

EMDR with Ann Chavez

I have recently completed a series of eight sessions of Eye Movement Desensitization and Retraining (EMDR) with Ann Chavez. I found the time to be well spent. Both Ann and EMDR exceeded my expectations.

Ann was kind and considerate. She seems well trained in the practice of EMDR. She confidently guided me through this process with sureness and grace. I feel that she was a good steward of my vulnerabilities and hopes.

I had not done EMDR before and while I had read about it and had it strongly recommended to me by a close friend I did not really know what to expect.

In my first session with Ann she asked me to choose a recent and somewhat unimportant experience that I wished had gone differently, something that while no great matter had room for my feelings and behavior to change so that I could feel better about both.

I chose an unpleasant event that had just occurred: the driver who brought me to my meeting with Ann had talked nonstop for an hour (the duration of the drive) about his personal problems and resentments. I had felt trapped listening to him. I felt that I could either tell him to stop, which would make him angry, or just put up with an unpleasant situation that there was no easy way out of. What I did was pretend to fall asleep. I withdrew from the situation, felt powerless to handle it better, resentful of my driver, and dreaded the drive home. It was not a great big deal but it turned out to be an excellent item for me to begin learning about EMDR.

Ann instructed me to place my hands flat on the desk between us and recall all the feelings and any bodily sensations that I might associate with this event. She and I together chose an object I would direct my gaze toward: an opal set in a ring she was wearing. She instructed me to hold my head still and follow with my gaze the opal as she moved it back and forth while gently tapping the backs of my hands. So she tapped my hands as she moved the opal back and forth and I followed the opal with my eyes while recalling the situation in the car. It seemed nonsensical as we did this but I went along with her. And as she tapped me and moved the opal before me the intensity of my feelings about the driver diminished. In just a minute or two I could no longer feel much at all about that situation. What Ann and I were doing together still didn't seem to make much sense. I really did not believe much of value was happening for me and we wrapped up the session at this point.

Much to my surprise I spent the hour-long drive home enjoying a conversation with that same driver about his experiences working with racehorses. It was as if he was a different person. In fact, it was I who had changed. These results were not what I had expected. They were better but I did not fully understand them yet. I needed to think all this over for a few days to better understand my EMDR session. One of the big problems for me was trusting the reality of the changes in me. It seemed too simple and too quick to be real. I settled on trusting what had happened with the qualifier that I would have to talk things over with Ann.

This first EMDR session and its aftermath were typical of the following sessions except for the depth and scope of what Ann and I dealt with. I had, as instructed, chosen a somewhat trivial matter for this first session. The sessions that followed were anything but trivial. I worked on problems that had bothered me since I was four years old. I worked on matters that preceded my ability to use words. I clearly recalled my experience as a newborn less than an hour old. In each of these it took me time to recognize what I was recalling. I did not immediately understand my memories and Ann did not coach me. I can only say that my memories were real and in each case the changes in me were also real and immediate.

I have the sense that a fabric of beliefs and expectations within me that I had not been able to change was being teased apart and rewoven into a new fabric that would serve me better. I feel that I am better able to meet the present as I carry less of my patterns into it.

These sessions were not effortless. I often cried during them and I felt worn out afterwards. Am I all better? Of course not. There is much more for me to learn about myself. But I am more flexible and happier than I was.