

## THOUGHTS ON PSYCHOTHERAPY July, 2004

Far from new, psychotherapy has been accomplished through ritual, religion, drama, and storytelling since the earliest times of which we have any knowledge. And dance is probably the oldest body psychotherapy. Core therapy, viewed as the journey of a soul, is simply a continuation of a mythic tradition from which we should always feel free to seek inspiration. This is the journey of ODYSSEUS, PSYCHE, DON QUIXOTE, Dante in THE DIVINE COMEDY, Perceval in THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS, and Siegfried in Germanic folklore and Wagnerian opera. Ancient Greek dramas such as OEDIPUS REX, ANTIGONE AND ELECTRA gave participants and audience alike the opportunity to experience many of their deepest conflicts and struggles.

By daring to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise and began the human journey. They catapulted themselves out of bliss into what we might think of as real life, as the challenge of growth. We are homo sapiens: the knower, or the knowledge seeker. What makes us human is seeking to know, knowing... what John Pierrakos calls consciousness.

The journey of Ulysses/Odysseus is perhaps the prototypical hero's journey. At the end of the Trojan wars, having proven himself as a man, one of its heroes sets out for "home," and encounters the challenges that will hone his soul and allow him to reunite with the feminine in the person of his wife, Penelope.

The myth of Eros and Psyche, written a few centuries later, is another version of the conscious journey, culminating in Joy. It is Psyche who holds up the lamp, who illuminates and questions her Paradise. When Eros flees, she panics and attempts to catch his heel, but the process is too far underway and she must begin the human journey. Psyche (Soul) has lived an unconscious life, too beautiful even to be wed, but worshiped from afar by such multitudes that she excites the jealousy of the goddess Aphrodite. Finally left on a mountaintop by her family to await a marriage with Death, she is whisked away by an unknown rescuer to a paradise-like environment. Love comes to her in paradise only in the night under cover of darkness, just as escaping from difficult, terrifying or torturous times to the relief of paradise, we are often content to ask no questions for a time. But then our souls become restless for expansion and we begin to question again. In the myth, the questions are spoken by Psyche's sisters, and she acts on their counsel to hold up the light to the Eros she has enjoyed under cover of darkness. When she does, her world turns upside down: love flees and she is catapulted out of paradise as she tries to cling to his heel.

Thus the real quest begins: the journey (back) to love. Eros is the awakener, the tasks of individual development remain. Psyche confronts the questions we must ask ourselves and our clients: What is our life task, what is our life plan, for what are we here on earth? What inner and outer marriage do we seek? As Psyche confronts the tasks set for her by Aphrodite to regain Eros, we see how love can be the torturer and purifier of the soul leading to growth, individuation and the marriage of our masculine and feminine aspects. And, if we stay the course, love can give birth to Joy.

So, I would suggest that if you really want to understand this sacred process of psychotherapy, read literature as well as psychology. Read Joseph Campbell, Liz Greene's THE ASTROLOGY OF FATE (1984), Robert Johnson. Read Carl Jung and the Jungians. Therapy is merely a continuation of the mythic tradition of self-transformation, the process of individuation and differentiation.

Our core qualities are amazing. We must strive to discover them in ourselves and in those we work with. We must look for the gifts, the common threads, for our and their greatest longings from childhood. Hopefully, as we become more conscious, fate becomes less blind and we need not necessarily follow the path of Oedipus to its bitter end. There is no inevitable path to a life. We can see our lives and those of our clients in a broader perspective. We can see our life task and their life tasks...and speculate about how and why they intersect. As Christopher Bollas has suggested in FORCES OF DESTINY (1991), the purpose of therapy is to be able to follow our destiny rather than merely be ruled by our fate. Fate is related to words, to prognostications by oracles or significant others: we are relatively passive in relation to it. Destiny implies action and the unfolding of all we are and all we can be, of our real selves, our true selves.

I don't envisage life as proceeding in a straight line or even a circle. I see the journey as a spiral. With each turn around, we delve deeper (or higher) into our psyches, often dealing with the same basic issues again and again at these different levels. The issues that were laid down in infancy and in childhood will probably come up in different ways for the rest of our lives, frequently when we least expect them. They appear during transitions, especially major life transitions. They appear in times of stress. And, each time we encounter them, we heal another facet of our original wounds. As Freud highlighted in his conceptualization of the "repetition compulsion," each new repetition is another opportunity for growth. We can never quiet the ocean, but we can become adept at riding the waves.

Each of our journeys is totally unique, and we as therapists must look in awe and respect at the persons who honor us by allowing us to accompany them. We must never forget that we are only companions: midwives, facilitators, helpers, always remembering that it is the patient who is doing the labor and who will bring forth and give birth to a true self.

In a poem entitled "Self Knowledge", Khalil Gibran expresses many of these concepts:

Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights  
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart's knowledge.  
You would know in words that which you have always known in thought.  
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.  
And it is well you should.  
The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs rise and run murmuring to the sea;  
And the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed to your eyes.  
But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;  
And seek not the depths of your knowledge with staff or sounding line.  
For self is a sea boundless and measureless.  
Say not, "I have found the truth," but rather "I have found a truth."  
Say not, "I have found the path of the soul." Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."  
For the soul walks upon all paths.  
The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.  
The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless pebbles.

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