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INNER PEACE AND WAR

At a workshop I ran at Shaw Farm, we went into the whole question of our own violence. While we are working for peace and a world in which conflicts can be reconciled, what do we need to do about the violence inside ourselves?

People talked movingly and amusingly of attacking the garden, of laying into their work, of overtaking in their cars. It became obvious that we all had some anger, some aggression, some violence inside ourselves, and had various established ways of handling it.

And then we talked about guilt - of how we felt bad about being violent, how we didn't talk about it, about how we dealt with it secretly and in privacy. How this privacy makes others feel more guilty, because they think they are alone, that they feel an anger no one else feels - they are subject to bad emotions which other people do not have.

By talking about it, by bringing it out into the open, we found that the guilt went away, being replaced by a shared feeling of understanding of our anger.

GOING DEEPER

That is fine as far as it goes, but what of the deeper roots of violence? In my own life I had the opportunity to get to the bottom of this, through therapy, co-counselling and growth groups. Here is an extract from my diary for May 1973:

It has been a real torment and a real lot of pain going through the realization of how much hate there is in me. To realize that I hated Neil (my wife) was shattering to me. I found that I hated virtually all the boys at school. But recently I have been getting into the nastiest one of all - self-hate. The taste of my own throat turned into the taste of evil. My whole head disappeared, and turned into a raw open throat pointing upwards to the sky. I became a cat, and a snake. And the cat was Set or Bubastis - an evil cat, full of hate, like in horror stories by

Bram Stoker and others which I read long ago. No wonder Freud believed in the bad-animal theory. I must have started hating early.

Later that year, the way I was putting it was that I had a subpersonality called Mr. Putdown, who specialised in hate, and who came into play whenever certain situations arose, such as opportunities to put down another person, most often a woman, because that was safer. In this extract from a therapy session in 1974, this character is asked the question - "What is your general approach to the world?" His answer:

Mr. Putdown's approach to the world is to try to blow it out. And if you can't blow it out, piss on it. If you can't piss on it, cut it off with scissors. If you can't cut it off with scissors, put an old sock round it.

Later that same year, I discovered where all this hate came from. In a co-counselling session, I had a very powerful experience of regression - of going back to some very early period in my life, certainly before four years old. This is what I wrote after the session:

*Some very early period with my mother. I knew what **real** love was like - picture of baby at breast. But now she was making all sorts of demands - if I did this I would get her love, if I did that I would get it and so on. But I never actually got it - I got some substitute instead. (Here I had an actual hallucination - my chewing gum tasted exactly like a rubber teat, and I could even hear the typical squeaky noise that a teat makes when you chew it.) I was a really good boy, I did all the right things, but I never got that real love I wanted. And so I made two resolves. One was that I would destroy my mother. I wasn't strong enough to do it myself, so I would invent a monster who would frighten her to death - it was black and vague and huge, and on top it had a really ugly frightening face, and it could move as fast as the wind. That would deal with her. The other resolve was that I would do what she wanted **now**, while I was weak, but when I grew up, I would do just the **opposite**, and see how she liked **that**. I would do everything she didn't want and didn't like, when I grew up. These two resolves explain so much. That frightening black monster, that I called Big Granny at first, and which scared me so much - I believe that was **my** monster, that I created!*

And then in 1975 I reached the turning point in all this. It took two sessions: one to open it up, and the other to find a positive answer to it. In the first session I regressed again to a very early time in my life. This is from an actual tape recording of the session:

*I had a little memory there of what it was all about. And then it started to go away again. I knew from the beginning what it was all about. I know what it was all about! I do, I know what it was all about! I really do know what it was all about!! (Cries) It's about **really** opening yourself up to somebody, and **really** doing it (crying) and everything else just being substitutes after that (crying) everything just being substitutes (crying). All that nursery talk was just ways of covering it up.*

The second session was with a friend of mine who was a transpersonal counsellor. I asked her to be with me for an hour, while I went into some of the stuff from that previous session, particularly about a character who had come up called Wicked Walter, who seemed obviously related to Big Granny, Mr. Putdown, the monster and soon. This was written immediately after the session.

*Gradually got into birth thing. Wicked Walter didn't **want** to be born - he said "NO! NO!" Wanted to get revenge for having been born - it was the **worst** thing that anyone could do - to take you out of that nice warm womb into all that pressure and fear and cold. (Very strong impression of pressure on head as this started.) It was most important to remember that it was mother who had done it - **must** get revenge on her. At some point that connected up with getting revenge for losing the breast, or not having it when I wanted it; and with losing that first mother's love, or not getting it when I wanted it. All these connected with the feeling of "that's what it was all about" mentioned before. Went through whole big catharsis on this, very powerful, leaving me lying down on the floor exhausted but whole and centred. Beverly said - "Let an image come into your mind". My reply: "There is no image, it's just grey. Grey all round in every direction, and the ground is grey too. It's all grey, all round. (Pause) Now it's like a dome. A plain grey dome, very big and covering the whole area where I am lying. I am lying in the middle of a grey plain and the grey dome is covering the whole". Beverly said - "Be the dome". I said - "I am protecting him. I am looking after him. I love him. He's done all these stupid things, but he's **all right**. He's made some stupid mistakes, but they are the kind of mistakes that **anyone** might make. He confused the womb with me, and*

he confused the breast with me, and he confused mother's love with me - but it's **understandable**. All the time he thought he's lost me, I was there all the time, and I always will be there". Beverly - "Go back to being you. Did you hear that?" Me - "Yes. (Crying) It's all true, I know now. What a waste! (Crying) I didn't need to blame my mother, or get revenge, or create my monsters, it was all a mistake! It was all a misunderstanding". Beverly - "Now be the dome again. Does his behaviour hurt you?" Me as the dome - "No, it doesn't hurt me. I **care**, but I don't **mind**. I don't add to his bad feelings by having bad feelings myself. But I do really care". It was all about destroying my mother, and now I don't need to destroy her anymore!

That was my experience, and it led to a great release of energy. That year I wrote two books, did various articles for magazines, ran workshops, worked intensively with Red Therapy, did some market research work, originated the dialectical workshop with John Southgate, worked with the Cosmic Conspiracy, and lazed away some afternoons in the summer sun, all feeling very easy and relaxed.

Now I don't want to make any general claims about this - it was my experience, and may not apply to anyone else. All I want to say is that the roots of violence **can** go as deep as this, and may need a lot of personal work to sort out, as they did in my case.

OTHERS TOO

But obviously I have been interested to read of or talk to other people who have had similar experiences or insights. Cynthia Adcock is one such, who goes much further in generalising this sort of experience. In her essay **Fear of "Other": The common root of sexism and militarism** she says this:

*The infant is terribly helpless and vulnerable compared to the parent (no matter how powerless the adult **feels** in the situation). It is not an equal power relationship. Moreover, even the most devoted parent cannot always be available for food or love, cannot always bring release from pain, and cannot permit the infant total freedom. Our reasons, to the baby, are meaningless and arbitrary. That I, as a mother, was exhausted by feedings every two hours through the night, or that I was frustrated and lonely, meant nothing to my babies then. From the infant's point of view, the parent holds a terrible and arbitrary power. Until this generation, that power was almost exclusively female. This common condition was true across a huge range of cultures and across thousands of years.*

The power, the immediate power over the infant, was female. We cannot help but live in fear, in dread, for any power on which we are so deeply dependent. In this fact, I think, lies the origin of sexism.

*Torn from the mother by birth, needy for her milk and love, we feel a terrified ambivalence toward her. This painful alienation dances maliciously, invisibly, throughout the rest of our lives. The Mother becomes the primal Other in a way that cannot always be pleasing. **And it was not our fault as mothers.** Even the most loving and nurturing among us were **by that very fact** seen as the most powerful Other. The contradiction is inherent in the situation rather than the virtues and faults of individuals.*

Apologies for such a long quote, but the whole series of points seemed to be inseparable. I don't know - none of us knows at present - how general or how inevitable this is: what I do know is that until I went through my own personal hell, I could not consciously decide not to oppress women. Or rather, I could decide, but could not carry out the decision.

It seemed that as long as I had the secret hate, the secret rage and the secret fear (that she who had done it to me once could do it to me again), I could not relate to women other than in a defensive way.

MORE CONNECTIONS

This defensiveness is very noticeable in other men, now that I have discovered it in myself. I can see how wary men get when women try to get close to them. And I relate it to one of the scariest moments in my therapy, when I discovered the full depth of my fear. This is a tape recording:

***I won't let go of anything.** Like that's **my** way of dealing with reality, and I'm going to **hang on** to it. I'm not going to go into any of your machinations, or any of your skullduggery, or any of your stupid sentimental whining craps. Because they are all a con! All a con!! They are nothing more or less than just a con. They are some kind of a fix, they are some kind of phony rap. They are just going to lure you out, and then they're going to **do** you# They're going to shoot all over you! (Cries) They are just going to wait for you to open up and come out, and then they're going to shoot all over you!! **THEY'RE GOING TO SHOOT ALL OVER YOU!!!** Trample all over you, and tread*

all over you, and put blood all over you, and scratch you to pieces. Scratch you to pieces in every way. In every conceivable dripping, horrible way! Whatever that is. Whatever you can imagine, whatever anyone could imagine.

When I read this again now, it reminds me of the Amritsar massacre in the film of **Gandhi**, or the Babi Yar massacre in **The White Hotel** - maybe those scenes are so powerful for me partly because they remind me of my own old fears. Certainly people like Lloyd de Mause, David Wasdell, Frank Lake and others have suggested that there are important connections between individual psychology and public events.

But just as fear and hatred and revenge can be translated from the individual into the public sphere, so can inner peace. Once I had settled my internal conflict, I was able to love better and cooperate better. I took far more interest in what was outside my own skin. And a few years later, after some more changes, I was able to admit that I was a spiritual being. Being able to own up to this fact seemed a very risky and dangerous step to take - a further step in surrender - but once I had taken it, it seemed to open the way for more reserves of energy to be tapped, and a much wider range of sympathies to come into play.

I discovered that for me the opposite of hatred was not peace but a feeling of excited flow, or creative joy, or a passionate glow - I'm not sure that any of those phrases is quite right, but they seem to point in the right direction.

It seems that the question I am asking now is not so much - "What do I want? And how do I get it?" - but more like - "What am I here for? And what am I supposed to do next?" But that is another story.

References

The Cynthia Adcock article comes from Pam McAllister (ed) **Reweaving the web of life: Feminism and nonviolence** (New Society Publishers 1982) which is a wonderful collection of readings.

The stuff by Lloyd de Mause, David Wasdell, etc., is collected in Frank Lake's **Constricted confusion: Exploration of a pre- and perinatal paradigm**, published by the Clinical Theology Association, Lingdale, Weston Avenue, Nottingham NG7 4BA.
