time. This is because the process needs to unfold and because there are issues in the background which are not only our personal issues, but society's issues as a whole, and which need to be processed.

What usually happens when the culture expects forgiveness and doesn't validate revenge, is that these feelings go underground. I worked with a spiritual community of people who come from various backgrounds in the world. So issues about racial and ethnic identity, and gender and class issues are present. Becoming part of a spiritual community or a spiritual path doesn't make these issues go away and problems still come up. In this community, feelings of revenge are not supported by the community, so they become gossip, which makes it impossible to resolve any issues. In contrast to this, I was recently in New Zealand and two Maori elders told me of their traditional way of dealing with a conflict in their community. If two people have a conflict, the community comes together in a large room known as Marai, a tribal house. There, anyone can say anything they want, and they keep going until everyone feels complete. After that is over, no one is allowed to mention the conflict again.

We, in the white Christian culture, generally have a problem with acknowledging feelings of revenge and tend to feel guilty and ashamed about them. This makes it very difficult to say yes to revenge. But until we do, the feelings persist and the processes of resolving conflict and of healing can't unfold.

Prisons and our Addiction to Revenge

Jonathan Wallace

'We do to others what we do to ourselves' is perhaps the least likely statement to come from a convicted murderer serving his nineteenth year in prison. Frank is a burly Irishman with a steady grey-eyed gaze and clumsy tattoos. He is in his late forties. We were talking about vengeance as the hard reality that forges prison life and culture. Prisons, we both knew, are our way of taking revenge. We also agreed that we have a compulsive urge to avenge ourselves on ourselves and that prisons externalise this addiction to our inner call for revenge.

Prisons also institutionalise vengeance, making this primal need socially palatable. When our addiction to take revenge is unassuaged by war or other mass behaviour, we turn to criminals as scapegoats. Logically, we should help peo-

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ple who exhibit such deeply anti-social behaviour. We don't. We punish them. We need to take revenge, just as an addict needs a fix. But we can't accept this need in ourselves, so we call it something else. An addict justifies the need to quell the craving for drugs by calling it getting high. We call it rehabilitation, deterring the criminal, keeping the streets safe, or whatever. The truth is we need to take revenge. And we get a high from it.

Frank knows all about it because he is forced to live it. I know about it because I have struggled for five years to set up and run a treatment programme for drug addicts in prison as a way of breaking the cycle of addiction and offending, capture and incarceration that binds half the prisoners in this country to lives of despair. If prisons were genuinely about helping prisoners to change, we would have received some government funding for our work by now. Our work is known to be highly effective and inexpensive. We train long-serving prisoners to become certificated addiction counsellors who work while completing their sentences. These pioneer counsellors create powerful forces for change in the prison environment. Does the prison service care? Not much. To them prisoners should be punished, not helped.

I have been working with drug addicts in British prisons for almost eight years. I came to this work with most, if not all, the expected preconceptions that the average middle-class, white, professional care worker would pretend not to possess.

Chief among these is that prisons are designed to rehabilitate prisoners. A close second is that the threat of prison sentences deters crime. I also assumed that prisons were run by the prison staff. It took a few months of voluntary work at HM Prison Wandsworth in south London to realise that these are the three big lies about prisons.

A shallow and cursory attempt mimicking rehabilitation is all most prisons offer inmates. This normally takes the form of woodworking, home maintenance, computer classes or similarly meaningless activities that are as valuable as the energies of the dispirited and underpaid staff can allow.

As no one actually believes that prison sentences deter criminal acts, it is a mystery how this myth remains in our culture. Given that 90 per cent of crimes are undetected, the chances are good that offenders will escape arrest. Not one of the 500 or so clients I have come to know over the years has once suggested that he ceased offending because he feared prison. Offenders do fear prison, but not enough to cease offending.

Prisoners run prisons. Staff:prisoner ratios of one:fifty are common. Without the tacit support and compliance of prisoners, the system would collapse overnight. So prisoners ensure that vengeance continues to be done to them.

We must hurt the criminals we catch. And prisoners comply. Prisoners in turn inflict revenge on themselves. Every adult prison in Britain has a Rule 43 wing, a place where sex offenders and 'grasses' are separated from the rest of the prison population for their own safety. Sex offenders are routinely targeted for violence and murder by other prisoners. They, in turn, will seek to hurt and maim the 'grasses' and those weaker than themselves.

The shame we feel (or is it fear?) about

expressing our need to exact revenge maintains the myth that our prisons are centres of rehabilitation. We deny the reality of what we do, just as the drug addict must live in denial to maintain addictive behaviour.

We need criminals because we need to feel the satisfaction of knowing that some 50,000 men and women are locked up and are suffering right now.

Frank and I have philosophised about prisons, addiction and revenge for some years. There is a lot of time to talk in a prison. Frank has just completed his diploma course as an addictions counsellor. We mused together about prisons as centres of revenge which are really just part of the landscape of the underworld of our collective inner journey. Frank sighed and voiced what everyone working with addicts knows: 'What we deny about ourselves, drives us.'

Until all those involved in the prison industry admit that what they actually do is to exact the collective need for revenge on criminals and until we all admit that this is so, prisons will remain warehouses of despair for our fellow human beings. We have made them scapegoats to feed our craving for vengeance on ourselves to expiate the crimes we have committed in our inner world.

Revenge and Learning Disability

Valerie Sinason

With the hope of peace in Northern Ireland many newspapers have pinpointed the accumulative historical anguish of 'revenge' killings. Within mainland England it was the Jacobean period that experienced such trauma as a result of the civil war. The powerful 'revenge tragedies' became the main theatrical way of dealing with an experience in which, as in Northern Ireland, neighbour was pitted against neighbour or family member against family member.

The literary way of trying to come to terms with such experiences included the theme of incest as both a metaphor and consequence of civil war — self versus self within the same society. Tourneur's 'Revenger's Tragedy' is one of the most famous of this genre, and the issue of revenge as a response to loss and hate is made clear in the opening line, with Vindice, the Revenger, holding his dead love's skull on stage and angrily crying 'Go royal lecher! Greyhaired adultery!'. Other characters in the play similarly unite their feelings of loss and trauma in a need for revenge. Spurio the bastard allows the incestuous kiss of his stepmother to 'pick

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