



SACRIFICE, aka RTS
(repetitive teabag
syndrome)

Sunday radio never fails to stir me up - probably why I listen to it! - in particular, references to the virtues of self-sacrifice. Grrr ...

Recently, I visited an elderly friend of my father's and quickly recognised the confused mixture of affluence and seemingly senseless economies - always made at the expense of comfort - typical to the kind of privileged background we share. When I asked for a

second cup of tea, he amiably invited me to help myself. As I reached for another teabag, I jumped, startled by his shout.

In my past life (pre-therapy), I'd have blushed, fished the disposed teabag out of the bin, hated him for making me feel small and continued, unaware, my life of self-deprivation. Instead, I made teasing reference to prep-school-itis (I used to compare my therapist's weekly hugs to my saved up sweetie-ration) and more seriously considered my leftover stingy habits still to be worked on.

I call the thrift-habit Cuddle-hunger, universal though certainly not exclusive to the nanny/boarding-school class, that only makes sense by understanding rationing, withholding and deprivation in terms of emotional rather than material availability.

Harold Shipman's case and now another horror-story of abduction and murder are both tales of extreme sacrifice of the punishing - others kind - and equally senseless without historical knowledge and understanding. I despair at the experts' consistent reluctance to explore experiential history as a matter of course in the search for answers to the relatives' anguished question 'Why?'

If a child is repeatedly hurt, his trying not to mind will develop into a don't-care habit where minding is sealed in a sound-proof box. He's the one years later whose 'better nature' is deaf to appeal. To care would interrupt the moment of vengeance, deprive him of what he believes will fix his emptiness. It's this extreme fragmentation - interesting that the 'nice' part earns the title 'false self' - that's so terrifying to the victims, so frustrating and bewildering to the witnesses. While desperate pleas merely satisfy the need to cause misery, my fantasy is always to whisper to the hurt child who just may, secretly, be listening, craving recognition.

Who self-destructs, who destroys others, who transforms vengeful energy into determination to heal? This is the continuing mystery, beyond scientific explanation, beyond 'how I was treated,' to do with responsibility, free will and choice that I believe is never beyond recovery.

At last, an excuse to mention 'The British Nanny' by Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, a rich source of understanding this important aspect of primary care. Then I discovered R. D Laing and A Esterson's 'Sanity, Madness and the Family,' amazingly published as long ago as 1964.



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