Blood Washing Blood **by Ray Menezes** Janus Publishing Company 2005 pp100 £6.99

Blood Washing Blood refers to the idea that when the ego attempts to solve the problem that is created by itself, it is like washing a blood stained garment in blood and expecting it to be clean.

I was very taken by the title and theme of this book. I often quote the aphorism that today's problems are a result of yesterday's solutions; or *The Course in Miracles* when it describes the ego's plan as being 'to seek and not find'. *Blood Washing Blood* says this very eloquently and graphically. Much of the book is taken with understanding the mechanism of the ego. In this way it is similar to the book *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle.

At the age of 26 the author almost drowned and at the moment of giving up all hope, a change in consciousness occurred that made it possible to survive. He describes it like this:

'The solution was not mystical or spiritual in nature; it was very simple and straightforward. I stopped resisting, I began to relax and accept who I am and what the world is, not in an intellectual way, but as a fact. I began to observe myself and the world without adding anything to the observation.'(page 9)

He describes the function of the ego as resisting pain and says that it is not the pain that is the problem so much as the ego's solution to the pain. The ego's solution to the pain is to resist. The resistance can take the form of denial i.e. 'I don't have a problem'. It can take the form of replacing the problem with another problem as with alcohol, drugs, crime or violence. All of these are ways to avoid a simple fact; we hurt.

The ego creates an even bigger problem by trying to solve the hurt that is experienced. This is blood washing blood, the problem itself tries to solve the problem. He then goes on to describe how children organise and process information and jump to conclusions that become blueprints for the rest of their lives. For example when parents separate, the child thinks the absent parent does not love him or her because they have left.

Menezes writes:

'Blueprints are not open to discussion; they are almost absolute. The more we deny them, the truer they become, this is because denial is untrue and being untrue, a state of conflict is created. Conflict ensures that the thing denied is reinforced.

To be free of a blueprint it is necessary to acknowledge the information it contains, completely. When we do this we begin to see the truth and because we no longer deny the truth, we free ourselves from conflict. This, in turn, allows our blueprint to naturally fall away. As it falls away we begin to discover who we really are.' (page 20)

He asks where to begin with this and suggests taking responsibility for our feelings. It is a question of attitude; if I feel angry I will not assume someone else has caused it. I will assume that (for some reason I may no longer be aware of) the feeling has originated in me.

In the chapter on the Language of the Ego, he describes how the ego sees things in terms of losing power or gaining power. Power involves the creation of strategies and defences designed to avoid or diminish pain, while at the same time restoring the illusion of power. This power is untrue because it is created as a means to feel powerful, rather than to truthfully be powerful. It is also untrue because it is arrived at through misapprehension of an event in our life that caused us pain.

A few years ago I facilitated a conference on forgiveness in Findhorn. It started as a study on revenge. I saw that revenge was a way of dealing with pain that was too much to bear, a way of trying to get back power. Like any other defence, it does not work. Forgiveness, for me, is a way of accepting that what happened has happened; 'letting go of the idea of a better past' is how one person put it. This fits in with Menezes ideas on ego and acceptance. This relates to self improvement, too. If I try to improve myself, I am already in conflict with myself. It's like a dog wishing to be a cat. Trying to change myself without resolving the inherent conflict will not work. Even if I appear to have changed, the underlying conflict makes sure that it will not last; more changes will have to be made. Complete understanding of this principle is vital for, if it is not completely understood, we must inevitably continue to try to solve our problems with the problem itself.

Menezes' answer to the problem of loss of power is to experience fully the feelings that losing power entails and to let go of the wish to take power back. Vulnerability is required if we are to fully experience the feelings that losing power produces. He describes it like this:

'Vulnerability is feeling exactly what we feel in any particular moment without the addition of thought or meaning. When we are truly vulnerable we become truly powerful, we enter a state of truth. At this point there is no further need for defence and as defence is the major function of the ego, the ego becomes redundant.'

I particularly like the chapter 'Is it Safe?' where he points out how we create war to make us feel safe, i.e. not feeling vulnerable. All wars are the result of mankind's need for safety. If an idea can give us the feeling of safety we crave, we are prepared to believe anything, no matter how illogical and regardless of how many people also suffer and die to protect this idea.

The paradox is that insisting on safety is very unsafe because we know that it is based on the lie that it is possible to be completely safe in this world.

The book is quite short (less than 100 pages) and has about thirty very short chapters which makes it very readable.

I liked this book very much. It is simple and accessible yet profound.

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Shouldn't I be Feeling Better by Now? Client views of therapy
Edited by Yvonne Bates pp210 Palgrave Macmillan £14.99

It was with a mixture of anticipation, fascination and reluctance that I opened this book, which is based on a series of clients' stories of their less than positive experiences in therapy. Anticipation, because it is always a privilege and a pleasure to read stories of clients' process in therapy. Fascination, if not *schadenfreude,* to read about the 'mistakes' made by other practitioners especially those from orientations I have mixed feelings about (I challenge **any** practitioner reading this book not to think 'I'd never do a thing like that' at least once).

And the reluctance? As a fifty-something who has been involved in the therapy world for most of my adult life, a tad of resistance to reading something which might lead me to the conclusion that it has all been an expensive waste of time isn't, I think, totally neurotic.

Therapy **is** a paradoxical, and, as some say, 'implausible' (Totton & House 1997), profession and we should all expect to have contradictory responses to the material presented so deftly here by Yvonne Bates. It is also important to hang on to this notion of paradoxicality in order to remain open to the experiences she presents.

The book has three main sections, which are preceded by an introduction by Virginia Ironside who also contributes a later chapter. Ms Ironside is well known in the media for her anti-therapy views. As a client herself, albeit a celebrity client, she has as much right to be heard as any of the other contributors, but I found myself less moved by her polemic than by the harrowing stories of the first main section.

The six stories are painful accounts of either, according to your viewpoint, what happens when therapy goes wrong or the problems intrinsic to the very notion of psychotherapy and counselling. This is part of the paradox and we could say that both viewpoints are valid. The important thing is that the stories, which are each sensitively introduced by Yvonne Bates, are told by the clients and this alone makes them salutary reading. It is difficult, however, to still the voice of my inner supervisor/trainer as I read some of the accounts.

Certainly, if one of my supervisees or trainees disclosed something like……but they probably don't do they!

The next eight chapters form another section headed 'Practice Issues', the intention being, I think, to distil the important issues which the client stories had raised. Of these, the most successful is the summary in chapter 13 where the questions arising from the client experiences are clearly set out in sections. The other chapter worthy of note in this section is one by Allessandra de Paula entitled 'Alice's Adventures in Psychoanalysis'. Structured around extracts from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* it is, as Yvonne Bates suggests in her introduction to the chapter, both 'sarcastic and emotive'. Nevertheless it is very well written and it does highlight the paradoxical nature of psychotherapy, although I'm not sure that this was the author's intention.

The next section 'Working Towards Solutions' is probably the most constructive. Chapter fourteen invites comment from a wide range of interested parties and it is interesting to read the responses of internationally acclaimed practitioners to the questions raised by the earlier material. A crucial chapter in this section, and the one that inspired me the most, was the dialogue between the author of *Folie a Deux: An experience of one-to-one therapy,* Rosie Alexander and Michael Jacobs. I really appreciated the way Michael Jacobs responded to Rosie Alexander's points; giving her a lot of space and taking her very seriously whilst at the same time acknowledging areas of possible disagreement and maintaining a sense of quiet, non-oppressive authority. For her part, Rosie Alexander seemed to appreciate 'being heard' even if not agreed with. Perhaps there might be some important learning here.

The Conclusion, by Richard House is, as well as being the 'clarion call' its introduction claims, also a summary of some of the literature of the 'client-voice movement'. The position he adopts is somewhat contradictory in that the response of the 'training industry' to this chapter might well be to increase the academicisation and to over-professionalise psychotherapy and counselling rather than to move in the direction he seems to suggest. The book finally concludes with an 'Afterword' by Fay Weldon, another anti-therapy celebrity, and a useful appendix on therapy research.

All in all, I would recommend this book to both trainees and experienced practitioners, but it is important, as I said at the beginning, to maintain a state of paradoxical openness when reading it. To borrow a construction of John Rowan's, the client experiences contained in this book **represent/do not represent** the truth about psychotherapy and counselling. To let go of either end of that paradox is to invite either a defensive response **from** the profession or a persecutory response **towards** the profession neither of which is helpful.

Geoff Lamb