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The Jewish People

The Patient

The patient, by the name of Israel, walks into the room and instantly bursts into a tirade of arguments conclusively proving his credentials, and says that he is better than everyone else. “Look,” he says to the therapist, “Freud, Einstein, Marx, Jesus, and others, were all Jews. And it is an undisputed fact that, considering our small size, our people gave humanity more than a few geniuses, not to mention the Book of Books, the Bible, and our God, whom everyone else copied. No wonder everyone envies me and mistreats me,” he says, adding, “it is simply jealousy and nothing else, because I did not do anything to them.” Here the therapist begins shifting in his seat in confusion. For a moment it all sounded perfectly convincing. This patient really is incredibly talented and special. And he, the therapist, feels helpless in the face of the force of his arguments. Yet still, the experienced therapist recovers and realizes that it is not his credentials, the size of his nose, or other unchangeable things that this patient needs to change in order to get along with his environment. The therapist tells the patient that he appreciates and respects his special talents, which are indisputable, but that is not the problem. The problem is on another level, the emotional level.

The war between patient and therapist is on. Even an experienced therapist would find himself engaged in it, and ask himself how he ever got there, and what in the world it is that this patient does to him that neither of them understands. The patient keeps trying to prove to the therapist that he is wrong, that he, the patient, doesn't have any problem, and that everybody just

hates him. And the therapist tries to show him that he does have a problem besides being terribly talented, and that he, the therapist, is right. This patient's arrogance and condescending attitude toward the therapist and toward everyone else bring out in the therapist complex feelings of envy, anger, and a desire to prove to the patient that he is neither the best nor the greatest in the world, and that the therapist also has something to say. Sometimes the therapist feels fear and uneasiness around this patient, Israel.

"What do you think is happening between us now?" the therapist will suddenly ask the patient. The patient will cut his vindication speech short, lean back in his seat, and wonder what the therapist is aiming for. "Look," the therapist will say, "What is happening between us now is what happens to you with the whole world. You surely didn't invent this behavior especially for me. You are trying to convince me you are right and I am trying to convince you I am right and we are stumbling into war. If we understand what is happening to you here, in this room with me, we can unravel this knot, and it can help you in your life outside of the clinic." At this point, the patient is prepared to admit there is a war going on in the room, just as there is a war going on wherever he goes, but he still doesn't understand why it keeps happening to him over and over again. The patient begins to feel there are things he has a hard time seeing.

The therapist will give the patient an example he knows from school. Everyone knows the type, the class genius who knows the answer to every question the teacher asks, but who doesn't have to jump up and answer before everyone else, doesn't have to prove his worth to others. He sits quietly, knows his own value, and knows that in the end, if nobody else knows the answer, the teacher will get to him. Another kind of class genius will jump ahead of everyone else and keep trying to prove he is the best.

Our patient, Israel, still doesn't really comprehend the analogy. But the therapist notes to himself that he understands from what is happening in the clinic why the patient quarrels with everyone. It is because the patient feels superior to everyone else, and invites everyone to prove to him that he is worthless. The therapy will be long and hard. "Like a stylus etching in stone," as someone once said, such is the progress of the paranoid patient, who feels everyone is against him. The patient will continue fighting tooth and nail to show he is the best. He won't easily give up his belief in his own grandiosity. The experienced therapist will begin to understand not only the anger this patient arouses in others, but how desperately this patient needs us to adore him, because he has a very hard time without it. Like every paranoid personality, he needs us to be very empathetic and attentive to him for a length of time, because he missed that experience in childhood, of someone really being with him, really understanding him. Only when he gets that experience that was missing from his past will he be able to calm down.

The therapist will also understand from the relationship growing in the

clinic what this patient's relationships were with his parents, and that here, in this room, the patient is reconstructing and resurrecting his past relationships through the therapist. "Yes," the therapist will say, "in your childhood you really did feel persecuted, and those were your real feelings, as a child who had difficulty facing his threatening parents. But now you are grown up, and continue reliving your childhood experiences even where circumstances are different and you are not being persecuted." Slowly, the longer the empathetic line continues in therapy, and the more the patient feels the therapist understands him, he will start calming down. He will have a corrective experience: for the first time in his life he will have a different relationship, one that is not persecuting or threatening.

Then the patient will, for the first time, share his dreams and fears with us. He often feels he is not the best, but possibly almost the worst, and he hides this and tries to conceal it from himself and from others. And he really doesn't understand why he always creates a stir and raises a riot; he knows something is wrong with him, but can't say what. Slowly the patient will let on how hard it is for him to make space for others, and how he is absorbed mainly with himself because of deprivations from his past. And the therapist will rediscover with the patient how hard it is to recognize the other and give him space when you weren't given the space you needed in the past, and lived under constant threat and struggled to survive. Now the therapist and the patient are on their way. They still have a lot of work to do, but this patient is no longer thinking in terms of good and evil, that he himself is good and everybody else is evil, that he is right and they are wrong. This happened because he had a corrective experience in his relationship with the therapist, who accepted him and was empathetic toward him.

At this point we will end the analogy and go back to the Jewish people, not necessarily in chronological order. In therapy too the patient divulges his past in an associative order, sometimes beginning with what happened to him today and from there remembering events of the past. We as a people often look down on the Arabs from a position of superiority, and then are surprised by their reactions. One example is our attempt to develop the Arab countries through economic conferences, based on the correct assumption that we have the ability to contribute to them. But again, the emotional message that goes with the offer is the root of the problem, and the Arab countries immediately go on the defensive and don't want our help, fearing we will dominate them with our "helping." Wouldn't it be better to wait for them to ask us for help? Every parent knows how a child reacts to the parent's good intentions, when the child would prefer to do something by herself. A good parent will be there, will witness the child's experience and convey the message that the child can come to her for help when she wants to. The child will choose when to ask for help, and the request for help has to come from the child. Otherwise, the parent will be seen as dominating the child with her tremendous experience, and quashing the child's attempt to develop separateness and independence. That

is how the United States treats us. It waits for us to ask for help, it helps us almost without our noticing, and surely does not flaunt its ability to help us; therefore we do not consider their help humiliating.

And who can forget the years of our contempt toward the Arabs, and the euphoria after the 1967 Six Day War, and the price we paid for it in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and our dismissal and ignoring of the Palestinians until the 1987 Intifada uprising broke out unexpectedly, and the years-long belief that we could conquer terrorism with force, and the price we paid for that in Lebanon, and more? Indeed, with our personality disorder as a people, our patient receives blow after blow and doesn't know where it is coming from. That is because he has a very hard time seeing the other side, understanding what they are really going through, and therefore predicting their future actions. We know those patients who are beset by one disaster after another, and when we try to inquire whether they saw any warning signs, if they felt anything coming, they always insist that the blow came out of the clear blue sky. We understand that they were very self-centered and did not see the other. The Holocaust is, of course, another example of what happens to the paranoid-grandiose personality who is not alert to his emotional dialogue with his surroundings. Unconsciously, the person with that personality plays the role dictated by his inner worldview, and invites the other side to play the complementary role. In our case the roles are persecutor and persecuted. That is the dynamic of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Jewish people secluded themselves for years with their obvious difference and separateness from the surrounding nations. That isolation contained within itself feelings of persecution and superiority at the same time. If I am so great and so important, others must have a reason to persecute me, envy me, and hate me. In psychopathology we know that paranoia often goes with megalomania. We also know from clinical experience that the feeling of "I am the best" is usually connected with its opposite, the feeling that "maybe I am not as great as I think," and serve to cover it up, and there is a feeling of falling into an internal experience that says, "I am worthless." One could say that from such heights you can only fall. Thus, a personality pattern is created in the individual or the nation, swinging sharply between feelings of inferiority and grandiosity. One does not exist without the other, and there is no point in asking which came first, the chicken or the egg, because they were both formed simultaneously in the growth process, just as it is pointless to ask whether we are God's chosen people or can be wiped off the face of the earth. The Jewish people did preserve their singularity over the years, in a kind of package deal of balancing intertwined emotional mechanisms. In their dialogue with the Gentiles, the Jewish people felt and broadcast that they were superior, while the Gentiles reminded them of what they wanted to forget, that they also felt they were worthless, didn't even have a home of their own, and could be eradicated. There is a self-nourishing emotional system at play here. There is no doubt

that the grandiose personality invites the envy and the hatred of others because of its arrogance, and that is how the person with that personality creates his own persecution and turns his emotional fantasy into a genuine, real experience. We, the Jews, find it very hard to think about and understand how we played any part in the age-old hatred toward us, and what feelings we aroused in others. That is the understanding the therapist tries to promote in therapy, so that the patient can become more aware of, and responsible to, what he brings out and invites from others. In the Holocaust the Jewish people connected with the peak of eradication and humiliation, so that from the arrogant experience of “I am the best” came the opposite inner experience of “I am worthless, and the evidence is, look what they did to us.”

From that difficult starting point, a relatively small segment of the Jewish people decides to establish their own state, returning to their ancestral homeland. Those Jews attempt to return to their ancient country they had abandoned for two thousand years, thinking they could come back as if it had waited for them all that time empty and neglected. And here we already know these people are in for another surprise, because of that same old pathology, manifested in their difficulty to see the other and recognize him. And sure enough, the Arabs are going to revolt and refuse to accept them, and the Jewish state will seclude itself in its differentness in the Middle East. If You Will It, It Is No Legend, the motto by which we created the state, is a correct statement in a certain sense — that you must believe in your power in order to create new things — but it is also a problematic statement in the emotional sense. It is an omnipotent statement (often uttered by an adolescent) by a person who has only his own will in view, and feels that with it he can conquer the world. And here the old vicious circle is re-created again, because again they really want to destroy us. And I am trying hard not to be dragged into the question, “Who is right?” and say we deserve a place too. Because every therapist knows that question can sabotage therapy for a paranoid personality. The question is not who is right, the therapist will tell the patient, but why are you suffering so much, and how can that suffering be prevented (because life is more than a court of law)? How does one help that patient, who feels that everyone is against him — and this time the feelings are not just in his head, they are true in reality — stop that vicious circle and stop inviting everyone to be against him? How, in a state of threat and persecution, can you keep the balance that allows you to preserve your existence and your honor, along with the understanding that not everything is yours and that others deserve their share too? That is the dilemma of the paranoid personality who has already come to understand that something is wrong with him and wants to get out of the catch.

In the United Nations organization, in the group of nations, which is like any therapy group, we are the personality-disordered member. That is the member who sits in the group and everyone always picks on him, and everyone has to deal with him, and he thinks he is always right and innocent. That is, of

course, a narcissistic disorder, where a person is absorbed in himself and in his own grandiosity, because he did not receive enough empathy in the past. We know that a child has to receive first, and only then can he give. What that patient really needs, as we said, is empathy from the world's nations. He needs to be treated with consideration, and needs his fears and anxieties to be understood, and rightly so, because others wanted and still want to destroy him, and that is why sometimes he gets aggressive, and has to hurt others and conquer territories.

This is where the different therapy styles of the European countries and the United States come in: The United States does not impose itself on us, and tries to give us security and a defense alliance. It understands that the peace process is a growth process that has to move at our own pace and come from within; that such processes cannot be imposed; and that direct negotiations are of immense importance, because this child has to grow up and be able to solve his problems himself, without others imposing solutions upon him and making him angry at them. That is the kind of parents every child needs in order to face the world. Parents that do not do things for him, but wait on the side and are ready to help when the child asks them. The personality-disturbed person also needs others to understand that he has to feel he is strong and standing on his own feet, in order not to be threatened and to be able to build trusting relations with the world. And what a therapeutic statement came from Secretary of State Warren Christopher when he said, "Only a strong Israel can make peace!" As every parent knows, only a child who feels safe can move forward in the growing process while recognizing the needs of others.

The European nations are, as therapists, less empathetic and less alert to our needs, and more inclined to try to impose their opinions on us. Therefore they are less effective in this therapeutic peace process and are less able to help the Arabs in the process. They approach this couples counseling like a therapist trying to impose her opinion, or at least who voices her opinion openly. They forget that their opinion is not that important and not so helpful, but on the contrary, blocks the eminently important ability of the partners to listen to each other. In that respect the right wing was right when it said for years that peace has to be made in direct negotiations between the parties, as equals, and not with the mediation of an outside arbitrator. During the governments of Rabin and Peres (1992-96) that personality-disordered being called "Israel" began to feel, definitely and possibly for the first time in its life, that the world loved it, a feeling that was ruined during the reign of Benjamin Netanyahu (1996-99).

Before we go back and try to understand how it all began, and how that personality disorder emerged and developed, let us say that the ultimate goal of growth in the lives of individuals and nations is the ability to integrate different parts of the personality. It is not only that I am the best, nor is it only that I am the worst, and it is not only that I am right, or that I am aggressive. The ability

to see complexities grows during the growth process. In that respect, left and right as overt and covert parts of the personality represent different emotional attitudes that can change at different times, and are at work inside the nation's single soul. You can say the emotional structure of the right better represents the Jewish people's past, while the left is a relatively new and young offshoot. The therapist's task in treating this kind of personality disorder is to heal the rift and soften the fragmentation. That is the task of the growing process for a child who lives in the stormy world of monsters and fairies, and good guys and bad guys, and that is the overall task of the peace process.

So How Did It All Begin?

The Jewish people were born when God appeared to Abraham and said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee. . . ." God chose Abraham, and, as we feel with certainty, chose us, to be his beloved children in this land. And that is how the Jewish people set out on their journey, a nation that began its course as different and special compared to other nations, because it was chosen by the omnipotent God. There is no doubt that Abraham had valid reasons to create for himself an authoritative, omnipotent father who loved only him. It surely took an active imagination to create such a new concept in those days, and Abraham used it creatively to resolve internal conflicts he must have had with his father, Terah. And so the group of people who had a strong emotional sense of singularity, including fear of their surroundings and arrogance, multiplied and grew. Let us consider for a moment that singular action in the human emotional experience, the invention of God, and try to understand it. Man created God out of his own needs; God did not create man. The goal of that human invention is to compensate for a very deep feeling of insecurity. That is because if there is a God, there is order and there is justice. Then you can predict the future, and events have meaning beyond cruel fate. Man's feelings of worthlessness and finality bred God as a great, omnipotent father, who watches over us, and whom we have to obey and appease.

But the Jewish people created a new model of God, an abstract one. Not a statue, not a mask, but the kind of God you cannot see, although it exists and is present in our consciousness, in our hearts, as an internalized image. That was of course a novelty in the environment of the Jewish people, because until that invention the nations surrounding the Jewish people were idol-worshippers (there are testimonies that the Jews were not necessarily the first people in the world to create an abstract God). That is an important developmental leap in the power of abstraction. We know that at a very young age (until the age of eight months) what a child does not see does not exist for her. If you hide her

toy before she has acquired the ability to abstract, which is known as object permanence, she will not seek it because she does not see it. Indeed, the small infant has to see the object to believe it exists. At around the age of three another “object permanence” emerges, this time emotionally. The image of the parent is internalized by the child. The child can, for instance, go to kindergarten with assurance, and still feel the parent is there in her experience. That emotional object permanence is also a critically important developmental leap. If the parent dies before that internalized image of the parent congeals, the child experiences it as abandonment, and cannot mourn the parent she has not internalized. After the age of three, usually, there is an ability to mourn what was and no longer is. Before developing emotional object permanence, the child has to see the parent frequently in order to establish his existence in her consciousness, but after that stage, she does not have to see him as frequently. Only after the child has an internalized image of the parent can she actually separate from the parent. This is an opportunity to note how powerful internalized images are, and what complex relationships we can develop with those figures that exist only in our imaginations. Indeed, the Jewish people showed a strong power of abstraction and invented a God that is invisible, who cannot be touched, who is only an internalized image.

The concept of one God is another significant developmental leap toward abstraction and integration. We know from the child’s development process how hard it is for her, and how much time she needs to understand that the same parent can be both good and bad, while remaining the same parent. That emotional integration of the image of a single parental figure, who is a human figure who has different personality traits, is an advanced developmental stage for the child, who is learning to view her parent as a complex personality. We know the fairy tales with the fairies and the witches and the dichotomy between good and evil. We also know from clinical psychology, from working with people with personality disorders, how they divide the world into good and evil, and how hard it is for them to understand that the same person can be both good and evil, and the split is in their own experiences but not in the person under consideration. The Jews created a God who is only good, but he can also be angry and cruelly vengeful when he is not obeyed. And again, relating to one single deity requires the integration of different feelings in the same figure without the possibility of a split.

Indeed, it has been hard for the Jews all these years to keep their God abstract and unique, and not to turn him into a statue, and not to give him children, such as Jesus, for instance, or the offspring and the multitude of Gods with different characteristics created by the Greeks. The concrete need to touch the object as well as fragment it, and not to stay with the abstract, is a very strong regressive need. The Jewish people did give humanity the abstract and single God, and other nations adopted that model in later times.

Let us go back now and examine the relationship between the Jews and the

God they created. We must remember, of course, that this beautiful fantasy existed nowhere else but in the minds of the Jewish people, who, since that moment in the life of Abraham, the patriarch, have lived by the story they told themselves. God chose the Jewish people, and God rewards them and punishes them time and again but he, God, is always right, and he must always be heeded and obeyed. That authoritative father figure is omnipotent, always right, and punishes severely and cruelly, especially when he is abandoned. In the Ten Commandments, the first commandment is, "I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the Land of Egypt." The second is, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the fourth is, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Thus the Jewish people created an infinitely narcissistic figure, which the first three commandments place in the center of the individual's world, and who requires absolute loyalty. The reward was, undoubtedly, the experience of differentness from all the nations of the region. The feeling of superiority and specialness runs like a thread through all of Jewish history, and is symbolized by the God who is only ours, the one and genuine.

The relationship between the Jewish people and their God has, among other things, a deep sadomasochistic element. God is always right and man is always wrong. And if something terrible happens to us, such as the Holocaust, we simply do not understand why we deserve that punishment, but we do deserve it, and God knows what he is doing. He is never wrong. In other words, the dialogue between man and God always ends with man saying, "I am guilty; I sinned," and so on, taking all the blame and the responsibility, and God always remains the good, strong, and right one. Surely it is not easy to grow up with such a parent, who, when he hits us, we have to say he is right. It really is not humane, but that is how the child, at least at certain moments, experiences the authoritative parent. The child, at those moments, identifies with the aggressor. It can be assumed that most of humanity grew up under such strong hierarchies most of the time, and therefore that is their projected image of God. But the Jewish people had a compensation for all the blows inflicted on them by God. They experienced them as blows of love, a sign of God's caring and desire to discipline them. That is how battered wives and children often feel about their batterers. Those women and children justify the beatings they get, see them as a sign of love, often invite the beatings, then run to the batterer asking forgiveness and comfort. That is the sadomasochistic relationship at its best. Yes, said the Jews, God is angrier at us and punishes us more, but that is because he loves us more and keeps us by his side, and that is where we derive our compensation and singularity. That child, named Israel, thinks his father loves him best, and transmits that feeling to his siblings. He is sure they are jealous of his closeness to God, the parent.

It is no wonder that such an inner experience is a self-fulfilling prophecy. All the other nations have to do is assume the role the Jewish people assigned

them over the years, to try and harm them, and thereby the Jews will continue feeling they are right and everyone is mistreating them because they are God's beloved children (this is not intended to justify the offending nations, only to understand the Jewish people's responsibility for the suffering they underwent). But let us not forget that everything we are talking about is happening in only one place, in the mind of the Jewish people, who invented God and the whole story. They did not invent it by accident. The Jewish people are projecting their inner experience outwardly and telling us about the quality of their initial relationships as a people. Now all that remains is for them to live by the story they invented, and thereby reconstruct and relive their inner historic experience as a nation again and again (those are emotional processes that can be seen clearly in the clinic).

The Jewish people preserved their uniqueness and their religion for years, and tried to establish a state during the periods of the First and Second biblical temples. The current attempt ("The Third Temple") by the Jewish people to establish their own state is different from the previous ones, because the world around us has changed. We no longer have a monopoly on God. Moreover, a more universal and less religious Western culture of thinking has evolved; a new stream with a more romantic and less dramatic emotional capacity has emerged; the developed world has undergone a change that reduces the role of religion in our lives and places the secular state above it; and emotional, impulsive, and totalitarian thinking are being replaced by democratic thinking, which is more relative and less absolute, and gives space to different voices, in the outside world as well as within the soul. It is both an emotional and intellectual maturation. The original need to create authoritative parents for ourselves has lessened, and our intellectual capacity for more abstract and less concrete thinking, as expressed in science, has increased.