

The Path of Mastery by Judith Lowe

This summer, at long last, I made it to Vinci. Yes, *that* Vinci where Leonardo grew up. In the castle which looks out over gentle Tuscan hills, green with olive groves and vines, there's a dedicated museum with some astonishing exhibits. There are flying machines, a 'car', clocks, and all kinds of contraptions which work by clever and innovative use of screws, levers, gears and pulleys. Shown alongside are Leonardo's extraordinary, intricate technical drawings – multi-perspective, zoom-to-detail, his famous backward-slanting mirror-writing with his explanatory notes about design and dynamics. These are the machines, now built for real, he dreamed of five hundred years ago.

Leonardo the genius, the insatiably curious 'renaissance' person was a key figure in the history of science, technology and the arts. He didn't just theorise, he observed nature, he painstakingly drew what he saw, he asked questions, he built futuristic solutions from experiential data. He never stopped learning, designing, perfecting, - an accomplished musician, a genius painter, a 'fashionista' with his clothes and appearance - he seems to have been intrigued by just about everything.

We look to people like Leonardo as outstanding examples of genius and achievement. They act as sources of inspiration and as models of human excellence. They remind us of the vast potential of our abilities – we too can fly.

NLP is a strange and marvellous field – and in my twenty years of study and practice - I would have to say full of strange and marvellous people too. For a start, what did they think they were doing, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, all those years ago on a west coast campus? How outrageous of them not to theorise, not to rationalise and analyse but just jump in and do! How irresponsible and unregulated!

'All our knowledge has its origins in our perceptions' says Leonardo. The early NLPers, the pioneers, were relentless in their observations, actions, experimentation/play and testing in their work. Techniques and metaphors were created and then abandoned in favour of ever more refined and integrated ones. New models and categories were added and sometimes held in controversy over decades. Diverse sub-cultures appeared and championed particular approaches – like Darwin's finches on neighbouring islands. But still the focus was on 'does it work?' and 'is it useful?', 'how do you know?' and 'what can you see, feel, hear?'

'The knowledge of all things is possible' says Leonardo – and these people seemed not to know when to stop! How do people who are happy, successful, creative, etc. do it? What are they doing and how are they thinking? Can we actually learn these skills? Is it really *possible* to cure a phobia in a few minutes – let's find out.

Mastery in NLP

What does it mean to you to say that you are a Practitioner of NLP? What should we expect of ourselves and each other in this sometimes derided and mainly unacknowledged field – that still has so much to offer the world?

For me, like the competition scoring for dance-like sports, there's a combination of 'technical merit' and 'artistic interpretation'. There's lots of technical aspects – behavioural, linguistic, cognitive, etc... and then there's making your work inspiring, joyous... beautiful even.

And supporting this are the deeper living-system issues of wisdom, resilience, compassion, learning and play. It's these issues of attitude, of integration and of relational and social awareness that seem to me to be key to bringing depth and humanity to your practice.

Learning NLP is more than a bunch of techniques, learnt from someone who learnt them from someone. It's an invitation to jump back into life, to see things fresh, have new, rich, strange, unlabelled experiences. It's a chance to take up unusual perspectives, put things together in surprising ways, finding extraordinary possibilities in yourself and others.

It's also an opportunity, through enriching and deepening our knowledge and experience, to link up our achievements to the wider, world conversations – about mind-body consciousness, human functioning and evolution. We are part of that leading-edge symposium on emotions, neurophysiology and change – and have a place, maybe not yet, at the right hand side of the Dalai Lama - tho hey, why not?

I want us to be demonstrating that we have a contribution to make to the bigger picture too - to world justice and peace and the care of our 'little garden-planet, oasis in space' and our fellow creatures.

So.. Mastery in NLP?

Let's make fantastical new models of extraordinary human abilities. Let's not mind if we smudge the margins of our notebooks or occasionally make things that won't quite get off the ground.

Leonardo saw leaves and how they moved, he saw water and clouds. He looked deeply into the workings of the human body...peeling back the skin, identifying the nerves, the organs, the bones. He had strange, new thoughts about how things might be. Maybe you could emboss silk like this, maybe water could be made to flow this way, maybe you could get these effects in painting and frighten people, seduce them even?

Looking across the Tuscan hills, it's almost obvious how the Renaissance artists would have had to 'discover' perspective. So many vistas, unfolding before your eyes hinting at secret places and destinations - so much meaning in the play of light and shadow, near and far. So many stories to tell.

To become a master, learn more about seeing, about your body and movement, about language and how to speak. Get excited about yourself and your own potential for genius, enjoy sponsoring and discovering more about others. Be a scientist, be an artist...look so carefully at a dragonfly that, although stunned by its beauty, you invent the helicopter!

'For in truth great love is born of great knowledge of the thing loved.' Leonardo da Vinci

Judith Lowe
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Further Reading:

Strategies of Genius Vol III (Freud, Leonardo, Tesla) by Robert Dilts
Turtles All the Way Down by John Grinder and Judith DeLozier
Whispering in the Wind by John Grinder and Carmen Bostic St Clair
How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci by Michael Gelb
Steps to an Ecology of Mind by Gregory Bateson