

# **ANGER, BLAME, GUILT AND SORROW**

**by David Brazier**

*This paper is concerned with the ways in which people respond to change, conflict, threat and hurt. It considers the proper place and function of "negative" emotions and the role of therapy in helping us to learn from them. It draws on the authors practice experience and upon the theory of humanistic, analytical and phenomenological psychology, both western and Buddhist.*

## **INEVITABLE SUFFERING**

### **a) A culture of repression:**

In this life we all experience frustration, loss and injury. Our culture, however, does not provide us with very reliable ways of coping with these events. The culture of the personal growth movement offers some alternative approaches but these too seem often inadequate to the task. Neither the doctrine of the stiff upper lip nor that of letting it all hang out seem to do full justice to our needs.

Every society encourages some emotions and discourages others. A great deal of effort can be expended on "impression management" (Goffman 1959). Keeping face can be even more important in some other cultures than in our own (see eg Doi 1986). In our society, anger, blaming, guilt and sorrow are generally regarded as negative states and discouraged. Although the Victorians believed in the stiff upper lip and the maintenance of proper decorum by the imperial race, it was probably the experience of the first world war which led to the general adoption by people in Britain of a policy of keeping emotions hidden. In a situation in which everybody had lost someone, one person's weeping could bring everyone to tears. People learned to bury their feelings in order to get on. This is understandable. The cost of such repression to individuals can, however, be high if it is sustained without respite. Emotional wounds may be kept out of sight but in that condition they do not seem to heal very well and people who have nursed their hurt for many years may suffer a great range of psycho-somatic disturbance. Also, repression does not eliminate, merely remove from consciousness. Jung showed through his studies in word association and later through dream analysis that repression creates a "shadow" consciousness where the thoughts and feelings which one is unwilling to accept nonetheless continue to exercise an unrecognised influence over one's behaviour, relationships and decision making. "The shadow consists of those psychic qualities which, because of their incompatibility with conscious values and goals, have been denied a place in the person's consciousness. These suppressed aspects of personality must be integrated with the rest of the personality if we are to become the authentic and whole persons that we should be" (Benner 1988, p56)

Psychological repression in our society also owes something to the rise of science. There is a widespread belief that pain, discomfort and trouble are unnecessary and that when they occur it is because something has gone wrong. Showing a negative feeling thus becomes an admission of failure. In our materialistic society we believe that the answer to all problems is a material one. And when things are not going as

they should, science even provides pills to help us repress the unwanted feelings which arise. Science and technology are expected to be able to put everything right. Of course, this is a delusion.

Perhaps this delusion is beginning to fade. We are perhaps beginning to be a little disenchanted with the mirage of endless comfort which modern civilization seemed to promise. Fortunately or unfortunately science has not eliminated distress. It has given us many good things and we can enjoy no longer having to live in hovels but it has not stopped people from quarrelling nor has it stopped them from dying. Rather it has given us a larger range of ways by which we may die and more things to quarrel over. It has eliminated some diseases and created others. It has given us bombs as well as washing machines. Compared with life in third world countries we all live better than kings, yet, on the whole, we are no happier. The materialist approach brings some tangible benefits but does not solve the problem of human misery.

Essentially, the materialist approach consists of believing that all will be well if only circumstances change. This doctrine is faulty on a number of counts. Firstly, the world is not so constituted that a change of circumstances - any change of circumstances - will yield enduring satisfaction. Secondly, it is change itself which is the trigger for most of our misery. Thirdly, the very idea that there is some other better place or time than this one is itself an idea which causes distress.

More recently a different idea has come to the fore. If repression does not work then the answer must be to become self-expressive. This is the idea that is commonly found in growth groups. There is no doubt that for a person who has repressed feelings for many years to have an opportunity to express them in circumstances which provide safety can be immensely healing and this is an important aspect of psychotherapy to which this paper will return later. On the other hand, there is also undoubtedly something wrong with the extension of this into a doctrine of selfishness in which individuals feel they have a right to special consideration at all times. It simply is not possible for everybody to have the largest slice of cake.

#### **b) Human inter-dependency:**

The emotions with which this paper is concerned generally arise out of our dealings with one another. If we are to understand them, we cannot do so by focusing attention on the individual in isolation. It is our social nature which is fundamental to the questions we must address here.

Human beings are dependent upon one another. My food, my clothes, my shelter, heat, light, communications, - they all depend upon other people's work. And although we all benefit in more than a thousand ways from other people's efforts every day, it is a remarkable fact that all this is commonly counted as nothing. In fact we only notice these "services" when they break down and cause us frustration. And those who provide such services - and we ourselves are included in this number - may easily be in the position of getting no joy from our labour and feeling unappreciated in our seemingly humdrum work.

Not only are we dependent physically, but we are dependent psychologically. In some parts of the personal growth movement it is fashionable to question this and to say such things as "Nobody can make you feel anything". Actually I remember a little couplet along the same lines taught to me by my elders forty years ago which went:

"Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me." Well, in my case, I have to say, I have not found this to be true. If it is true, then I think this must only be for an elite who have trained themselves most rigorously and heroically, and I do not think that many of us are going to reach such a degree of complete independence, even if we were to decide this to be desirable. This idea seems to be part of a general western notion that hurt should not happen.

Generally we live in something of a make-believe world in which we pretend that the hurts of the past should not have happened and those of the future can be avoided. Perhaps the first and most difficult step is to give up this illusion. Everyone who reads this is going suffer physical pain and emotional losses in the future and, in due course, will die. We know this as knowledge but we do not realise it in our hearts. It is also true that we could not have lived this far without suffering hurts of one kind or another. There is a deep spiritual challenge to all of us to face the reality of our situation without sinking into apathetic despair. It used to be thought that people became depressed when they adopted an unrealistic view of the world but recent research suggests that it is actually most "normal" people who keep their spirits up by sustaining unrealistic illusions about life.

**c) Break-downs are in the nature of our situation:**

Our bodies are complicated, our families are complicated, our social groups are complicated. They are all complicated in that they consist of inter-dependent parts. All complicated structures of inter-dependent parts break down. It is in their nature to do so. Really, nothing is wrong when this happens - things are going according to their nature. What is miraculous is that things break down so little. But when our plans do come to nothing or when a loved one is suffering or dying, we have to take on emotional tasks which test us.

In order to do something which seems worthwhile such as create a family or build a house or help the destitute or read an interesting book or breed a new variety of beautiful flower or get to the supermarket before closing time, we invest effort. This effort generally has to be sustained over a period of time. In order to sustain our commitment we generally do not allow ourselves to think that what we are creating will break down, that what we have given our heart to will come to an end. And yet, inevitably, it will be so. Family members will go away or die; houses deteriorate; books lose their fascination; flowers get eaten by aphids and supermarkets sometimes close early.

It does seem to me that the first step in all healing is some kind of acceptance. In fact, although there may be several other important steps in between, the first step and the last step in healing are both acceptance. The acceptance which is the first step often takes the form both of accepting the real situation and of letting go of something one has used to block one's view (and feelings), while the acceptance which constitutes the last step frequently seems to be a sense of reaching the point of being at peace with the common human lot. This kind of acceptance makes it possible for us to support one another without dealing in guilt. And, as Ken Wilber wrote, after five years of supporting his wife who has cancer, "at some point virtually everybody will either need a support person or be one" and therefore "one might want to think about what it means" (Wilber 1988, p142).

Because break-downs of one sort or another are inevitable in life, we need an attitude of compassion and kindness, both for ourselves and for others. In large measure, the fact that it is that person rather than me who is suffering is fortuitous. My turn will come, as will yours. And if one person is suffering, then in some degree we all are. We are all in one boat. Developing compassion and acceptance is something we can work at but is also something which comes naturally in proportion to our ability to accept the human condition. Really we need to try to reach a condition in which we have a deep realization of the fact that things do decay. While we are thinking that the world should not be constituted as it is, we will waste a great deal of energy and our ability to help one another in ways which work, rather than in ways which just put off the inevitable, will be handicapped.

### **NATURAL HEALING PROCESS**

#### **a) Time Heals:**

A common saying is the "time heals". As a generalization, it is true that most hurts fade with the passing of time. It is not exactly time itself which makes the difference. It is, rather, the fact that experience goes on. Not only does the passage of time demonstrate that one has survived but it also provides other experiences which contrast with the traumatic one. I had a relationship upon which I had pinned great hopes in which the other person left me without warning and with minimal explanation. The pain was terrible but after six months it did not feel so bad and after a year the twinges came only occasionally. This is the process we call grief. It included periods when I felt angry, periods when I felt guilty, periods when I was inclined to find someone to blame and periods of deep sorrow. Grief is very painful, but I think we may say that its suffering is "appropriate".

It is difficult to accept in this modern age which believes so fervently in comfort that some processes, like grief, which are intensely uncomfortable, are, nonetheless, appropriate, but I believe that as therapists we have to do so and this means that we must learn the truth of it in our own case as well as in application to our clients. There is, generally, a gradually growing acceptance that grief is a proper feeling to have in some situations. The same can barely yet be said about guilt. A great deal of effort can be expended in our culture trying to avoid feelings of guilt arising in ourselves or others. Yet, I have come to the conclusion that there are many situations where feelings of remorse or contrition are in fact quite simply the appropriate feelings to have. There seem to be just as many clients who need to learn how to feel contrite about the harm they have actually done as there are clients who need to learn how to stop feeling guilty inappropriately. And some self-questioning and self-reproach are a natural part of the process of grief and change. It is only by re-examining one's conduct that one can prepare for a new way of being. Nobody makes progress until they realize that there is something that needs doing. So contrition is often the trigger for real personal growth.

Now let us turn our attention to anger and blame. It is very common to feel angry as soon as the initial shock of a trauma has passed. This seems to be a quite natural physiological reaction and in such a circumstance, again, we may say, appropriate, at least in as much as it is quite natural and spontaneous. When two cars have collided, the drivers first feel shock and then anger. They get out of their cars and shout and

wave fists. Then they subside into a tremulous depression. By the time they get home afterwards they are back in their normal minds and trying hard to rationalize their "heat of the moment" behaviour. These sorts of things should not be held against people. What is apparent from these examples is that most emotions arise in natural sequences as part of processes with which we are equipped so as to be able to cope with emergency situations. They are not always that well adapted to modern civilized life but they are understandable in terms of the more primitive requirements of the life of our ancestors. We have emergency reactions for coping with confrontations with wild beasts and we have grief reactions for adjusting to the reorganization of our world by forces beyond our control. These two global scenarios may vary in detail but have a generally recognizable overall form. Within them are sequences of organismic responses which include, in every case, a number of different emotions and mental dispositions following one upon another. These have been very extensively documented in the literature on stress (Seyle 1952; Gray 1987) and on loss (Worden 1983; Marris 1986; Parkes 1972).

One thing which is immediately noticeable about these processes is that they are physical as well as psychological. It is in experiences such as loss that one most directly encounters the unity of body and mind. Conventionally we separate body and mind. If we do so then we must say that it is the mind which realizes that a loss has occurred but it is the body which gives expression to the grief. In lived experience the body-mind split here is seen to be just a convenient way of speaking, nothing more. Construing a situation as one of loss and feeling the tears well up are inseparable. This fact of the physicality of these emotions is something which I wish to under-line because we will return to it when we consider questions of therapy below.

In general the researches on stress and on loss suggest that the typical sequence of human response to disturbance goes something like this:

1. SHOCK: The first response is often a numb disbelief. We might say "It cannot be true". It takes a little time for the reality to sink in.
2. ANGER: Then one feels outrage. "It should not have happened". The body mobilizes ready for action. If the situation is redeemable, this reaction prepares us to do whatever is necessary.
3. DEPRESSION: If nothing can be done, one may be overwhelmed by the sense of helplessness. To counteract this, one searches for some meaning in events by thinking about guilt and blame. "Whose fault is it that this has happened".
4. SORROW: As one ceases to struggle against what has happened the feeling of sorrow predominates. This can feel like the most physical phase of all. There is a sense of emptiness which very gradually gives way to acceptance. Little by little one recovers. There are interludes when the pain subsides and one feels "almost normal" though one knows one has been changed irreversibly by the experience. In time the interludes become longer and the pangs less frequent as one readjusts to life in the new situation.

Marris (1986) has shown how these reactions are common not just to people who have suffered a bereavement but to all people who suffer a major disruption of the life they had come to take for normal, whether by rehousing or redundancy or injury or however. Worden (1983) has shown how the process of readjustment can become



arrested at any of these different stages and how it may be the task of therapy to identify where things have got stuck and what has prevented the process taking its natural course.

It is also worth noting that another way of conceptualising this process is as a series of "flight-fight" reactions. Shock amounts to flight and anger to fight, guilt to flight, blame to fight, sorrow to flight, readjustment to fight. The idea of flight-fight gives us a picture of the person swinging back and forth, like a pendulum or like one of those weighted dolls which bob back up when knocked over.

This flight-fight pattern has very wide application. One sees it in all kinds of situations where people must make adjustment to something new. The theory of group process outlines such a pattern (Bennis & Shepard 1956; Brazier 1991) and it is clear from this that we are dealing here with a basic phenomenon of all social life. Whenever one encounters a new social situation some degree of this oscillating process will be set off.

#### **b) Needing a safe place:**

So far we have described the common case. But we know that not every instance goes like this. Not only do human's have a capacity to grieve, they also have a capacity to repress grief. Evolution has provided us with the means to set feelings aside until such time as it may be safe enough to begin to make the necessary psychological transformation. Grief is a metamorphosis and a metamorphosis needs the protection of a cocoon. If the cocoon is not available at the time, we put matters "on hold" until more propitious circumstances arrive. It is thus not uncommon for the therapist to meet clients who say something to the effect of: "I cannot understand why I should have become depressed now when things have never been better for me. All my life I have had to struggle against the odds and now, just as I seem to have created the happy home I set out to make, I feel myself becoming depressed." In such a case, there may of course be many contributory factors, not least of which may be sheer fatigue, but an important element is often the fact that while the person was struggling there was no time to grieve for the hurts and losses sustained during the fight. It is only once a safe haven has been found that the back-log can be cleared.

The healing process can get arrested at any stage if circumstances are perceived to be such that it is not safe to move into the next phase. We know how when an animal is wounded it will creep away into a secluded place and wait. If it is not found and killed by a predator, the wounds may slowly heal and eventually it will be able to return to active life. Humans are much the same but safe places can sometimes be difficult to find. The adolescent who has had a parent die may have understanding relatives who create a supportive atmosphere in which to grieve but sometimes this is not the case. There may be a misguided attitude of forbidding the young person to show distress or there may be younger brothers and sisters to look after and no help available. In such circumstances grief may be set aside and remain, as it were, buried for years to come. Such buried grief will not, however, be without effect. The effort of keeping it covered will drain away energy which would otherwise have been available for life and growth and although the young person may cope, life may remain joyless much longer than would have been the case if the acute pain of loss had been fully felt at the time.

In other cases the process may be arrested because it seems advantageous. Sometimes there are apparent advantages to be gained by staying angry, as, for instance, after an accident when claims for compensation may be possible. In the case of the hurts inevitably sustained as a result of misunderstandings within relationships, all these factors may sometimes come into play. Perhaps when one partner tries to get the seclusion needed for the wound to heal, the other takes this as rejection and new hurt is caused. Perhaps when one partner has a flash of anger in the heat of the moment, something is said which is then not allowed to pass. Perhaps from a series of small items of unfinished business one partner becomes embittered when each of the items singly amounted to very little. Intimate relationships can provide the safe place in which to heal old wounds or they can become a new battle-ground where old conflicts are re-enacted.

Broadly, we may say there are two types of relationships. There are the formal, functional relationships, such as those we have at work or when buying and selling, relations governed by some sort of contract, agreement or negotiation, and there are intimate, friendly or kindred relations in which we treat each other as special. In the former, for the most part, we are required to repress our feelings and maintain a measure of detachment. It is our friends and intimates who see us, as it were, in our natural state. Intimate relationships, where one can confide one's "weaknesses" without danger, provide an environment where we may go through our various metamorphoses safely. The existence of such a safe relationship is thus a very important factor in giving us the ability to meet the challenges of life and not to succumb to depression (Brown & Harris 1978).

### **c) Letting go:**

In summary, therefore, we can say that the emotions we are here concerned with are a part of our natural endowment. They have their place as part of the regular process of adaptation to change, loss, and reorganization in our lives which is, in varying scale, going on in all our lives all the time. Change is intrinsic and essential to our existence in the world. The process is not always comfortable but, allowed to run its natural course, it helps us to grow, change and learn. Trouble arises when the process is arrested or blocked. This happens when we are unable to let go, either because the next stage is too dangerous or because there is an imagined or real advantage in holding on. In order for nature to do her work we have to be willing to let go. In different circumstances this letting go may be called forgiveness, patience, compassion, or acceptance. The ability to say "That's life" is a necessary prerequisite for healing and reconciliation.

Thus far, therefore, this paper has sketched the natural context of anger, guilt, blame and sorrow. The remainder of the paper is concerned with how this natural process which is common to us all can be upset by individual considerations and what can be done by way of therapy to help understand these processes.

## **HURT WITHIN US**

### **a) Repeating Past Hurts:**

How we respond in the present has roots in the past. We are all carrying, as it were, the traces of many past hurts. Some people have suffered indescribably. All of us have

been hurt in some degree. And for each, it is one's own hurt which is the most immediately accessible though that does not necessarily mean that we are very good at facing it. Old hurts live on. They remain with us as unfinished business: the person who left without saying goodbye; the person who hurt me without reason; the person I hurt and to whom I could not make amends; the people who did not give me as much time as I yearned for; the people who wasted what I gave to them; the projects in which I invested time and effort which failed; the time I wasted; and so on.

These old hurts sensitize us, don't they, to be on the look out for new dangers, real or imaginary? Once bitten, twice shy, and once I have been bitten I will see teeth even where none exist. So, all too easily, we can multiply our own difficulty. Once bitten, will I ever meet a friendly dog again? Not until my fear subsides. It is thus an unfortunate truth that the more hurt one has been the more prone one will be to being hurt again. It seems that we carry memory of some sort in our bodies. What I mean by this is that the process is not just to do with patterns of thought, it is to do with direct physical experience. If I have been badly bitten, the mere sight of a dog will bring out the sweat on my brow no matter what I say to myself in my mind. This is why I say that, in the common case, the idea that nobody can make one feel anything is wrong. I have to accept that my body has a certain way and wisdom which are beyond the reach of my conscious mind. Of course, if one were enlightened to the point where one's body really was of no further account, then one would probably be immune even in this case but, in this paper, we are concerned with the psychological situation which ordinary people like you and I find ourselves in.

The mental-physical organism carries traces of the past. It is as though each of us has a storehouse where such traces are stored. In Buddhist psychology the storehouse is called the "alaya consciousness" and the traces are called karma. Karma means action. This reminds us that what is carried is not just ideas, not just mental contents, but the traces of former action. The body remembers what it has done, and prepares to do it again.

In phenomenological psychology we are concerned with the body's recollection of being (Levin 1985). We know that each person lives in a different phenomenal world, a different *eigenwelt*. Perception is not just the passive reception of what a world "out there" offers to the senses, it is our intentional reaching out to grasp the world in a particular way. And the way for each of us will be shaped by the traces of past action. We will each have "triggers" which activate past action and these will sometimes seem to have been set off accidentally but often enough, when we are able to trace back the roots of what has happened, we find that we have actually been actively co-operating in bringing about the circumstances which trigger us off. It is as though the contents of our storehouse work for their own release and repeatedly recreate the circumstances of their formation. Freud noticed this urge to repeat, sometimes called "repetition compulsion", and saw it as part of the organism's drive to heal itself, just as children's play repeats "everything that has made a great impression on them in real life, and.. in doing so they abreact the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation" (Freud 1920, p286).

Repetition compulsion is the seemingly involuntary reliving in life and in dreams of the traumas (and the satisfactions) of the past. In the extreme, this has been called



"post traumatic stress disorder" but this condition is simply a more pronounced example of the repetition tendency we all carry with us.

So the nature of karma is repetition. Whatever is incomplete or unresolved will, in one way or another, be repeated. Often we are unaware that we are setting ourselves up to repeat old patterns, but yet we do so. The idea of the "unconscious mind" is sometimes used to explain such phenomena. This is the idea that there is a will in us apart from our conscious will, that there is an organismic self with needs which may not correspond with one's conscious idea of what one wants. Certainly there is a tendency for the traumas of the past to resurface and to be re-enacted. And although we may say that the body is controlled by the brain it does appear to make some kind of practical sense to say that such repetition is just as much the manifestation of a bodily trace as of a mental one.

**b) The Role of Perception:**

A commonly told story illustrates the role of perception. A man lives in a hot country. In the heat of the day he takes a bath. As he is getting out of his bath he puts his foot on something long and round. What does he feel? Probably in the first split second he just registers that something is not as expected. Then an image will crystalize in his mind. If the image is a piece of rope, he will look down with composure already imagining picking it up. In this case, however, he imagines a snake. Every cell in his body immediately goes into emergency reaction and after a moment of frozen terror he pulls back his foot with a start, tensing from head to toe. Sweat breaks out all over his body. Of course, what is actually there may be neither of these things. He looks down and sees that he has actually stepped on the hose pipe he used to fill the bath. For a moment he remains unsure. He registers that it is the hosepipe but the fear of the "snake" is still in him and he wants to be quite sure. He quickly notes the features of the pipe and his eye traces its length back to where it is tied on to the tap. Then he experiences another wave of feeling, perhaps a mixture of relief and embarrassment. He quickly looks round to see if anyone had noticed his discomposure before realising that, in the bathroom, he is alone.

In this illustration we can clearly see how it is not what is actually there so much as what we perceive to be there which gives rise to our reaction. We also see what a large part imagination plays in perception. In fact perception generally occurs against a background of expectation. The first thing the bather recognised was that something was not as expected. Immediately the imagination fills in the blanks, building on whatever "information" is to hand. The mind jumps directly to a conclusion and does not budge from it until further data is presented. And even when such further data comes, it may at first be doubted.

From a consideration of ambiguous situations of this kind we can get some idea of the vital part played by perception in our lives. Especially so when we consider that the emotions we are concerned with in this paper generally arise in a social context and every social context is, in some degree, ambiguous. We very rarely have "the whole story". We never know for certain who is our real friend and who our real enemy. How do we know whether we are dealing with a snake or not? The power of Shakespeare's plays, for instance, frequently hinges upon this theme of ambiguity, as, for instance, in Romeo and Juliet where the theme is that of loving someone who is officially one's

enemy. In this instance the ambiguity is clear to both the main characters but still results in tragedy. In the case of King Lear, however, the most tragic consequences flow from Lear's misjudgment of his daughters' affection for him. Shakespeare had a talent for revealing to us the dilemma of our situation in the most powerful terms. Now the fact that such an important role is played by perception means that if we can shift the way we habitually perceive situations we will change the quality of our lives markedly. In psychology there is little or no real cause and effect. Whatever has happened to us does not entirely determine how we must be. As a therapist one sees everyday how different people have reacted quite differently to similar scenarios. This means that in our capacity as therapists we may need a quite different outlook from when we are in our capacity as citizens. Clients may have every right as citizens to do things which do not contribute to their psychological well-being. Those who have been treated badly may need to discover their feelings about the event and this is likely to include anger but equally they will not recover psychologically simply by staying angry even though what has happened to them may have been unjust.

Perception is affected not only by the resources it draws on from our past but also by what we want for ourselves in the future. Here again imagination plays a large part. In order to do anything at all, the mind projects forward. When one crosses the room, one's mind goes ahead of the body. Image precedes action. If one cannot see oneself doing something one probably will not do it. An important part of therapy can be to clarify the client's mental pictures which define the repertoire of possible action, and to co-operatively conjure new pictures which open up new possibilities.

We can see that past experience and future projection work together because it is easiest to see oneself doing what one has already done before. Familiarisation with a new situation is necessary and comes by acting within it. A small child explores the environment. We are all equipped with an inquiring spirit and this is closely linked to action. To inquire is to explore and to explore is to move around. Therapy is armchair travel.

### **c) Feelings and action:**

An important theme of this paper is the close connection between feelings and action. An emotion is an urge toward action. Anger is an urge to harm. Remorse is an urge to punish oneself. Sorrow is an urge to curl up and hibernate. But although emotion is a mental act which intends some action as its object, the sheer fact of having the emotion does not make the corresponding action inevitable. It is possible to refrain from harm even when one is angry, for instance, provided that one believes it is important to do so. Realizing this is important because many people use repression of emotion as a means of controlling behaviour. In effect, they say: "I do not believe in doing harm, so I will make sure I never feel anger".

In the practice of meditation one learns to see the whole range of emotions rise and fall without ever moving from one's seat. It is possible, therefore, to pass through many difficult situations by relying upon patience. A note of clarification is important here, however. There are, it seems, two different sorts of patience. One is the patience of apathy and fatalism which does not seem to be all that helpful. Rather, the kind of patience which seems to heal is the patience which is rooted in the idea that there is wisdom in nature even when it is not immediately apparent. If one is to avoid the

extremes both of repression and narcissism, this means trusting the natural process. In practice this means being willing to feel every feeling as it naturally arises, neither exaggerating nor suppressing its passage through us. This kind of patience is, in fact, a kind of meditation.

When something happens that casts us into a dark frame of mind, we may say that what has happened is that something has been triggered off from within our storehouse. We may not yet know what, but we can rely upon it that it was trying to get out and that it is probably better out than in. When we are tempted to think, "I won't start to cry because I will never stop", we are almost certainly mistaken. Even the worse storm blows itself out and this is as true of ourselves as it is of the weather. The prescription here, therefore, is to "feel everything". Do not economise on feelings. On the other hand, this does not necessarily mean that one has to act out every whim. Achieving a more complete awareness of what is going on coupled with an attitude of acceptance, seems to allow things to flow in a naturally healing way. Awareness is the key.

As mentioned above, people often suppress feelings because they believe that feelings control behaviour. This is not true. Actually it is the other way about. As people behave, so are they likely to feel. Feeling angry, I am not obliged to punch my adversary. If I do so, then the action trace I lay down will be one of violence and this will stay in my storehouse waiting to make me angry the next time. Angry actions breed more anger. They also, of course, set up retaliation. Feuds help nobody in the end. So what we are talking about now is avoiding clinging on to hurt. This is a matter of feeling the reaction in oneself to the full, then letting it go. One can only do this if one is capable both of being fully in one's experience and of standing aside from oneself. If I can stand aside from myself, then I can look and see my own reaction. If I cannot allow myself to react, however, there will be nothing to see. If I can do both, then I will see clearly enough to say "I am full of anger". The anger still feels very unpleasant as I feel my blood "boil". The state of observing one's own state is, however, quite different from either on the one hand being carried away by it or, on the other, resorting to repression. The same is true of other emotions. It is possible to "feel the fear and do it anyway (Jeffers 1987).

## **THERAPY**

### **a) Therapy as drama and story:**

When the natural healing process is blocked in some way, it is wise to seek help. In the dialogue of therapy there are many ways in which one person can help another to free up the log-jam which is keeping things stuck. Therapy provides a special environment in which the client can inquire into the phenomena of his or her life and the way they make sense. Therapy is not about finding cause and effect processes. People do not operate like machines. People live the way they do because it has become meaningful to them. As therapist, one has to try to understand the meaningfulness of the client's world to the client from the client's own side. This means that the logic of life is not the logic of cause and effect but the logic of story-telling. A story unfolds in a certain way. One thing leads to another and we can recognize when it "makes sense". Recognizing that it makes sense is quite different

from thinking that one thing inevitably follows from another. We feel moved inwardly by somebody's story precisely because it could have been otherwise but it was as it was. We do not feel empathically moved, generally speaking, by machines.

This is why it is pointless telling clients that they should have done otherwise. It is meaningless. They did as they did because that was meaningful to them. Until I can appreciate the "making-sense" of the client's world, I remain a helpless outsider. The process of making sense of life involves an active searching. The therapist becomes a companion on the client's journey, a "co-inquirer". Having a companion who is an experienced traveller gives one courage to adventure into new territories.

Already we are using metaphor and metaphor plays a crucial role in the evolution of meaning. Clients create their own story, in which all their passion can find its place. The logic of stories is also the logic of action. We say that actions speak louder than words and this is true. Therapy cannot be effective if it remains at the level of cause and effect logic. It is not sufficient, in the great majority of cases, for the client to have the situation figured out. It is necessary that the client feel something new, that there is a real event.

The word "real" in the last sentence, in the context of therapy, means psychologically real, or we may say phenomenologically real. We are not here talking about objectivity. In psychodrama, for instance, a protagonist may converse with someone who has been dead for many years. Objectively this is unreal. Phenomenologically it is real. In the phenomenal world of the client it is real. As therapists, therefore, we need a quite different sense of what is and what is not real. Moreno, the inventor of psychodrama, called things which are phenomenologically but not objectively real, "surplus reality". Therapy is done in the realm of surplus reality (Blatner 1988, p58).

Psychotherapy is thus essentially dramatic. In talking therapy it is necessary to be able to conjure up the image or the sense of action. In art therapies action is represented. In drama therapies action is performed. In all therapies there are two dramas going on and these tend to be reflections of each other. One drama is the drama of the story told by the client. The other drama is the unfolding relationship between the client and the therapist. Both these dramas are real events which change both the client and the therapist.

Often the drama of therapy is achieved via the use of myth and metaphor. Leonard provides some good examples from her work with women of the use of mythological themes in the task of harnessing rage (Leonard 1985).

#### **b) The drama of the therapy relationship:**

We may say that the therapy relationship has both a here and now and a "transference" aspect. If the client feels angry with the therapist this may be because the therapist has been rude or arrogant or has misunderstood or it may be because the client expects the therapist to behave badly in the same way as the client's parent did. Transference may be understood, therefore, as projection or as an instance of repetition compulsion. The client expects the same relationship with the therapist as with other significant people in the client's life and unwittingly goes about creating it. In analytical therapies the task of the therapist is to interpret this transference so as to throw light on the original relationship where the hurt was sustained. In person-centred therapy the therapist does not interpret but relies upon the fact that the relationship

with the client is sustained in a quite different way from the original one to effect change (Rogers 1986).

Either way the unfolding of the therapy relationship is very important to the outcome. The therapist needs the capacity to accept all the client's feelings even when they are directed at the therapist.

**c) Repair and nurture work:**

A frequent scenario in therapy is that the client has a sense of lack of parenting. It is as though there is a child inside the client still raging with frustration at the mother who did not come because the next baby needed all her attention or at the father who was never at home except when intoxicated. The client needs to find an experience in the therapy which will replace some of what feels to be missing. This may be achieved either through the relationship with the therapist or through the "work" of therapy itself. In psychodrama it may be possible to provide the client dramatically with the experience of being looked after by a "good parent" or "super-mum". Regression therapies may aim to "take the person back" to the time when hurt was sustained in order to reexperience events in a new way (Brazier 1992). In talking therapy it may be possible to conjure up the sense of nurture by reflecting the detail of what the client yearns for in a graphic way. In any therapy in which trust is achieved, the client will get a sense of this nurture from the therapist. Sometimes it is said that therapist's should avoid cultivating dependency in clients but often enough the dependency is there already and when this is the case it would not be wise to actively demolish it. The client needs to see the gleam in the therapist's eye (Kohut 1971; 1977).

It is not necessary always to see the need for nurture as a regression to childhood, although this idea provides a very useful metaphor in many cases which is readily understood by the client and brings with it not just the regressive but also the healing and creative properties of the "child within". Nurture is a general need of old and young alike when afflicted. We talked earlier about the need for a cocoon in which metamorphosis can take place and the therapy relationship provides such a "bubble". Therapy is phenomenological primarily in that it is a place where the ordinary world can be put in brackets. Doing this, however, requires trust and the establishment of confidence is thus one of the ever-present underlying dynamics of the therapy process (Fong & Cox 1983).

**d) Catharsis:**

By catharsis is meant the discharge of repressed emotion. Many therapies make some use of cathartic methods. There has been a lot of debate in the history of psychotherapy about the importance of catharsis. Freud began with a method based on catharsis (Freud & Breuer 1895) but moved away from this approach as he came to believe that catharsis did not lead to lasting cure. Psychodrama has, however, continued to make use of catharsis as an integral part of its method. An excellent study of this subject is provided by Scheff (1979) who introduces a very useful concept of "distancing" which he defines as "the extent to which the person's attention is not taken up by the return of repressed emotion from past events" (p59). In the theatre, for instance, "a drama is considered to be underdistanced if it evokes raw emotion in audiences to the point that its members become so drawn into the dramatic action that they forget where they are" whereas "In overdistanced drama, the audience



is unmoved" (p59). He suggests that "When the individual's attention is exactly divided between past distress and present safety (ie at optimum distance from the repressed emotion), repression is lifted, and catharsis occurs" (p60).

Moreno described two different kinds of catharsis as being essential to psychodrama, the primary catharsis and the catharsis of integration. Primary catharsis consists of the discharge of repressed emotion. The catharsis of integration consists of the emotional discharge which occurs when new insight is applied as spontaneous adaptation to a present set of circumstances. The theory of psychodrama would suggest that a primary catharsis which is not followed by a catharsis of integration may produce no more than transitory relief.

When working with clients who have failed to grieve or who have a store of unfinished business, catharses occur quite spontaneously as the memories are accessed in the safety of the therapy relationship. As therapists we need to make this possible and respect the client's need for such discharge but not make the obtaining of catharsis an end in itself.

#### **e) Therapy in groups:**

In group therapy it may sometimes be easier to work with strong emotions. The presence of a group can have an amplifying effect. In many tribal societies the shamanic healer always begins by gathering the clan together. Anger, blame, guilt and sorrow are emotions which have to do with some rupture in the social fabric and it may be easier to heal this in the presence of a social world in microcosm such as is provided by group therapy. Work in groups can be highly evocative. Also, the group process itself, as mentioned earlier, tends to include a phase of "storming" (Tuckman 1965) when angry feelings may come to the fore quite naturally followed by subsequent phases in which there is opportunity for them to be reintegrated. The group provides a "matrix" of support which enables individuals to "work" on emotional issues in a way which can restore their sense of solidarity with others.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In this paper the following themes have emerged:

1. Some suffering is inevitable and the effort to avoid inevitable suffering produces further unnecessary suffering. Acceptance, patience, forgiveness and compassion thus all play an important part in healing.
2. The so-called "negative" emotions have their place as part of a natural process of growth, change and metamorphosis. They should, therefore, neither be repressed nor unduly focused upon, but accepted and allowed to do their work.
3. The way we experience the world is coloured by experience of the past, hopes for the future and cherished beliefs and attachments. Together these constitute a perspective or "frame of reference" which sets us up for particular experiences. Realizing this can produce a significant shift in our attitude to misfortune, giving us more stability and inner peace and can give us the possibility of changing our habitual frame of reference in ways which will give us more joy in life.
4. Psychotherapy is concerned both with supporting the natural healing process and with inquiring into the way clients view the world and how this affects their experiences. The therapy situation is one in which objective reality is bracketed and

phenomenal reality can be explored. The inner life is found to be governed by narrative rather than logical forms and emotion is closely linked to action. Repair work can be done through the "work" of therapy and through the therapy relationship itself. Such work often involves catharsis and may be more powerful in a group setting.

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