

Jerome Liss

Masochism, Alcoholism and other Contradictory Phenomena

'I was feeling stuck in the throat and a heaviness in my chest. Somehow it seemed connected to my brother's death. Dr. R. asked me how the rest of my body felt. I told him, 'Numb, uncomfortable, like I'd like to jump out of my own skin.' He then said gently, 'Stay with the feeling.' I began to cry a bit but I needed deeper release. I took Dr. R's hands, put one over my throat and the other on top of my chest. And with that I burst out crying. I had a quick, vivid flash of seeing my brother in the coffin, but I couldn't hold on to it, or perhaps didn't want to, it was just too strong. I noticed as I cried the sudden warmth which came into my body from my chest and also my belly. It was actually pleasure, even though I was crying about my brother's death. I noticed my whole body felt warm and tingly. Especially my skin had this gentle buzzing feeling. I felt warm and relaxed all over. I didn't need the pressures of Dr. R's hands any more, so I moved his hands away and just rested, and began to remember the times when my brother was alive and how we enjoyed doing things together. Now the thought of him no longer distressed me. In memory I was able to enjoy and appreciate him once again.'

When people are asked to remain aware of their body feelings during an emotional discharge, they usually notice how the areas of discomfort and tension coming up, such as in the jaw, throat, chest or belly will become stronger at first and then completely subside. A person might also notice that the tension is replaced, not by a neutral feeling, but by actual warmth and pleasure. However, what a person might not notice unless he attends to his whole body, is the fact that his whole body undergoes a transformation from discomfort, tightness or emptiness, to fullness, warmth and tingling, especially if the discharge is complete and the situation is a comforting one. I would claim that deep emotional discharge for a person previously emotionally suppressed will change body processes down to its very metabolism. The process must be repeated again and again for it to take hold.

This resurging of body heat with deep emotional discharge explains the apparent contradiction that after fully undergoing one's grief and distress one will end up feeling better. Emotional release means not only relief from distress but also a re-evocation of the body's warmth. I believe an extension of this principle can account for several other apparently contradictory phenomena.

Life's double edge

Let us first take masochism. How can we account for this apparent contradiction that people will purposefully inflict pain on themselves, presumably in the interests of gaining pleasure? I believe a detailed report of the experience of masochism might go something like this: a person feels tension and numbness throughout the body. (This is due to a long-standing history of being emotionally pent-up). The experience of pressure on an area of numbness or tension gives immediate relief. In a person inclined toward masochism it is the deepest muscles which are most tense and that experience of tension

is an excruciating one. Also, the feeling of 'deadness' or 'numbness' is not a neutral one, but rather a somewhat unlocatable and intensely disquieting feeling which is even more agonising than more directly felt 'tension'. Very deep pressure is needed to contact the dead and numb body areas. A large number of people have one or two areas which feel that way, especially the top of the shoulders and the back of the neck. But some people feel that way over almost their entire bodies.

With deep pressure there is a feeling of relief. With still deeper pressure there is a feeling of still deeper relief. Relief means a subsiding of the discomfort. Now if still more pressure is exerted on these numb areas to the point of pain, then the discomfort of the pain is experienced, but it is easily endured because the relief from contacting the previously 'numb' feeling is still greater. This explains the 'economics' of masochism - why the pleasurable release is worth the pain.

However, I think there is one more aspect which for me explains the compulsion some people have for the masochistic experience: a feeling of warmth is produced in the area directly touched and in the rest of the body. This warmth is the essence of the feeling of well-being. Therefore, even if a person must endure intense pain in order to receive the beginning flickers of this body warmth, he will feel compelled to do so. I use the word 'compelled' because the body spirit is in anguish when its flames have cooled, and upon tasting a few licks of the new body flame - even at the cost of some pain - the bodily person will feel compelled to rush for the experience like a greedy child who has been held off from his favourite dessert for months on end.

'Your habits are doing you no good'

'How do you know?'

I believe chronic alcoholism and other compulsions for intoxication have a similar lay-out. A person in every case experiences the full brunt of the destructiveness of his actions, even if he does not consciously admit them. However, the intoxicant is an artificial stimulant giving entry to the vital warmth (and thus well-being) of the body, even if it is only partial, temporary and associated with the hugest draw-backs such as not being able to function nor live in loving reciprocity with other people.

There are other destructive patterns which are kept going because they both give some relief to stored up body tensions and keep a bit alive the fires of body warmth. Destructive action patterns, such as criminal activity, excessive gambling, or driving automobiles at suicidal speeds all follow this pattern. One middle-aged man described the excitement in his finger-tips and hands and the warm feeling in his belly when he saw a ten-dollar bill lying on someone's office desk. The discomfort he had to undergo in not taking the money involved a turning of these pleasurable sensations into absolute frozenness and tension, a degree of discomfort which he found almost immeasurable and for which he had to dig up some extremely good justifications to go through. Even the negative and destructive statements of a depressed person vilifying himself or a complaining person blaming everyone in the world also follows this pattern of giving some discharge to tension and also arousing some degree of body warmth.

My purpose in laying out these compelling forces which underlie destructive behaviour is to make it clear that anyone who is attempting to change these patterns, whether in himself or by helping another, is undertaking an immense job. But this we already know. My second point in delineating the compelling forces to a destructive pattern is as follows: the destructive pattern in the adult sits upon a deeper destructive pattern which began in early childhood and continues into adulthood, namely, the loss of the body's (and person's) warm, natural vitality through the unwitting suppression of emotions and actions. Therefore, to my mind, the proper therapy of any destructive pattern involves not only eliminating the patterns, but also, and more importantly, finding other means to regain the body's natural warmth and vitality. After all, if healing does not include the regaining of this warmth, then for whose benefit is the destructive behaviour pattern given up? Certainly other people. But not necessarily for the person who is at issue and agent.

Constance Tottle

Homoepathy

Homeopathy is a system of medicine based on the principle that 'Like' cures 'Like'. This means that medicine capable of producing certain symptoms when taken by healthy human beings, is also capable of curing any illness that displays similar symptoms. For example, if a healthy person takes a dose of Belladonna, that person would become extremely hot, getting a high temperature, dilated pupils, and a red burning face. According to homeopathic law that like cures like, any person having such symptoms. Whatever the name of the disease (e.g. feverish cold, scarlet fever etc) will be cured by certain doses of Belladonna, as the symptoms of both are so similar.

The approach to healing through homeopathy is therefore fundamentally opposite to the orthodox school of medicine, as instead of attacking, and subduing the symptoms of disease and driving further inwards, a homeopath chooses a remedy because it has been

proved to cause similar symptoms in a healthy person. Such a remedy chosen for its similarity to the patient as a whole, and to a specific disease, activates the patient's vital or inner force, and enables him to do as nature designed him to do, that is to throw off the disease.

Homeopathy works from within and drives the illness outwards, so that it is eliminated or expelled instead of being suppressed only to show up again in the same or a different form of disease later.

When the first experiments in this direction were made over 150 years ago by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, the discoverer of homeopathy, he realised that large and frequent doses of the symptom provoking drug, although effecting cure in the long run, often caused a considerable aggravation of the patient's condition, before the cure was completed. This caused him to try much smaller doses, and found they gave equally effective results.