insecurity in myself as an individual. This interview has humbled me in relation to judgments I have placed on others of being "nonmetaphysical." It has caused me to look within for my own power and helped me discover the richness that I possess and have to share. I hope this presentation is as helpful to you as it has been for me. —P.J.N.

Meditation Magazine: *You have written a book called The Viscott Method. Exactly what is your method and how does it differ from other psychiatric approaches?*

David Viscott: The only people who get better are people who get themselves better. In my experience treating people, I have found that until a person wants to get better all efforts to assist them are either wasted or consume so much of the therapist's time that the therapist is robbing other people who could benefit from their efforts. You can dedicate yourself to save one patient but what you do is make that patient dependent on you. A patient who is dependent on the therapist, even though the symptoms are gone, is a patient with another set of symptoms.

So, long ago I discovered some things about therapy that in a nutshell go like this: patients forget just about everything they tell you, they often lie and you can't tell when they are lying or telling the truth. The greatest force in your armamentarium is the patient's discomfort in hearing themselves lie. If people are good then it follows that they are going to feel discomfort at hearing themselves lie.

I had a patient who could not hear me. I could not get through to him so I decided to tape the session and said please play this back you're making me crazy. He came in the next week holding the tape between his thumb and forefingers and he said that he was crazy and he never saw it before. I told him, "Bravo! Now you're going to get better!" The first thing he had to overcome was his belief that he was okay. Underneath he was okay, but he didn't realize that he was not reflecting it in his behavior.

I decided to tape more sessions. I had a school teacher who taped the first session and cancelled three weeks in a row saying she had more to get out of it. She came in with about four hundred pages of notes on what she got out of the session and made more progress in two sessions than anyone I had ever seen.

This all evolved my thinking about this phenomena in a very interesting way in which I developed a method which exists now as the Viscott Institute, where I train therapists in this method. When I do therapy, my sessions are two hours long and are tape recorded. The patient takes the tape home, replays the tape using the workbook which guides the patient through the process of becoming more honest in hearing themselves and correcting the lies, seeing what they



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have forgotten, seeing their distortions and what their defenses or avoiding style is and how to make compensation for that avoiding style. When people hear the tape they realize they haven't been forthright, which is what is required to be happy. For example all mental health is learning how to mourn properly the losses that all people are heir to. The defenses that get between you and the loss — while they may protect you from absorbing the full compass of the hurt — will — if you persist in being hurt after the loss — translate into anger. The anger loses its attachment to reality and seems irrational to other people. Therefore, it leaves you feeling alienated from the world because no one understands your plight.

I once saw a man chasing a bus; the bus driver slammed the door in his face. The man stood on the corner as the traffic was moving. He was screaming and yelling and everyone understood. But as a new line of traffic came into place, the drivers hadn't seen the event that caused him to be screaming and yelling, so he seemed like a crazy person. That change of events is the exact picture of what happens in mental health. You lose contact with the thing that injured you and try to explain yourself to another person, who cannot for the life of them comprehend why you are in such pain. The other person will, therefore, deny that they hurt you or intended to hurt you and will suggest that you are too sensitive or you exaggerate. What you have to do is be more contemporaneous with your expression of hurt. Make it relate to the specific incident.

Through replaying of the two hour tape, the Viscott method helps the patients develop a sense of themselves as a force that they are in control of. I think psychiatry, therapy, should be devoted to people being better people — that's what I believe. To be a better person means to be more forthright about speaking your feelings, to be more sharing, more communicative and more loving.

In radio therapy I find myself handicapped by the fact that people are able to present a false facade which has to be cracked through. I am very good at cracking through that facade because of my radio and television experience. The average psychiatrist takes a lot of time to do that because he has a lot of time to do that. Very often they don't do it because they see their point of entry and instead of acting on it they look for another point of evidence to justify making the statement and then they collect about three or four of them. Then they go to tell the patient what's wrong by saying, "Remember when you did such and such... and you did such and such?" Meanwhile they're trying to fit it all together into some theory that encompasses it and explains it and gives them the credential for making the comment. The patient hears it and it's so intellectualized he/she can't integrate it into making a positive change.

I believe a therapist should be centered, at peace with himself, comfortable with speaking the truth, open, honest and free to express feelings about the situation with a simplicity that is a work of art. Therefore a patient should have the benefit of a therapist's immediate response, one way they learn to respond in life is by seeing the therapist respond to them. Therefore I say, "Boy, you sound hurt."

I don't say, "I wonder how you feel about a thing like this?"

"Well, I feel fine."

"Well, it seems to me, perhaps, that what you're really feeling might, not be fine but something else. Do you want to try to look at that?"

"No, I'm fine."

"Well, I feel a resistance to my question."

Instead of, "Boy, you sound hurt! Deal with that."

"No, I'm not."

"Then why do I feel you are?"

MM: *So you use your own feelings as a feedback for the patient?*

DV: That's the best there is.

MM: *You use a lot of metaphysical techniques in your therapy; I've heard you quote the Bhagavad Gita and offer techniques such as repeating "I AM"...*

DV: Oh, don't give me that crap. Metaphysical direction is a crippling force to the person who sees it as an end rather than as a tool. The problem is many people become attracted to a metaphysical life because of a lack of personal power. They want to believe they will be picked up by a spaceship and given special audience. The fact is people who have been picked up by

space ships — such as Betty Hill whom I have interviewed — don't want to ever be near them again. We all have a capacity for paranoid grandiose thinking. The belief that something is going to give us the key to power that will unlock our minds and make us supermen is a dream. When it is directed toward peace and love, it is a harmless dream, because it gives you courage just like religion. When directed toward the wrong thing that dream becomes the dark force which is capable of world war and of the belief that you are better than the bag lady you just passed. You and the bag lady are the same person. We are all the same person — we are just one energy force or energy field. You can call that metaphysical if you want but I think you do it a great disservice.

The fact is we are the life form. We exist as the life form and therefore WE ARE — period.

Metaphysical experiences are not *metaphysical*, they are part of nature. To encapsulate them under a spooky connotation gives rise to a whole level of perception suggesting that people can rise 'to great heights through artificial means. What greater heights are there than the *Jupiter* symphony? Give me a break. What greater heights are there than Schubert writing *Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel* when he was sixteen years old? Come on, that's the height — art is the height.

The creative spirit is the direct channeling of the highest self into pure sensory representation. Monet sees the aura around the hay stack, not an aura, his eye was so quick he saw the way light happened. Rembrandt was so fast with his line that if you take a look at his etchings with people in the crowds, they all have facial expressions that are telling. He captures the telling detail of the soul in a line. Someone else hears it in a line. The noblest, highest experience that a person can ever attain is in an art form.

If you sit and go into an autohypnotic state and convince yourself that's the end of the world, you've missed the point of creation of the world. You're here to continue the creation. If you gain strength through the power of meditation which is the ability to put yourself behind your perceptions and in front of your abilities then it can be a useful tool.

What are we talking about? We're talking about the miracle itself. Life is the miracle and we're all part of it! Why make a big deal of it? I mean, celebrate it... and let's get the economy under control. Let's wipe out diseases and go to work. But to sit cross-legged saying you're saving the world is nonsense. To listen to some of these people talk is just an absurdity. They talk about high energy physics and complicated equations with such intellectualization that they have no value or relationship to the world. It's no better than the physicists at JPL who think we can dispose of nuclear Waste in a safe manner. World safety is the question. Breaking of the ozone is the question. Heating up of the environment, the greenhouse effect is the question. Keeping people safe from harm is the question... revamping of the educational system, the bringing out the highest self in each person by discovering the gift that they were born with.

MM: *Many people tend to see the soul as something lofty, distant or even something to attain. In your work, you have a way of talking to a person's higher self and making it available in the present.*

DV: I AM. *I am my higher self is what we need to realize.*

MM: *You say many people are attracted to metaphysics because of a lack of personal power. Exactly what do you mean by personal power?*

DV: Personal power is your understanding that no matter what situation you will be in, you will work it out.

MM: *So, how would you advise people to develop personal power who recognize in themselves a lack?*

DV: What people do in most situations is to develop a neurotic attachment to cults, become reborn Christians or become involved in esoteric things. If you carry a crystal in your pocket and say it empowers you to be strong, you're just kidding yourself. It's you who is being strong. If you take an antidepressant and say it allows you to write your novel, how come it doesn't allow the other lady down the street to do anything more than to sweep her floor?

You empower yourself by a belief in yourself. You reinforce your belief in yourself by acting on that belief. You act on that belief by following the simple command "I love." And, you fill your life with things that you love to do. There is nothing more and anything less is unfulfilling. Your love for a tiny detail can fill your whole life but it has to be your own creation.

MM: *Your new book I Love You Let's Work It Out, talks about partners speaking to each other's inner voice.*

DV: The higher self. We wanted to make that as unmetaphysical as possible because we didn't want to lose the people who need to know. The people that you talk to already know. What they don't know is that they don't know enough. The work is what's important, not the thinking about the work.

The fact is that *you* are the gift. If you don't give yourself, then you have wasted your life. You can change anytime you decide your life has another meaning. Until you give that meaning, your life is empty.

I think people get lost. I think there hasn't been any leadership in this country for years. What leadership there has been has been faulty. We need one world and that's what we all need to work toward. But you can't work toward it by being namby-pamby and sitting in a hot spa to leave your body. I mean... come on. And anyone who believes that stuff has a lack of personal power and is trying to get it somewhere.

Your personal power is the power to say the words "I AM." Then you follow that with the truth. I am... happy. I am... unhappy. What are you unhappy about?

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--which is the ability to put yourself behind
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--then it can be a useful tool.*

"I am unhappy about the way I am being treated."

By whom? Tell them. What else is there?

"I am unhappy with my life." Change it.

"I am unhappy with my job." Change it.

"I am unhappy with who I am? Grow. People don't change. They just grow into their higher selves.

MM: *Why do you think this country hasn't had effective leadership in years?*

DV: The problem with the leadership in this country is that it is all by politicians.

MM: *What are some of the changes you see as crucial for our country at this time?*

DV: What every sensible person sees in their heart. With notable exception of psychotics and vengeful jerks, if you were simply to say to people, "You have twelve hours to sit down and write your list of the changes you want to have happen in your community or your country," everyone would have the same list.

And the list would go like this: A stable economic system that provides jobs, fair employment, and equal access to the resources of the world. A good education for all children with a focus on helping children discover their gifts at the earliest possible age and getting them trained to their fullest development and support. A system of justice that is fair and speedy. A system of imprisonment and correction that is in fact corrective. A medical outreach that addresses — without prejudice or policies, you know just what I am talking about — all the diseases of mankind and seeks to eradicate them as a top priority. An excellent health care system, with regulation and maintenance of standards that approximates the highest ideals. The development of a world watch system that detects changes in climate and plans for mass evacuations ahead of what a person experiences: as the Sahara moves south three miles a year, change the way it moves by erecting a barrier at a certain point and building a forest at the verge. The Sahara was once all fertile farm land.

A system of government that does as much to preserve these activities as possible. Leadership that is chosen to inspire people to do the work, because no leader ever did the work. What leader ever did what they were elected for? We do the work. I get up and write the books. You do too. They don't do nothing. As I was watching senator last night — live Doonesbury as I see it — I was thinking of the guy on the campaign trail who sounded so different than the benign guy he is

now, completely ineffectual. Something happens when you get elected and go to Washington. You lose touch with something. You smell the power and get intoxicated by it. Finally, the maintenance of the world as a giant park. It's beautiful you know, the planet. And that requires being of the world, not believing that there are UFOs or that there is another power or that you have access to some secret books of wisdom. It's all in your own soul.

You are put here as God. You are God. Everyone as a conglomerate is the force. All of us are all knowing. We know about all of us in our consciousness. We are all doing. We are all powerful. We are the world. We are God. Nothing else fits the description except all of us. Therefore God must be the energy of life that lives in all things. The whole metaphysical plane that people try to aspire to is often a way of avoiding the problems of one's life. If your life is in chaos, change your life.

You don't have to gain the strength from metaphysics. You gain the strength from belief in yourself. You need to know you are part of the whole energy system. But that doesn't mean that it is religious or metaphysical — it just is.

As for people being psychic, everybody is psychic. So what is the big deal? Stop trying to isolate it. It's a big competitive game. I have these powers, you don't — that's what some of these people tell you. We all have these powers! How do you develop them? I know lots of astrologers and psychics and that sort of thing. The really good ones tell you the truth. You got to do all the work yourself.

MM: *There are plenty of people out there who are in jobs they hate. I'm sure you run across this all the time. What exercises can people do to begin to fulfill their visions or share their gifts with the world?*

DV: The best exercise I know for this is one I came up with on the air the other day. All you need is a wall, some three by five cards and some scotch tape. You write the two words *I LOVE* and you put them up on the wall. Then on the cards, in big black letters, you write whatever it is you love and keep on filling it out. If you see anything similar one thing to another, group them together. After about three or four hours you have a wall filled with things you love. Leave that up. See how many things you love can fit into one category. Then you think *achievement, protection, maintenance, education* and you group them together. Then you have goals, and you work at those goals. Whatever you love you will do well. Genius has been described as unflagging attention to detail.

MM: *How would you describe the dynamic of risking?*

DV: It's very simple. Imagine you are on a narrow road. In front of you is a truck that contains a Gypsy family. You're in a high wind and they have all their belongings piled up in back. A mattress is getting loose. Sooner or later it's going to come off, you just know it. You cannot drive your best because of the distraction. So you are in a position of dangerousness. One, you are not doing your best work and, two, the truck may dump all over the place at any moment. All

of a sudden you notice the truck is swerving a little bit and you figure out that maybe the heater in the truck doesn't work and the operator is using a substance to keep warm. You gotta pass. You got to get the hell out of there. The road is narrow. You're looking for your spot. *First* you have to decide that you're in a position that you don't want to be in. *Second* you have to commit to the decision to get out of there. *Third* you have to make a plan. You're looking for a spot on the road that is straight, that's clear, and you want to make your intentions known. You pull in the other lane chit to see whether it is clear. Then you realize, "Wait a second... at higher speeds it's going to be more dangerous. The road is wet. I have to be going in a straight line. I don't want to do anything stupid, but I'm going to be more scared at that speed." So, you have to wait until you find a place where you feel the most amount of comfort. That may be far ahead. When the chance comes you signal the driver, drop the hammer to the floor and give it everything there is to give. Then you realize there is a point of no return. At that point you go for it. You cut in and somehow get in.

In every risk there is a loss. There is a loss of safety, a loss of complacency, of false belief that you're okay where you are. There may be a loss of apartment... the threat of loss of children in divorce. There may be the insecurity of knowing if someone really loves you when you're opening up. There may be the threat that the other person may not give you the raise. But, in order to do anything, you must take a risk. All I say is be aware of the loss involved, because a risk is not a step — it's a leap. Both feet are off the ground at the same time. You recommitted to land right side up and flying, and you plan to cope with your own insecurity. You plan to cope with your own confusion. And you make your plan flexible in case all of a sudden another car comes Out of the other way. So it is in life and the people who don't risk don't grow.

MM: *Tell us more about your new book.*

DV: The new book is about learning to be alone together. So that the other person's presence doesn't interfere with your consciousness. It is written at as many levels as you care to go. It is the deepest book ever written about relationships form a metaphysical point of view, from a psychological point of view and from a simple organizational point of view.

MM: *If refers to committing to your partner and to yourself. Would you elaborate for our readers on commitment?*

DV: A relationship that is not committed is not a relationship. It's a lie.

MM: *I assume you're not speaking of a commitment in time.*

DV: I mean you're there. You're a couple — that's it, until you decide not to be a couple. If you don't commit it's the issue you always discuss. It's the first issue the last issue and the next issue. But once you commit you are free. Until you commit you're not. Many men have a strange habit of believing that if they commit to a woman they're trapped. The fact of the matter is if you commit to the right person you are free, because now you can put your energy elsewhere.

MM: *David, is there anything else you would like to say to our readers?*

DV: I am a friend to people who are interested in metaphysics — but don't get lost in it. There is more to life than thinking about life. It's called *LIVING*.

DAVID VISCOTT is the host of “Getting in Touch.” a popular radio program on the ABC Talk radio Network. His revolutionary short-term psychotherapy method is practiced at The Viscott Institute in Sherman Oaks California. He is the author of several best-selling and highly praised books, including “How to Live with Another Person,” “The Language of Feelings,” “Risking,” and “The Making of a Psychiatrist,” which was a National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize nominee.