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Repetition and Incomplete Mourning: The Intergenerational Transmission of Traumatic Themes

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This article addresses the tension in character development between the compulsion to repeat and the urge toward growth, between adhering to the old and pushing toward the new. Specifically, it is suggested that the successful interchange of giving and receiving with the previous generation enables the child to move onward with good conscience. When this interchange breaks down, it may become fixed around a traumatic theme. Identification with the parental aggressor of the traumatic theme may then become the source for a characterological immersion in the compulsion to repeat. The intergenerational transmission of one's traumatic themes to one's children is viewed as a manifestation of the identification with the aggressor and is contrasted with the process of mourning one's one and only childhood. Mourning is viewed as a process of reintegrating repressed wishes for "what could have been." This reintegration, in turn, enables one to relinquish the necessity that those wishes be fulfilled, and makes it possible to give a better life to one's children.

In clinical practice, we see many patients who, at one time or another, had sworn to themselves never to repeat the hated behavior of a parent, yet nevertheless somehow find themselves doing just that in their interactions with their own children. Why would a parent call her children stupid over and over again, knowing how it felt when it was done to her? Why would a father consistently break small promises to his child, if he could not tolerate it when his own father had done that to him? In my view, much of emotional misery—and the misery transmitted from one generation to the next—comes from being untrue to one's own suffering in this way. Looked at simply, without jargon or theoretical rationalization, there is a mystery in parents transmitting to their beloved children the most despised features of their own childhood.

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I believe that this sort of identification with the aggressor is the central vehicle by which the chronic disillusionments or "traumatic themes" (Shabad, 1988, 1989b) of one's own childhood are forsaken and supplanted by a stringently narrowed vision of adulthood. This vision of adulthood is unconsciously dictated by the imperative of undoing one's prior disillusionments. Against the relatively circumscribed backdrop of one's private experiences of helplessness and disillusionment, character development thus unfolds by reducing the field of potential destinies to one determined by the compulsive quest to master one's own past through a magical undoing. However, because this fantasied unconscious quest to undo one's disillusionments is never realized, it is endlessly repeated.

It is, I believe, the reliance on this narrowing function of repetition that Becker (1973) had in mind when he referred to character as a "vital lie": vital, because by defensively immersing oneself in the secure familiarity of the repeated, one may insulate oneself from anxiety sufficiently to go on living; a lie, because to buy one's way into the security of repetition, one must repress the wishes, truths, ideals, and possibilities that are at the heart of one's psychic growth. Yet it is precisely these forgotten wishes and inner truths that would enable one to transcend the intergenerational cycle of reenacting one's traumatic themes and to generate a better life for one's children.

It is in this light that I believe it is important to consider the concept of mourning. What I mean by mourning here is not so much a close emotional encounter with what one has lost (although this is certainly an integral part of the mourning process) but a reintegrative experience—specifically, a reintegration of unconscious wishes that had been disowned because of their painful links with the chronic disillusionment specific to one's traumatic theme(s). It is through consciously reclaiming and elaborating on previously unconscious wishes to undo the traumatic theme that one is also able to gain access to a vision of one's ideal childhood and, in so doing, open up with renewed hope to the possibilities of a less circumscribed life for oneself and one's children.

Here, then, is the basic theme of the article: At one and the same time that a person uses the defensive dynamic of identification with the aggressor to anchor his or her identity in the security of repetition, there is also an upward and outward pressure to bring essential unconscious wishes to realized and expressive life for the purpose of furthering individual growth.

AMBIVALENCE AND THE GIVE-AND-TAKE OF DEVELOPMENT

Human development is fraught with contradictory urges: impulses to advance individual growth toward the new and impulses to link back with the solidity of the familiar. Discussing the preoedipal era, Mahler, Pine, and Bergman (1975) observed how in the practicing subphase of the separation-individuation

process, the infant's forays away from the mother are punctuated by periods of "emotional refueling" where bodily contact with the other is sought and reestablished. Later, during the rapprochement subphase, the authors further observed how the child may dart away from the mother only to wait for her to swoop him or her up in her arms and momentarily undo the separateness.

The Oedipus complex, too, captures the ambivalence of development, especially with reference to intergenerational issues. On the one hand, the small boy wishes to escape his childhood helplessness through fantasies in which he is the grand architect of his own life and destiny; at the same time, however, he wishes also to be a humble creature who is protected and taken care of by his parents. The psychic tension between creating one's own solitary path separate from the previous generation and simultaneously adhering to the previous generation via repetition is brought into bold relief when we consider the Oedipus complex as an oedipal project whose aim is *causa-sui*—self-creation (Brown, 1959).

According to Brown, a primary aim of the *causa-sui* fantasy is to turn the helplessness of being a small, mortal creature into the active potency of a Godlike creator by becoming father to oneself. Freud was alert to this view of the Oedipus complex; in speaking of the small boy, he wrote: "All his instincts, those of tenderness, gratitude, lustfulness, defiance and independence, find satisfaction in the wish *to be his own father*" (Freud, 1910, p. 173).

In the *causa-sui* version of the oedipal drama, the boy casts himself as *both* father and son. As father, the boy imagines impregnating the mother in order to be creator of his own life. In this illusion of self-manufactured oedipal victory, we see the narcissistic fantasy, par excellence: a fantasy in which the young boy envisions himself as a self-perpetuating Superman who seemingly does not need the cycle of succeeding generations to transcend the limitations of his mortal body.

However, as Oedipus and countless other, prior and subsequent oedipal victors have learned, there is a boomeranging price to be paid for the self-deceiving hubris of oedipal victory. Although a child may be full of grandiose pride for usurping his father's role as creator and thereby becoming fantasied father to himself, the child also experiences a frightening solitariness in being prematurely evicted from the secure embeddedness of being only a son in a cycle of generations. The forsaking of one's "humble origins" thus may bring with it an anxiety-filled discovery that it is "lonely at the top," that the burden of responsibility for being a would-be creator (father) of one's own life can be a heavy one. The boomerang here is that what the boy now idealizes and yearns for is precisely what he has denied in himself: to be a son who is firmly fastened under the protective umbrella of past generations. Indeed, one might argue that the prohibition against transgressing the oedipal taboo would not be as potent as it is, if it were not buttressed by a parallel longing to yield oneself to the moral traditions of one's fathers.

The discovery of one's limitations through these longings for a father is a

humbling one. Because one owes one's existence to powers greater than oneself, there is much anxiety in emerging as a separate individual out from under the shield offered by those parental powers. The anxiety of this emergent solitude, in turn, contributes to a "survivor guilt," for developing and ascending over the decline of the previous generation.

Here, guilt has the function of ensuring that one does not just internalize the love or life-giving powers of one's parent without a glance backward. Indeed, such guilt spurs a sense of indebtedness which is manifested in the urge to give back something of oneself to the previous generation. The parental acceptance of these offerings enables a child to link back with his or her roots, thus alleviating the anxiety and guilt about becoming a solitary individual.

From this point of view, development proceeds not only by way of the oscillating rhythms of regression and progression, but also along a dimension of give-and-take with the previous generation. And just as under ideal developmental circumstances, the movement of progression is, in actuality, indistinguishable from regression in the service of the ego, so it is often not easy to differentiate who is giving and who is receiving between parent and child.

For example, when we think of *unconditional acceptance,* we think of it as something that a child receives from his or her parents. However, at the same time that the child receives such acceptance, he or she is also being accepted by or received by the parents as a sort of "gift from heaven."

We often think of narcissistic adults as individuals who have "developmental deficits," people who are "empty" because they have not received enough early "mirroring" (Kohut, 1977). However, such persons also feel often that they have not been recognized or received as treasured gifts in and of themselves, but rather exploited as disposable objects. Mirroring itself may be said to be a process of simultaneous giving and receiving.

When viewing the developmental process from this perspective of giving and receiving, one realizes how essential the parents' capacity to receive their children's offerings is, to the development of healthy narcissism. Winnicott (1954–1955/1975) pointed out that there is no true receiving without the first giving of infant to mother. When a parent is able to give and to receive graciously the offerings of a child, it may create a developmental flexibility and dynamism which enables the child to move closer to and further away from the parent.

The rhythms of progression–regression and giving–receiving may be thus fundamentally interwoven in ways that propel the developmental process forward. One might hypothesize, for example, that the hard-earned products and accomplishments of the progressive phase of the developmental process (first bowel movements, grades in school, career successes) derive much of their value from being trophies that are brought home during the regressive phase of the process and offered as gifts to parents and/or their transferential surrogates; the subsequent parental acceptance of these gifts enables children to

internalize the emotional fuel necessary to move forward once again with some degree of equanimity. In leaving a piece of themselves behind, children are able to anchor themselves securely in time and place, thus reducing the anxiety of separateness and the guilt for leaving loved ones behind. Fairbairn (1941/1954) stated that the parents' acceptance of their child's love enables the child to "renounce infantile dependence without misgiving" (p. 39). And Winnicott (1954–1955/1975) emphasized that "the small child must go on having a chance to give in relation to guilt belonging to instinctual experience, because this is the way of growth" (p. 271).

There are individuals, for example, who can neither get too close nor stray too far from their parents, but who, instead, hover around them, as if frozen in place. Although such individuals may live in close physical proximity to their parents—and even may see their parents a great deal—there is very little interchange of genuine emotion. Because these parents accept very little of what their children have to offer, and the children, in turn, take in little from their parents, such children lack the emotional fuel with which to move away from the parents. Instead, such individuals become caught on a treadmill of dependency, as if waiting for some signal or recognition before proceeding onward with their lives.

THE TRAUMATIC THEME AND THE REPEATED IDENTIFICATION WITH THE AGGRESSOR

A child's wish in giving something good and receiving something good from a parent can be frustrated indefinitely in a variety of ways. In other writings I have described these repeated modes of frustration as *traumatic themes* (Shabad, 1989b). The traumatic theme is a chronic pattern of frustrating childhood experiences suffered at the hands of significant others, which, when repeated day after day over a number of years, may cumulatively take on the emotional significance of a trauma. A parent's moody silences, petty criticisms, persistent intrusiveness, to mention a few examples, may all come to constitute traumatic themes of varying severity.

The chronicity of the traumatic theme derives from the unmourned and, therefore, repeated aspects of the parent's history that have become entrenched in the parent's character and are continually enacted on the child; the helplessness engendered by the traumatic theme derives from the child's continued incapacity to change the parent into a wished-for figure. As such, the traumatic theme is a gradually evolving blueprint of helplessness and disenchantment before the powers of fate, as personified by one's parents and as uniquely fashioned by one's developmental history.

Elsewhere, I have drawn a parallel between the traumatic theme and the psychic loss of a physically present parent (Shabad, 1989b). Such psychic loss

is not the actual physical loss of a parent, but an intangible subjective sense of loss concerning the hopes, illusions, and ideals one has in regard to that parent. The traumatic theme may be seen as a source of chronic disillusionment, a continuing deflation and enduring loss of the child's hope for a satisfying relationship with the parent.

We frequently encounter patients who tell us about the caretaking heroics of their depressed mothers: women who were able, more or less, to sublimate their masochism in the generous deeds of self-sacrificing motherhood, but who did not allow themselves to receive or enjoy the offerings of love from their children. And yet the mother's acceptance of the child's gifts is precisely the toll that must be paid in order for the child to separate from her with secure and good conscience. In such circumstances, when a gift of the child's does not seem to be sufficient to alleviate the mother's depression in any kind of lasting way, the child may feel an increasing paradoxical pressure to give up more of himself or herself to extricate himself or herself from the mother's unhappy state. In Winnicott's (1960/1965) language, we might say that the mother's depression is an "impingement" which the child reacts to by forming a caretaker false self that has the aim of filling the mother's needs, at greater and greater cost to the unfolding truth of the child's own "spontaneous gesture."

At some point, the child, adolescent, or adult may conclude that the emotional cost of putting forth a continuing effort to have his or her offerings accepted by the mother is far too high. This may then result in a problematic either–or dichotomy between (a) an all-consuming identification with the mother's depression in which the child gives all of himself or herself away and (b) a narcissistically self-enclosed isolation in which the child consciously attempts to disengage himself or herself from the parent.

Here, the chronic sense of loss inherent in the traumatic theme may accentuate the child's sense of helplessness to such a degree as to stimulate defensive *causa-sui* attempts to "reinvent" an identity for himself or herself that is disengaged from the frustrating parent(s). A child may seek, thus, to deny the significance of the frustrating parental relationship and any sense of indebtedness to that parent and, ultimately, to repress wishes for some sort of reconciliation with the parent. The emotional isolation of the psychic loss experience thus may be compounded by the defensive determination to force one's own cherished wishes and their accompanying fantasies underground to live a buried life in the unconscious. However, it is just when one represses the wishes to reconcile with and embed oneself in the previous generation that those unconscious wishes "return from the repressed" with an all-consuming vengeance.

The return of this repressed aim of reconciliation may become manifested in the form of an imitative repetition of the parent from whom one feels alienated. Here, for example, a daughter may attempt to offer a gift of herself to her unhappy mother by unconsciously inhibiting the pleasures of her own

life. The daughter may thus select a man for herself who will treat her no better than her father always treated her mother. The theme of a child self-sacrificially joining a parent in his or her misery by repetitiously duplicating the parent's behavior is encountered frequently in clinical practice.

I see a 42-year-old Jewish man who presented with anxiety and insomnia that worsened on the Sunday nights before he was to become, in his words, a "faceless bureaucrat" on Monday morning. As an only child, he had felt extremely catered to by his mother. His childhood fears of independence—his fear of going to camp, his returning home frequently from college—may be viewed as his attempt to repay his mother by forming a dependent false self that had the function of catering to her need to be needed. At the cost of being called a "nebbish" and "mama's boy" by his father, the patient sacrificed many boyhood initiatives and autonomous pleasures to enhance his mother's sense of her irreplaceability to him.

Indeed, as an adult, the patient believes only a supreme gift of immense professional success and fame would be sufficient to repay her for her past ministrations—and sufficient to buy himself free of her. However, this gift of professional success continues to elude him, in large part because he feels compelled to make an equally profound offering to his father to repair the imagined rift caused by the oedipally victorious closeness to his mother.

For this patient, the little boy's *causa-sui* fantasy of being father to himself had come to some fruition in oedipal victory. It is only in middle age, as he searches to root himself concretely in an interpersonal matrix of community and generational continuity, that he has come to discover belatedly that the cost of such oedipal victory was an alienation from his previously devalued father.

Because the patient's father failed at many jobs, the patient's reparative gift to him has taken the form of a work inhibition. In this way, the patient can, in identificatory fantasy, keep his father company in his downtrodden state of professional and oedipal failure and heal the rift between them.

Freud (1917) pointed out that a person turns with harsh rebukes upon himself or herself to protect against the full realization of loss. Rochlin (1965) noted that superego attacks on the self may be a means of defensively warding off a sense of abandonment.

In attempting to adapt to a parent's characterological faults, the introjection of sadomasochistic interactions with the parent corresponding to the experiences of one's traumatic theme(s) may be a relational substitute that is preferable to a more desolate, solitary encounter with a parent who seems silently and immutably unresponsive to one's efforts and wishes. The introjection of an actual frustrating relationship with a parent seems to provide a more secure foundation for the development of one's identity than the longing for the actualization of an ideal relationship that never seems to materialize.

It is well to remember here Freud's (1911) observation that the infant "treats internal unpleasurable stimuli as if they were external" (p. 220). Many

years later, he described a tendency "to separate from the ego everything that can become a source of such unpleasure, to throw it outside and to create a pure pleasure-ego which is confronted by a strange and threatening 'outside' " (Freud, 1930, p. 67).

Loewald's (1962) view that parental introjects shift in degree of internalization between a deep ego core and the periphery of an intrapsychic space—or what Loewald called the "ego system"—dovetails nicely with Freud's view of the ego's tendency to distance itself from unpleasure. For Loewald, the superego, created out of the ashes of oedipal disillusionment, exists on the periphery of the ego system separate from the person's deep ego core.

The continually frustrated child may thus attempt to accommodate to the necessity of ongoing frustration not only by evicting that frustration, but also by defensively shifting the self's center of gravity (Horney, 1950) from inside to outside; from the subjective experience of helpless yearning, toward an identification with the negation of those yearnings on the periphery of the ego system. This intrapsychic shift of one's allegiances strongly resembles A. Freud's (1936) defensive dynamic of identification with the aggressor. Such identification, she noted, is not really an identification with the person of the aggressor, but with the aggressive behavior itself.

If continually frustrated in the wish to transform the actual parent into an ideal figure, a child may become an adolescent who, rather than experience the unbearable tension and degradation of wishes falling on deaf ears, defends against that helplessness by taking on the guise of the more powerful enemy—the hated and disillusioning behavior of the parent.

By parroting, echoing, and perpetrating on oneself the constellation of frustrating attitudes, behaviors, and morality particular to one's traumatic theme(s), there is an ongoing, counterphobic attempt to co-opt the emotional potency of frustration by merging with its source. One major defensive function of "bracing for disappointment," of silencing one's wishes for a parent's transformation into a longed-for figure before those wishes can be silenced from without, is to forestall further psychic injury. If and when such wishes do see the light of consciousness, they are ruthlessly hounded by ridicule, shame, guilt, and other forms of self-deflation.

Indeed, inasmuch as negating one's "unrealistic" wishes also limits the possibilities of who one can be, the self-negation of identifying with the aggressor is also a means of self-definition, of setting the outlying boundaries to one's character before they are set by someone else. In this defensive aim of covering over the soft underbelly of childhood helplessness concretized by the traumatic theme, identification with the aggressor underlies the formation of the defensive armor of adult character—a means of defining one's identity from the outside in. By knowing who one cannot or may not possibly be, one partly defines who one necessarily must be.

Yet, lest we think of identification with the aggressor solely as an involuntarily compelled defensive maneuver designed to master trauma, we would do

well to remember that the individual has a certain investment in embedding his or her identity in the bosom of repetition. As the psychic reality of the transference tells us, where the future is perceived, created, and delimited by the images and fantasies of the past, the uncertain dangers of encountering actual novelty, emergence, and solitude can be eliminated.

Thus, a primary aim of superego formation may be to placate the powers of the previous generation to achieve some sort of reconciling sense of continuity. One might then think of identification with the aggressor as an ongoing superego process that is directly reflective of one's traumatic theme(s); a fixation on an attempted offering of oneself to one's parents that was never accepted, and which, therefore, must be offered again and again with ever-higher stakes. Finally, the chronic disillusionment becomes so unbearable that one attempts to bridge the chasm between oneself and the psychically lost parent narcissistically—by "becoming" the parental aggressor to oneself. In this way, identification with the aggressor is used pervasively to give a defining form and content both to a bridge of repetition to the previous generation and to one's own personal identity.

ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

In a sense, by identifying with those "unpleasurable" superego processes at the periphery of the ego system, one curls in on oneself in a self-enclosed dialectic between self-denial and unconscious wishes struggling for realization. This narcissistic stance forecloses any genuine interchange with the external world; no opportunity for further disillusionment by the outside world is let in, and one's unconscious wishes to undo the traumatic theme are not let out—that is, allowed to come to expression in consciousness.

But this is precisely the problem: For in the unconscious determination to adhere to imagined ties with one's parents, one rigidly duplicates the sadomasochistic relationship experienced with them. In allying with the introjected parental "aggressor" of the traumatic theme, one is also repressing wishes to undo the traumatic theme as ruthlessly as the parental "aggressor" once oppressed them. Because these wishes carry with them vital, potentially rejuvenating ideals, by excluding them from awareness, one is also inhibiting the generation and conscious pursuit of one's passions and pleasures. In so doing, one renders oneself a critical observer rather than a wholehearted participant in one's own life, resulting in the sense of being on the outside looking in at oneself and one's significant relationships, and perhaps most importantly, resulting in a sense of emotional alienation from one's own childhood.

Detached from themselves and encapsulated within the fantasied, remembered image of the parental "aggressor," these individuals continually miss the emotional richness of the current moment. Because such persons are not truly

inhabiting themselves, their lives may, on reflection, take on an illusory, dream-like quality—as if life had gone by without having been genuinely lived. In the subsequent obsessional attempts of such individuals to recapture an ever-elusive emotional quality of times gone by through the second-guessing of their experience, we see how the self-conscious sense of being on the outside looking in perpetuates the characterological urge to repeat. Like a dog chasing its own tail, the future is held hostage to repeated attempts to resurrect the ever-elusive phantoms of the past.

Elsewhere I have written of the self-perpetuating effects of regret for time that has been lost to the unconscious pursuit of unrealizable ideals (Shabad, 1987, 1989a). Instead of finally confronting, reflecting on, and mourning the "road not taken," one may continue to repeat the same behavior that spurred the sense of regret in the first place. By demonstrating an incapacity to change in one's current life, one is able to justify to oneself that one has always been helpless in the face of one's unfortunate destiny. Rather than mourn the many years that were devoted to unconscious wishing and entitled waiting for the suffering of childhood to be redeemed, one may use the further reenactments of the traumatic theme to evade the painful truth that those years went for naught.

Indeed, these intimations of regret or "existential" guilt for not having participated, and continuing not to participate, in one's own life may become so intolerable that responsibility for that life may become externalized in the form of envy. I believe that the continued stance of sitting on the sidelines of one's own life and observing the forward motion of other lives is a key component in the experience of envy. It is thus not uncommon for regret-filled individuals, who for years have existed on the periphery of their own lives, to be consumed by envy of other individuals who they imagine are possessed of boundless self-confidence, direction in life, and, most important, a sense of being at one with themselves. Here, the essential passivity of the envious person's fatalism is evident in his or her mystified belief that fate seems to smile arbitrarily on the lives of some, while ignoring others like himself or herself. In a sense, we can see how this envious individual transforms a private regretful knowledge of an unlived truth, of unconscious wishes that were never brought to life, into the idealized distortion of the good fortune of others—as if these others had robbed the individual of that unlived life.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMATIC THEMES

The sense of being cheated out of one's rightful childhood may often be a result of the chronic disillusionments of the traumatic theme. While children are progressively losing their illusions about their parents, they are also shedding the innocence of childhood. For those "parentified" children who live by the

rigid caretaking ethic of the false self, the sense of being evicted prematurely from childhood may be especially great. The experience of eviction in such children may be compounded by repressive defenses which serve to make the childlike within them feel remote as well. After a lifetime of caring and working for others, these individuals eventually may begin to feel that they have compromised their passionate participation in their own lives. At the same time that such individuals were identifying with the most frustrating miseries of a parent via various forms of self-inhibition, they were also harboring unconscious yearnings to undo that misery and finally to live out a childhood of which they feel cheated and to which they now feel entitled.

In continuing to bury this longing to relive childhood, these individuals are able to evade the disillusioning encounter with the impossibility of "going home again" in its purest narcissistic sense; in so doing, they also continue to evade the necessity of mourning the fact that childhood, for better or worse, comes around but once. Instead, for one fraught with the self-denial of introjecting hated aspects of one's own parents, the unconscious hope for the idyllic regeneration of one's life springs eternal in polarized reaction to the conscious discounting of such hopes.

With the advent of a new generation, one may now externalize the introjected sadomasochistic dialectic of one's traumatic themes onto the relationship with one's own children. There is now a new field on which to reclaim a life that had been sacrificially inhibited, never lived out—a childlike life of hopes, dreams, ideals, and possibilities. With the power of parent, one may view the parent–child relationship as a tempting opportunity to reenact and undo the traumatic theme, and through this undoing, to grab back a childhood felt to be one's just due. One may bitterly begrudge the passing on of a better life to children who are unconsciously seen as rivals for the experience of a "new beginning." Where once one subjected one's own wishes to ruthless oppression, one may now target one's children with the hated aspects of one's parents. When queried about his or her behavior, such a parent may respond, without imaginative access to a vision of his or her own ideal childhood: "That's how I was brought up" or "That's what my parents did with me."

I believe we can discern a subtle form of revenge in these parents' perpetuation of the wrongs done to them. Consciously, one may realize that revenge cannot retrieve someone or something that has been lost. However, in the primary process thinking of the unconscious, the timelessness of the circle replaces linear time. In this cyclical unconscious universe, one can go backward as easily as forward, and that which has been lost can be retrieved; one can—indeed, one must—retrace one's steps to use a wrong to undo a wrong and make a right. Here, the reversal magic derives from "holding in one's own hands" the frustrating power of the aggressor of one's traumatic theme. In this way, the intergenerational cycle of unconscious envy, transmitted through the magical vehicle of one's identification with, and enacting of, the "aggressor"

in one's own parent, is a product of the failure to mourn the passing of one's one and only childhood.

MOURNING AND THE REINTEGRATION OF UNCONSCIOUS WISHES

If we view mourning as a process whose aim is to become relatively free from the compulsions to repeat the past, then we can see how the disintegrating consequences of suffering chronic disillusionments work against that process. For now, to go forward, one must first go backward and gather up vital, split-off fragments of oneself: one's disillusioned wishes for the ideal childhood, and with those wishes, a sense of subjective participation in the mainstream of one's life. Mourning is thus a paradoxical process; one must affirm what is most irrational and unrealistic to relinquish that irrationality.

If unpleasure is consistently evicted from a person's most profound psychic depths—or perhaps, more accurately, is never truly internalized to begin with—for the purpose of creating a "pure pleasure-ego," one might conclude that no amount of rational coercion, manipulation, or imposition of further disillusionment will modify a person's wishes, but will only be superimposed on those wishes. To the extent that the external world is experienced as nongratifying, it may fail to genuinely enter a person's inner life.

Meanwhile, in this "inner life," the indestructible connectedness between unconscious wishes and their pleasurable fulfillment (wishes that do not take "no" for an answer) limits the degree and depth to which their unrealizability can be mourned—at least, by a premature, forcible exposure to what one has lost or what one cannot have. When mourning thus entails the external imposition of the "reality" of loss, it is not mourning at all, but leads instead to further repetition.

Perhaps it is for this reason that Freud (1933) noted, in speaking of the id, that "no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time" (p. 74). Indeed, Freud's pessimism about substantively affecting unconscious wishes at their source made it necessary that psychoanalysis become an "instrument to enable the ego to achieve a progressive conquest of the id" (Freud, 1923, p. 56).

Rather than vanish into the air, these unconscious wishes become "black sheep" in the person's intrapsychic "family"; rebellious renegades, eventually hardened by intrapsychic struggle and isolation into becoming "needs" that must be acted on immediately and compulsively. Perhaps this urge to immediate action is not only a consequence of undiluted drive derivatives, but already an intrapsychic elaboration of wish into impulse in polarized response to the earliest frustrations in object relations and the corresponding introjections of self-negating *no(s)* and *never(s).* Indeed, acting out in the external world may

be viewed, at times, as an unconscious plea to others for rescue from one's own cruelty to oneself.

This externalization of responsibility for the care of one's neediness may parallel the "malignant regression" (Balint, 1968) which aims at gratifying instinctual cravings. The essential passivity of such a person with regard to his or her inner life lends itself to endless spirals of "passive repetition" as reproduction (Loewald, 1971/1980). As Freud (1914) clearly pointed out—and, to my mind, the significance of his observation is still underappreciated—that which is not "re-membered" in thought will be repeated in action.

By re-membering in thought, however, a person may be able to engender what Loewald described as an "active re-creative repetition" in which the old is not reproduced, but reconstructed. This sort of active reconstruction of the old through memory resembles also Balint's (1968) "benign regression," which is characterized by the search for recognition.

It is essential, then, to recognize that mourning need not, indeed cannot, entail that one be rid of one's irrational wishes, but rather that one ultimately relinquish the necessity and burden of their fulfillment. It has been my impression that this process of "letting go" seems to occur only after a person feels he or she has first internalized something of positive value, even if that means only recognizing or regaining conscious possession of the wishes themselves.

A few years ago I saw an acutely suicidal man in treatment, who, with his other problems, was struggling with the cancer of his beloved girlfriend, as well as her subsequent breakup with him. In his sessions, this man would become extremely obsessional in his repeated rageful disavowal of her significance to him, interspersed only rarely by nostalgic, dreamlike reminiscences of better times they had shared together. Sensing that because of his painful disillusionment he was retrospectively "killing off" their passionately loving experiences together, I stated that no matter what had happened since, no one could take away the genuine love and intimacy he once had shared with her; that it was not a dream, but a reality that had existed and would always exist, and one to which I could now bear witness because of his communicating it to me. His obsessional stance immediately gave way to bittersweet tears as he said: "We did have something pretty good, didn't we?"

Perhaps there is a lesson to be gleaned from this short romantic fable. Maybe an underlying motive of repetition, of the characterological obsessions and compulsions to "act out," is to overcome the dreamlike "derealization" that typically accompanies the repression of disillusioned wishes and to bring those wishes to realized and expressive life. By consciously recognizing the dignified, if irrational voice of those wishes—whether or not they are fulfillable—we lend those wishes an inclusionary life within, if only for a brief moment. And that brief moment, in a romantic, but powerful psychological sense, once alive, lives forever. Let me illustrate with a brief clinical vignette about the 42-year-old man discussed in a previous section.

The man came to the session immediately following Passover in a somewhat low-key, depressed mood. He is Jewish, his wife had converted to Judaism, and they had invited only non-Jewish friends to their Seder. The patient said that he often became "down" the day before Passover and thought that it was because he missed being part of a Jewish community. He felt that the guests who were at the Seder could not fully appreciate him as the rabbi. He recounted that he had been leading Passover Seders since he was 13 because his father had never been interested in conducting the ceremony. I asked him if he had missed his father being in attendance at Passover since his death 10 years earlier, and specifically at this last one. He replied that "It would have been nice" to have had his father there. I then continued: "How would you have liked for your father to watch you lead the Seder, come up to you after dinner, pat you on the back, and tell you how proud he was of you for the job you did as rabbi?" The patient reddened, and his eyes teared up a little. After a brief pause, he cleared his throat, smiled imperceptibly, and said: "Yeah, I'd love that." A few seconds later he roused himself from his reverie and added: "But that will never happen."

For just 2 or 3 minutes the patient was able to suspend disbelief, and forsake an external reality in which his father had been dead for 10 years. In its place, this patient, not unlike the infant who conjures up an imaginary breast via hallucinatory wish-fulfillment (Freud, 1911), was able to reconstitute a different world within himself: one in which his father, for all practical purposes, was still living. During the few brief moments of this constructive illusion, the patient was able to attain a sense of inner fullness and satisfaction. This momentary satisfaction, in turn, enabled him to be more generous in letting go of the necessity that his father actually be alive and present at the Seder. I would suggest that the re-creation of an imaginary world that elaborates on a wish is among the most mutative periods in psychotherapy with regard to mourning and psychic growth.

It is through the conscious reintegration of long-buried wishes for "what could have been" and their imaginary elaborations that a person may experience that at least something of the "eternal spark" of a lost childhood has been salvaged. Indeed, this recapturing of a vision of one's ideal childhood can then become the internalized and, therefore, nonrepeated source of a new beginning. And with this sense of rejuvenation, one may be able more easily to let go of the fantasied necessity of perfectly repairing the defects of one's traumatic theme through the actual reliving of one's childhood. The process of "losing" and mourning that loss then may be experienced as if it were voluntarily coming from within, as part of the natural shedding of one's psychic skin. As this mourning process evolves, in part self-willed and self-created, it may spur the capacity to meet generously the unidirectionality of life on its own mortal terms. In so doing, one may find out paradoxically that one can "share in" and be renewed by the better life that one is generating for one's children.

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