

Language, Love and Healing: A Psychoanalytic Perspective
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I would like to approach the question of healing in psychoanalysis by paraphrasing Donald Winnicott's prayer, which by now has been over-quoted, namely, that we be alive when we die. A hope, which I believe, should be an essential goal for patients as well as for analysts. Winnicott also noted that feeling alive, feeling real, could not be simply equated with the satisfaction of our instincts. He wrote that our instincts are personalized, so to speak, when they support and are in unison with our personal goals. Freud hinted at a similar process in his famous dictum that where id is, ego shall be. If to be alive is to experience oneself as real, experiencing creativity as well as personal initiative, then we have a usable context in which to understand psychoanalytic work.

Consequently, we can note that psychoanalysts and psychotherapists do not simply uncover what was covered over, so to speak (although they certainly do that). They do not simply identify, confront and interpret various developmental defenses (although they undoubtedly do that also). In this journey toward realness, toward aliveness, analysts and therapists try to provide a safe place where patients can find, and re-find, their personal history; a place where the language of their symptoms, of their non-aliveness, can be heard. As analysts we attempt to provide a quiet place where therapeutic caring can quietly sustain a patient's personal grief — a caring one can legitimately speak of as love. In such a setting the rifts within us and between us, the dividing fissures, the pathologies from narcissistic to neurotic disorders, have the possibility of coming together. Such a coming together, within oneself and with each other, is a healing worth striving for. A healing which should have as one of its ingredients, for analyst and analysand, a demonstrable capacity for compassion and civility, for oneself and others. What I have just stated is by way of introduction to my personal thoughts about the work I do as a psychoanalyst. A work I have repeatedly thought about in terms of what I am doing, and why I am doing it, for over thirty years.

The ancient Greeks noted that happiness -I think we can read this in the context of aliveness -resided in the full exercise of personal competence. Freud echoes this theme when he notes that the goal of analysis is to enable a person to love and to work. It is within this context that we can understand what might seem like a more pessimistic conclusion of his, namely, that at the end of an analysis a patient exchanges neurotic (he spoke of hysterical) misery for common unhappiness.¹ Although I have always had a sense of what Freud meant, writing this paper has helped me understand common unhappiness anew. Common unhappiness, I have come to appreciate, need not be experienced as a dour sadness. It has more to do, I believe, with the acceptance of death, conflict and ambiguity in the ongoing task of integrating our personal histories. When we are able to arrive at such an emotional integration, we have the possibility that the rift between our unrealistic wishes and/or ideals and our historical actuality can be bridged. I believe this is what Erik Erikson (1964) had in mind when he noted, in *Insight and Responsibility* that we are most free (i.e., most alive) when we are able to will the inevitable that has happened to us. I have repeatedly struggled to unravel this thought of Erikson's. Tentatively

¹ Freud. S. (1893-1895). Vol, 11, (p.305).

I would say that we are alive when we know both intellectually and emotionally and have mourned for what we have lived through. We are personally grounded to the degree that we accept the present moment and relinquish the fantasies of what we would have liked to have happened. We are alive when we can interact with those with whom we live, with those whom we love, not as salves for our injuries but as possibilities for experiences. To be able to use oneself, to be able to use one's world, not in a manipulative sense but by recognizing relationships, is to feel effective and related — touching and touched. Winnicott has these experiences in mind, I believe, when he speaks about being alive. Feeling alive, feeling grounded, as well as being intimately connected with others, is, however, a life task; it is not an existential given. In psychoanalysis, such a task is negotiated essentially through language, through our personal and interpersonal dialogues.

As patients recognize and attempt to resolve the old scripts of their lives, they can be more actively immersed in the world. Because they have walked the difficult streets of their pasts, they need no longer be held, in solitary captivity, by their histories. Therapy offers the possibility of being real rather than reactive. The human condition, what I believe Freud alluded to when speaking of common unhappiness, can be accepted and lived with. Within such a context, we can speak of healing.

Walking the streets of one's past, in analytic therapy, means understanding how we have been spoken to and therefore how we speak. The words that pass between patient and analyst provide alternate readings, alternate metaphors for our desires and our loves, our experiences and our needs.

What I have indicated about healing implies, as I have stated, understanding healing, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy metaphorically. Elaborating on these thoughts, I noted that:²

A metaphor is, as we know, that which evokes something else — a use of analogy to promote a depth of meaning and emotional resonance, as when we speak, for example, of the evening of life. Just as a metaphor points to something else, locates the center of meaning somewhere else, (it is important to) remember that ultimately there is not, nor can there be, one definitive center of meaning. By the very nature of our capacity to use metaphor, we are guaranteed continuous new meanings. What do I mean when I say that psychoanalysis is a metaphor? To speak of something as unconscious, for example, is to context an individual's self-understanding. When we say that the unconscious is revealed or found as it is interpreted, we are describing an aspect of self-knowledge that comes in many guises. That is, knowing ourselves is also to experience not knowing ourselves, turning our eyes away from or even refusing to see ourselves. The metaphorical nature of the unconscious is equally true of such concepts as resistance, transference, idealized self-object or transitional space, inter alia. We can also speak of desire itself as a metaphor for the other — the other as culture, the other which germinates desire within us; even the prohibition of desire is the other, as superego. (pp. 416-417).

We may choose to describe what occurs in the space between couch and chair as transference, or

² Gargiulo, G. (1998).

we may choose to describe it in terms of developmental lacunae leading to the formation of what we can call either an 'ôI' or a persona — as long as we understand that such realities are imaginative/ cultural/ constructs subject to the same ebb and flow of insight which time guarantees. When we understand transference as a metaphor, for example, we are attempting to elucidate how we are contextual creations, made up of our many histories and our many desires. We can appreciate that when patients are, for the psychological moment, their forgotten childhood dreams, fears, hopes, or expectations, they nevertheless encompass more than meets the ear, at that moment. Transference, in this context, can be understood as a metaphor for memory, for our need to speak the language spoken to us, for the ambiguity of desire and sometimes the absence of desire, as well as the different selves desires evoke. That we are all had by our history and by what we do with that history is not in itself a statement of pathology but of the dilemma of self-understanding. To understand the Freudian metaphors of the mind, Id/Ego/Superego, conscious, preconscious and unconscious is, in fact, to appreciate man and woman as divided. To understand the metaphors of defense is to appreciate men and women as warring within themselves.

To be alive is to know how and where we stand with ourselves and with others. To be able to recognize our divisions, and in Erikson's sense to will them, goes a long way toward healing the rifts that divide us. The recognition of common unhappiness is, as I have mentioned, no morose outcome to treatment; it is similar to Winnicott's conviction of the universality of an everyday mild depression. A mild depression that is concomitant with the recognition of our place in the world, as we have discussed, as well as the experience of our inner aloneness.

Given our aloneness and the bridge which language supplies, it is understandable that we need a guide to help us find ourselves, a mentor to help us find our way. Buddhism has a long tradition of the master and for Western consciousness it was Dante, with Virgil as his guide, who exemplified such a need. What prompts such a search is our willingness to accept, as Dante reminds us, our finding ourselves in darkness; lost and aware that life is passing us by. Psychoanalysis, as one discipline addressing these issues, promises, as far as is individually and humanly possible, a place where another will listen, with minimal judgment, to our story. A place where another will help us understand how we are telling it, point out our forgetting, our possible distortions, as well as our reenactments. As language and emotion become safe, as memory becomes clear, as reenactment becomes difficult, we are achieving a healing from neurotic misery to common unhappiness. A common unhappiness, I repeat, which is not a dour sadness but an acceptance of the ambiguities and conflicts of life, the reality of death, the need to continuously examine our lives.

If we are listened to with compassion and respect, we should be able to find these qualities in ourselves. If we are listened to with a neutral ear, so to speak, we should find human differences more acceptable and thus be able to experience civility; a civility that is lived through a respect for others as well as for oneself. Such qualities are also the hallmarks of healing within a psychoanalytic context. Terminating therapy, an individual should be able to love the world and to experience personal competence, to value oneself and be committed to the surprise of finding out who he/she is with honesty and humor. This is what it means to be alive. This is what it means to find oneself -able to walk the path that makes the journey out of the dark forest of our pathologies pleasurable rather than frightening. We know our aloneness, however, because we

are with others. Paradoxically when we are not in relation with others we are not alone, we are isolated.

Aloneness can be a contented and grounded place for many. For others, it is a seedbed for seeking whatever transcendent reality may be beyond them. Alfred North Whitehead (1926), the British philosopher and mathematician, concluded that religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness (p.16). If one accepts such a definition, we can see that the human issues which psychoanalysis addresses, the profound subjectivity as well as relatedness of human awareness, dovetail with many spiritual (rather than religious) traditions. Psychoanalytic healing, in my judgment, need not preempt either the acceptance of the finality of our individuality or the possibility of a transcendent context for knowing and experiencing our humanity.

While it is possible to argue that the primary interpretation, metaphorically speaking, an analyst makes to a patient is the quality of the therapeutic relationship, it is particularly important for analysts to remember that such a therapeutic relationship is a two-way street. An analyst must find healing also. While we can presume an analyst's competence, we need not require brilliance. While we can expect intellectual honesty, we can hope that an analyst is able to manage his/her self-referential narcissism. The intellectual and emotional milieu out of which an analyst's own healing can occur entails his or her being able to study whatever insights a psychoanalytic perspective can provide, knowing without intellectual cynicism that one is not able to hold truth except as a point of reference.

Healing, as I have tried to convey, is a two-edged sword: both patient and analyst are its subjects. Helping others find and own their lives can, and frequently does, awaken an analyst's own shadows; he or she comes to healing with each case one treats. We can speak, consequently, of the analyst's common unhappiness as found in this repetitive healing. If the two-edged sword of healing does not cut to the analyst's side, he or she will sacrifice a little bit of life, a little bit of aliveness, a little bit of realness. The task of finding life, of reaching each other, of touching the real, continues for each of us.