

What Might Psychotherapy Have to do With Peace?¹

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Psychotherapy can be regarded as having two basic stages.

The first stage is what most people picture when they think of psychotherapy and is what is usually taught in psychotherapy training programs, including most clinical psychology programs. It has to do with the healing or resolution of symptoms or presenting complaints. In this stage the psychotherapist is regarded as an expert who applies techniques or procedures to bring about the desired result, the restoration of some form of normal functioning in the patient, and when that result is achieved the treatment ends. The techniques or procedures are based on objective evidence derived from carefully designed experiments and can be “manualized”—i.e. written down as a series of instructions that any fairly intelligent person could read and follow. The depression or anxiety is relieved, the relationship repaired, the grieving completed, the obsessions or compulsions have become manageable—the patient is cured and the job is done. In some cases, of course, this stage may go on for a very long time, even indefinitely. If the treatment is unable to resolve the presenting complaints but is able to hold the symptoms at bay as long as the treatment continues then it is considered “supportive” and may last a lifetime.

The second stage of psychotherapy also may last a lifetime but for a different reason. After the symptomatic relief of the first stage is achieved the psychotherapist and patient, perhaps now called a “client,” may elect to continue to work together for the ongoing enhancement of functioning beyond the original goal of the restoration of normal functioning. In this stage the psychotherapist and client are more likely to be on a first name basis and the psychotherapist becomes more of a companion on an open-ended journey of growth that transforms him or her as well as the client through a deeply personal and intimate relationship. Existential or spiritual themes are more salient. Evidence for the value of psychotherapy in the second stage tends to be more subjective than objective, and the therapist is guided less by instructional manuals and more by his or her personal experience as a client in psychotherapy.

In public or institutional settings only the first stage of psychotherapy is usually offered. The second stage is most commonly seen in private practice settings. Most psychotherapists would acknowledge that they do some of each, although some would claim to do one or the other exclusively and would tend to be a bit contemptuous of those who do not. Those who practice first stage psychotherapy exclusively would tend

to describe those who engage in stage two as have “boutique” psychotherapy practices, while those who focus exclusively on stage two would tend to see the other group as providing “merely counseling.” Such a dichotomy is ironic in light of a number of topics that will be addressed in this paper, such as tolerance for ambiguity, black/white thinking and paranoid projection. While both stages have relevance to peace, it is the second stage that has the greater relevance and will be the primary focus of this paper.

The thesis of this paper is that psychotherapy, especially its second stage, can contribute significantly to peace. This contribution can be conceptualized in somewhat different ways depending on the client’s membership in one of three groups: (1) citizen/voter, (2) political leader, and (3) soldier or prospective soldier. Basic drives, especially developmental and spiritual ones, are addressed in psychotherapy in ways that lead the client, as a member of one of these three groups, to be more likely to contribute to peace.

PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR CITIZENS

When a normal citizen is the client in psychotherapy there is reason to expect an enhancement of his or her functioning as a citizen in ways that are likely to contribute to peace. This is particularly the case in a democracy, when the citizen is also a voter. Such enhanced functioning manifests in three areas: resistance to the manipulation of unconscious motivation by politicians, an ability to assess the unconscious motivations of politicians, and a diminished vulnerability to us/them paranoid-like thinking.

The need for a citizen to be able to resist being manipulated unconsciously has been the focus of psychologists for many years. Ethel Kavin, a child psychologist who worked with juvenile delinquents in the 1920s and 1930s, became interested in how children could be raised in order to prevent delinquency. This interest led her to study methods for teaching children to have sufficient self-esteem and independent thinking abilities not only to stay out of trouble, but to become valuable citizens and intelligent voters in a democracy. In the latter part of her career she focused on teaching parents how to raise their children so that they would become such citizens (Kavin, 1966). Although effective parenting rather than psychotherapy was the intervention, the model was very similar to the one herein considered.

Far better known than Kavin’s work, but overlapping in time, is the book The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford, 1950). In the wake of World War II its authors sought to understand the childhood antecedents of susceptibility to fascism and developed a 9-factor model of

personality features presumed to contribute to such susceptibility. These included conventionality, submissiveness, aggression, subjectivity, superstitiousness, toughness, cynicism, the tendency to project unconscious emotional responses onto the world, and heightened concerns about sex. Although methodologically limited if not flawed (Christie and Johada, 1954), The Authoritarian Personality sparked interest in the factors that could lead individuals and nations to be drawn to war. The authors held out little hope that people who showed a predominance of these personality features would change, and instead speculated that an entire society would have to change in order to become less inclined toward fascism. I would argue that such societal change can take place, one citizen at a time, as a function of psychotherapy.

A much more recent work by Welch (2008) would seem to support such an argument. Welch, an active clinical psychologist with a great deal of experience as a political insider in Washington DC, offers a chilling account of the way in which unconscious conflicts are carefully and effectively manipulated by modern neoconservative politicians. Unconscious material in the areas of envy, paranoia, and sexuality (reminding us of The Authoritarian Personality factors) are routinely exploited. Voters tend to be susceptible to the appeals made by politicians who use such manipulations, and these same politicians tend to lead the country into war.

For example, Welch asserts that the emotional turmoil in Americans immediately after the 9/11 attacks made them particularly sensitive to the paranoid defense mechanism of projection. Eager to find a way to understand the terrible thing that had happened, frightened by the prospect that it might happen again, and concerned about how best to avoid its happening again, Americans were easily persuaded by their president that the solution was simple: An evil and dangerous man, Saddam Hussein, was the cause of the problem and disposing of him was the solution. All responsibility for the events of 9/11 was projected onto this scapegoat figure, thereby removing the need for examination of more complex ways of understanding the situation, especially ways that might involve America's taking some of the responsibility. The beginnings of an examination of this more complex possibility were contained in the question "Why do they hate us?" Many people were asking this question immediately after the attacks. However the President and his aides were able to manipulate the American psyche and to drown out this incipient collective introspection by actively encouraging the paranoid position that all responsibility resided in an evil other.

Clearly the greater awareness of one's unconscious motives that psychotherapy provides can serve as a prophylaxis against such manipulation. In a review of Welch's book that was published in a psychotherapy journal (Rhead, 2008), the larger implications are presented in this way:

That we need to improve our ability to tolerate complexity and anxiety and to think clearly and independently at the same time is obvious. If such abilities continue to decline, we will almost certainly find the great American experiment in democracy a failure, probably to be replaced by some kind of dictatorship. How to avoid such a disaster is the question that looms. Does it require more genuine education rather than merely teaching to the test? Does it mean everybody needs to have at least 5 years of serious psychotherapy before they are allowed to vote—and at least 10 years before being eligible to run for office? Does it mean that the role of the psychotherapist must be viewed in some context larger than that of the consulting room? Should we in some way be citizen-psychotherapists, seeking to address the psyche of the nation?

While psychotherapy may provide a prophylaxis against political manipulation, it is not without cost. An example of this cost came up recently in an ongoing psychotherapy group in which all the members are predominantly in the second stage of psychotherapy. One of the group members had made more than one reference to his impulse to simplify a choice he had to make in an upcoming election. Seizing on a small piece of information about one of the candidates, he jumped to a sweeping generalization about the candidate that seemed to make the choice an easy one. Soon another member of the group voiced his longing to “return to Mayberry.” He reminisced about how much simpler his life had been while a member of the military during the Cold War. He knew very clearly that he was one of the “good guys” (though not always proud of what he actually did), and that he was fighting a dangerous and evil world-wide communist conspiracy. Such a black-and-white world is no longer available to him, and while he acknowledges that he is better off without it he still feels the desire to “return to Mayberry.” Eventually my co-therapist was sharp enough to pick up the implied complaint that psychotherapy was part of the problem, since it made it very difficult to return to a Mayberry cognitive-perceptual style in which a world-wide terrorist conspiracy could be substituted for the earlier communist version.

This clinical example demonstrates how psychotherapy can bring to conscious awareness the nuanced aspects of the external world and of one's internal affective and motivational world. In doing so it helps

develop a tolerance for ambiguity in both inner and outer realities. This tolerance for ambiguity has implications for the tendency to make war, and will be examined later in this article.

Another clinical example is provided by Rice and Benson (2005):

In a mixed religion psychotherapy group conducted in Northern Ireland by one of the authors, a Protestant woman persisted in denying that a significant member of her group was a Catholic by consistently calling him Donald when his name was Donal. The members of the group repeatedly pointed the error out to her. Unconsciously she was making him a cultural partner by adjusting a single letter of his name and anglicizing the Irish name in order to justify to herself that a Catholic could be meaningful to her. Only as she was able to become aware of this previous unconscious and now unwanted prejudice towards Catholics could she begin to explore how her sheltered fundamentalist upbringing had adversely affected her in many other ways.

A more theoretical example comes from an article about the dangers of trivializing psychotherapy (Rhead, 2002). Examining psychotherapy as a process that enhances introspection, the following scenario is presented:

It is interesting to speculate about the response of a German bureaucrat to the news that he will no longer be managing the logistics of railroad cars filled with merchandise bound for market. Starting tomorrow his job will be the same with the minor exception of the cargo, which will now be human beings bound for torture and death. He goes home, has dinner with his family, helps his children with their homework, makes love with his wife, and goes back to work the next day to carry out his slightly revised duties. What is missing from this picture? I would suggest that introspection is missing.

PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR POLITICAL LEADERS

Now let us turn to the possible peace dividends that might accrue if more political leaders had some significant psychotherapy experience. In the most general sense we could expect less acting out of unconscious conflicts (e.g. about one's sense of adequacy), and greater resistance to those ("foreign or

domestic”) who might try to manipulate a political leader by subtle appeal to such conflicts. Certainly a case could be made that the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States is largely a result of such unexamined unconscious material (Frank, 2004).

The tendency toward us/them paranoid styles of thinking is certainly a liability for anyone with the power to start a war. Psychotherapy helps clients to become conscious of, and to withdraw, the projections that support such thinking. This is particularly the case in group psychotherapy, where one set of instructions to clients begins as follows (Rhead and Jacobson, 2007):

Group therapy can provide powerful healing, and even transformative, experiences. In order for this type of experience to occur, the members of the group must achieve a deep level of trust and interconnectedness. The suggestions given below are intended help you enter and participate in the group in ways that will make it more likely that you will have such experiences.

Enter the group with an openness to developing deeply personal relationships with other group members. Maintain this openness over time.

Initially it may seem impossible to trust or to learn from other members of the group you perceive to be different from you. You may see yourself as superior, inferior, or just plain incompatible on any one of many dimensions, such as wealth, intelligence, sophistication, education, gender, sexual orientation, religion, spirituality, criminal history, ethnicity, age, mental health, political beliefs, moral integrity, and/or self-awareness. Discussing how your perception of differences makes trusting others difficult can be the first step to building relationships with them.

Your ability to search out elements of common humanity (including yourself *in*, rather than *out*) will offer you wider possibilities for self-knowledge and growth.

After the invasion of Iraq I had occasion to talk with a bright young staffer in the U.S. Congress. I asked him why the Congress had been willing to give such power to George Bush, a man who had been diagnosed as suffering from megalomania (Frank, 2004), both through direct legislation and through passively failing to challenge his blatant abuses of even this extended power. His response: “We thought he would be more reasonable.” Had there been among members of Congress a greater appreciation of the

pervasiveness of unconscious motivation in all of us, an appreciation that results from exposure to psychotherapy, perhaps it would have made a dent in the denial that allowed for the expectation that Mr. Bush would be “reasonable.”

It is noteworthy that Frank’s diagnosis of megalomania was based on much more than Bush’s brazen disregard for the laws and constitution he had sworn to uphold as president. He compiled an extensive archive on Mr. Bush’s entire life, long before he entered politics. Frank traces a developmental history filled with unresolved trauma, a lifetime of extremely fragile self-esteem, untreated alcoholism, and a black-and-white world view that casts him as the all-powerful warrior who is pitted against the “evildoers.” His embrace of fundamental Christianity, which merges with his belief that he is doing God’s will, provides a cultural container for his megalomania. His blatant indifference to the suffering he has inflicted on the people of Iraq is further evidence of his belief that his decisions are beyond ever being questioned or challenged.

Even before most US citizens were aware of George Bush’s unprecedented use of “signing statements” to declare his intention to assume the power to selectively enforce laws passed by Congress, most members of Congress were fully aware of it. One former Congressman and Vice-President, Al Gore, has noted (Gore, 2007): “One of President Bush's most contemptuous and dangerous practices has been his chronic abuse of what are called 'signing statements.’”(pg 223). He goes on to note that Bush acts as if “...he can simply decide on his own whim which provisions of a law apply to him and which ones he'll simply ignore.” (pg 235). One would have hoped a Congressman with the slightest psychological sophistication would have seen the signs of megalomania long before Frank (2004) made the diagnosis publicly. Yet there was no significant questioning by Congress of the President’s fitness-for-duty in terms of his mental health in the face of such “contemptuous and dangerous practices.” This seems likely to be an indication of a failure on the part of members of Congress to be thinking in terms of unconscious motivation in general, to say nothing of specific mental disorders. If even a few members of Congress had been exposed to enough psychotherapy to stimulate their thinking in such directions, they might have been able to raise the issue in a serious enough way that such abuses of power by the President could have been meaningfully challenged.

The earlier quote from the review of Welch’s book alluded to the possibility that psychotherapy might be made a requirement for voting or even for running for office. Of course neither would be practical or even

desirable. Psychotherapy that is undertaken in response to an external demand, rather than one's internal pain or desire for growth, is not effective. I would not even be inclined to consider it psychotherapy. However, if enough voters began to ask candidates about their psychotherapy experience, it might become the cultural expectation. I still remember how hopeful I felt as a very young psychologist when I heard rumors that Bobby Kennedy had such experience.

PSYCHOTHRAPY FOR SOLDIERS AND PROSPECTIVE SOLDIERS

Finally, let us examine how psychotherapy might make a difference in the domain of the military. Of course many members of the military receive first stage symptom-focused psychotherapy for PTSD after combat experience. What I want to address here is the possible effects of having those who might become soldiers exposed to second stage growth-focused psychotherapy. These possible effects fall into two general categories: (1) choosing not to become a soldier and (2) becoming a more psychologically sophisticated soldier.

A more psychologically sophisticated soldier would be better able to resist unlawful orders. A young man I met when he was 18 could not wait to join the Marines and go to Vietnam. As soon as he was deposited by helicopter in the combat zone he was instructed by an officer to shoot a Vietnamese man in a nearby field. The man appeared to be, and very likely was, simply a farmer attempting to till his fields. My friend followed the order he had been given in spite of the slight inner conflict he felt and regrets it to this day. More recently a small number of soldiers have refused deployment to Iraq, citing the unlawful nature of our invasion of that country. While soldiers capable of independent thought are not efficient soldiers in the eyes of the military, they certainly offer some restraint against unchallenged war-making and unbridled destruction.

Probably the greatest area of interest to me with regard to the possible impact of psychotherapy on peace has to do with the possibility that many young men (and women) might not choose, or be willing, to go to war if they had some substantial psychotherapy experience. This is area in which the developmental and spiritual variables come into play most clearly.

Almost 100 years ago William James posited the need for a "moral equivalent" of war as an alternative way to satisfy the drives he postulated motivated young men (he did not have to consider young women at

the time) to go to war (James, 1995). Speaking of the “military instinct” as well as a number of more psychological and spiritual motives, he was not optimistic about a stable peace, but he had hope. Among other things he noted:

All the qualities of a man acquire dignity when he knows that the service of the collectivity that owns him needs him. If proud of the collectivity, his own pride rises in proportion. No collectivity is like an army for nourishing such pride;

From such reasoning he suggested that a “moral equivalent” to war might be found that would satisfy such psychological and spiritual needs for belonging, pride, honor, sacrifice, devotion, adventure, and meaning. In some ways he seems to have anticipated the Civilian Conservation Corps, The Peace Corps, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Psychotherapy can assist young men and women to become more conscious of such psychological and spiritual needs, thereby giving them greater flexibility in finding ways to meet them without resorting to the old standby, war.

Much more recently Fox has suggested a similar model (Fox, 2008) for men. He suggests that men are predominately unconscious of their spiritual need to function as a “noble warrior.” He postulates that men must find their own personal calling as a warrior, channeling aggression and competition into what Thomas Berry calls “The Great Work,” which means “the task of moving modern industrial civilization from its present devastating influence on the Earth to a more benign mode of presence.” The warrior’s benign mode is contrasted with that of the soldier, who unquestioningly obeys orders to behave destructively. The warrior is “the mystic in action” and gets his strength from passing through Fox’s version of the traditional stages of the mystic’s journey. The primary test of the warrior’s efforts to embrace his spiritual calling is the extent to which he creates greater justice and compassion.

Plotkin offers an elaborate and sophisticated psychospiritual developmental model that also emphasizes the concept of personal calling (Plotkin, 2008). His eight-stage model can be applied to individuals as well as to societies or cultures. He postulates that most of the members of modern industrialized societies are suffering from arrested development at the third of these eight stages, resulting in what he calls “patho-adolescence.” Finding one’s calling does not really begin until the next stage, so this early arrest in development prevents the discovery of one’s calling and leaves one vulnerable to anything which might feel like an approximation of calling. For the reasons cited by William James war can easily become such

an approximation. Plotkin makes a passionate plea for finding ways to catalyze the development of enough individuals beyond patho-adolescence to stimulate the growth of society beyond the need for war and other destructive behaviors. In a review of Plotkin's book (Rhead, 2008), I have suggested that psychotherapy can make a meaningful contribution to this growth in individuals and thereby in society.

A man who was in the military in Vietnam reported to me a dramatic experience he had 35 years later that might be a case example for Plotkin's theory. He happened across an empty cigarette pack of the brand he used to smoke. It provoked a flood of memories of all the things he did to try to achieve/prove his manhood 35 to 40 years earlier. These included heavy smoking of unfiltered cigarettes, heavy drinking of hard liquor, compulsive sexual conquests, and joining the military so he could fight in a war. The flood of memories carried with them the clear realization that all of these activities had been undertaken in order to compensate for his deep feelings of inadequacy as a man. In Plotkin's language he was attempting to create a rite of passage for himself into the next stage of development by using these self-destructive activities as if they were genuine and appropriate developmental tasks for a person his age. He had been in many years of psychotherapy after leaving the military, initially of the first stage variety to recover from the trauma of war and later using the second stage to piece together the insights that came together with the flood of memories triggered by the cigarette pack.

One way to characterize the effect of psychotherapy, in both its first and second stages, is to think of it as freeing clients from the control of external authority and enhancing their inner sense of authority. In the first stage this might be represented by a person who feels guilty and depressed because he believes he is the terrible person his parents and religious community have told him he is. In many cases it is amazing to see how terrible a person can feel simply because of having certain thoughts and feelings that were judged harshly by the adults around them when they were children, even though these thoughts and feelings have never been expressed in behavior. Psychotherapy helps him challenge this belief in his unworthiness that was imposed by powerful external authority figures. It sometimes takes a great deal of time and effort to overcome the emotional consequences of such a belief, even though many other people currently in the client's life can see the belief as completely irrational and without basis. However, once this has been successfully accomplished the client's vulnerability to believing what he is told by an external authority is forever reduced. This reduction in such vulnerability would probably make the client a much less valuable soldier to most conventional armies, especially if they sometimes demand behavior of him that is in conflict with his inner sense of morality.

Zimbardo (2007) has recently offered a set of guidelines to those who find themselves the object of “undesirable social influences.” His recommendations stem from two sources: (1) his famous prison experiment, in which normal college students very quickly became sadistic when randomly cast in the role of guards in a mock prison, and (2) his serving as an expert witness for a soldier who was on trial for abusing prisoners at Abu Ghraib. In both situations Zimbardo attributed the abusive and sadistic behavior entirely to the social context in which it took place. In the case of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal he countered the military’s argument that “a few bad apples” were at fault and instead blamed “a bad barrel,” charging several high-ranking military and political individuals for creating it. Zimbardo’s set of 10 guidelines for those who would resist behaving in immoral ways when directed to do so by an external authority are primarily consciously utilized cognitive strategies. They are primarily cognitive exercises structured as affirmations, such as “I am responsible,” “I respect Just Authority but rebel against Unjust Authority,” and “I want group acceptance, but value my independence.”

Clearly Zimbardo’s guidelines are designed to reduce vulnerability to external authority in very intentional and specific ways. Although psychotherapy is not generally undertaken with this specific goal in mind, the impact of psychotherapy might well enhance the effectiveness of these exercises. In particular the development of skill at interpersonal confrontation that often takes place in group psychotherapy would be expected to generalize to the exercises described by Zimbardo.

Group psychotherapy may also facilitate the development of “heroic imagination,” something which has been hypothesized to be a precursor of heroic behavior (Franco and Zimbardo, 2007). In this context heroic behavior could be exhibited by the soldier who risks his life to protect a comrade, and by the soldier who risks his career by refusing an unlawful order. Heroic imagination is “the capacity to imagine facing physically or socially risky situations, to struggle with the hypothetical problems these situations generate, and to consider one’s actions and the consequences.” (Franco and Zimbardo, 2007, pg 34). While group psychotherapy rarely presents the need to face physical risk, it certainly provides many opportunities to take risks socially, as noted in the preceding paragraph. The introspection facilitated by second stage psychotherapy, whether group or individual, could also be expected to stimulate heroic imagination.

There is another impact of psychotherapy that could have a dramatic impact on unconventional armies, such as covert terrorist networks. Certainly the reduction in vulnerability to external authority, noted above, would be present and powerful in these unconventional armies. However, psychotherapy also encourages something beyond the introspection that leads to challenging external authority. It encourages the sharing with others of the inner experiences that result from introspection. This sharing is often quite powerful in individual psychotherapy when the client reveals something that she has never told anyone else. It is even more powerful when this sharing happens in the context of group psychotherapy. I have often been intrigued with imagining how well the 9/11 terrorist cells would have functioned if a member found within himself doubts about the wisdom or morality of their mission and then shared his doubts with his comrades. By the time they were nearing execution of the mission I imagine that the doubter simply would have been killed by his comrades. However earlier in the process, say during the recruitment or planning stages, such sharing of uncertainty might change the course of history. In the film *Munich* one of the members of the Israeli assassination team questions the team's decision to deviate from their official target list, sanctioned by no less an external authority than the Prime Minister herself, to kill someone for personal revenge. He is willing to be excluded from the revenge killing and wait in silence while the others carry it out. However, had he been more insistent, the other members of the team would have had a very difficult choice on their hands. A similar dilemma is presented in the film *Paradise Now*, in which two young Palestinian men are recruited to become suicide bombers. While neither film cites psychotherapy as the cause of the questioning of external authority, and I doubt that any of the 9/11 terrorists had any meaningful exposure to psychotherapy, there is still something to be said for the impact on a culture when a significant number of its members engage in psychotherapy. Even those who are not formally psychotherapy clients can be impacted by the value attributed to introspection and sharing of uncertainty by those who are.

PSYCHOTHERAPY, MYSTICISM, AND PEACE

One variety of psychospiritual experience seems particularly relevant to the type of growth in individuals that would lead toward peace. This is the mystical experience of union or transcendence—an experience in which the sense of one's being a unique entity that is separate from the rest of creation dissolves. William James among many others has reminded us that such experiences are separated from our usual experience of ourselves by “the thinnest of veils.” In such a state the existential question shifts from “Am

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” to “Am I my brother?” Spending time in a state of mind in which the latter question is meaningfully engaged certainly implies an enhancement of the ability to tolerate ambiguity. Tolerance for ambiguity has in turn been shown to be associated with certain ideological perspectives that favor peace over war (Haidt, 2007; Jost, 2006). Further, changes in attitude and worldview that take place in such states have been shown to be enduring (Griffiths, Richards, Johnson, McCann and Jesse, 2008). Over the last decade or two psychology has become far less hesitant to acknowledge the validity of the study of these phenomena, and far more certain about their significance (Pargament, 2008).

Three to four decades ago there was a great deal of research on the use of psychedelic compounds as adjuncts to psychotherapy (Pahnke and Richards, 1966). One of the most consistent results of this research was the finding that the occurrence of “peak” experiences during such psychotherapy was highly correlated with positive outcome (Richards, Rhead, DiLeo, Yensen, and Kurland, 1977). Peak experiences were characterized by feelings of unity, deeply felt positive mood, and transcendence of time and space, among others. As the legal restrictions imposed by the “war on drugs” killed this line of psychotherapy research in the 1970s it was becoming clear that carefully structured psychotherapy in combination with a psychedelic compound could maximize the probability that a peak experience would occur. Fortunately the study of the ways in which an experienced psychotherapist can facilitate such experiences through the use of psychedelic compounds as adjuncts to psychotherapy is having a renaissance (Griffiths, Richards, McCann and Jesse, 2006). It seems intuitively obvious that there is an inverse relationship between exposure to such processes and the tendency to make war. This intuition was expressed by the early informal researchers in the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco in the 1960s when they emerged from LSD experiences and proclaimed “Make love, not war.”

The virtual explosion of new formal research on the use of psychedelics as adjuncts to psychotherapy in the last two years (Winkelman and Roberts, 2007; Roberts, 2006) could potentially have a profound impact on “peacebuilding” (Christie, Tint, Wagner and Winter, 2008). As a critical mass of people who have had peak experiences in the context of psychedelic psychotherapy develops, it could facilitate the societal maturation described by Plotkin (2008) and envisioned by Adorno et al. (1950). Fadiman, a psychologist who conducted research on psychedelic psychotherapy in the 1960s, has written a novel that examines precisely this type of social change (Fadiman, 2001). Richards, one of the authors of the Griffiths et al. (2006, 2008) studies has noted (Hughes, 2008):

[Our research] is part of the education of a culture. These [psychedelics] are radically different drugs. They are not for “getting high.” We have to move beyond the concept of getting high and seek to become more mature human beings. These compounds are just one tool to help facilitate enlightenment.

Maslow, who coined the term “peak experience,” concluded on the basis of his research that all people have private spontaneous peak experiences. Those who do not report such experiences, he hypothesized, have simply used suppression or denial to avoid feeling and recalling them (Maslow, 1994). Psychedelic psychotherapy can facilitate peak experiences in an intentionally chosen and public—i.e. non-spontaneous and public at least to the extent that the therapist is present—circumstance, making it less likely that the experiences will be suppressed or denied. If enough people in a given culture are able to reclaim their access to and recall of such experiences, they might counteract the suppression and denial of others with whom they associate and perhaps discuss such things. However, it is important to note that the entrenched resistance in many members of a culture to the manifestation of heretofore unconscious material in others can be powerful and even violent (Whitaker, 2003; Rhead, 2004).

Fadiman has had the opportunity to follow some of those exposed to early attempts at psychedelic therapy (Savage, Fadiman, Mogar and Allen, 1964) for more than 40 years. He labels those who had peak experiences while using psychedelics “psychedelic graduates” (Fadiman, 2008). The term implies not only that such persons have had such experiences, but that they have “graduated” and moved on to other things as a result. Often these other things include spiritual practices, such as meditation, contemplation, chanting, and prayer. While praying for peace is a time-honored practice in many religious traditions, it is only recently that serious scientific evidence has begun to demonstrate the efficacy of prayer (Dossey, 2000). If psychedelic psychotherapy increases the probability of prayer and leaves people feeling positively disposed toward their fellow humans, prayers for peace would seem a likely result.

CONCLUSION

It is reasonable to assume that psychotherapy, especially in its second stage, can make a meaningful contribution to world peace. If more citizens, leaders, soldiers and prospective soldiers were to participate in psychotherapy both the frequency and destructiveness of war might be reduced. Besides its direct effect on clients, psychotherapy can be seen to have an effect on those members of a culture or society who do not participate in psychotherapy through their contact with those who do. These effects are presumed to flow from a number of mechanisms, such as a reduction in paranoid and black/white thinking, a greater appreciation of unconscious processes in oneself and in others, an increased tolerance for ambiguity, a greater capacity for heroic behavior as a result of the stimulation of heroic imagination, an enhanced ability to confront others, a shift in worldview as a result of peak experiences, and an increase in spiritual practices such as prayer.

It should be noted that the optimism expressed in the preceding paragraph is not shared by all those who have examined such issues. Hillman and Ventura have suggested that psychotherapy is not part of the solution to the problems of the world, and indeed is part of the problem (Hillman and Ventura, 1993). Their analysis presents a caricatured version of the first stage of psychotherapy noted above, describing it as a process which seeks to suppress all individual uniqueness and make everyone “normal” in the most negative connotation of that word. The “acorn” of each individual’s unique self and destiny is thereby suppressed and society is robbed of the creativity and genius that can only come from those who live outside the norm and therefore think outside the box. This characterization represents one of the “dangers inherent in the trivialization of psychotherapy” presented in the article published under that title (Rhead, 2002). It trivializes even the first stage of psychotherapy, and completely ignores the second stage, the stage that quite explicitly seeks to assist the client in claiming and living out his or her unique place in the larger universe.

It should also be noted that psychotherapy is not the only way to facilitate deep introspection. Various forms of contemplation, prayer, and meditation have served in this capacity for millennia. Robert Kull recently spent a year on a solo wilderness retreat in a very remote and challenging location, using meditation, prayer and journaling to deepen the introspection process. He published his journal, with commentary added after the year’s retreat (Kull, 2008), in which he attempted to describe both the experience of the retreat as well as its impact on him. In the final months there were increasingly frequent episodes of what he calls Big Mind, which sounds very similar to the peak experiences noted above. One of the ways he describes the impact of his retreat experience is in terms of his attitude toward killing,

appearing to be derived in part from self reflection while killing fish to eat: “Killing other people, except in immediate self-defense is rarely, possibly never, justified.” (p. 301) If we assume that a prolonged period of deep introspection might reveal something essential about human nature, then what it revealed to Robert Kull might be very good news. It is certainly an optimistic counterpoint to William James’ notion of “military instinct.”

PERSONAL ADDENDUM

I hope that my writing this paper will help me get beyond an impasse regarding another writing project which has been stalled for over a year. The provisional title of this project is “Psychological and Spiritual Causes of War,” and it seeks to explain the attraction to war in terms of unconscious elements of the individual’s relationship with The Divine. It postulates that all humans have an inherent archetypal relationship with The Divine regardless of any consciously held beliefs about the existence, or non-existence, of The Divine (Genova and Rhead, 2005). For the vast majority of people this relationship is filled with unconscious fear, and this fear in turn is what drives us to make war.

A number of powerful dreams have come to me while writing this paper, and seem to have contributed to it. Four of these are presented below:

Dream 1. I am part of a group of 20 or 30 foreigners who are trying to escape a country that has been taken over by a dictator or military junta. We are trying to get disguises, false papers, or whatever and blend in with a larger group of people who are allowed to leave or at least to use public transportation. Most of the group is successful at this and gets cleared by the soldiers who are guarding access to transportation and it gets down to 4 of us who have not been able to do so. We are in a room and realize that very soon the soldiers will be upon us and we will probably be killed. I realize I might be able to call my family on a cell phone and say goodbye and am considering that. I also am not ready to give up. A man and a woman who represent the oppressors discover us. They are not in military uniforms and seem to be doctors—at least the man is. The woman is seems to be the epitome of the evil Nazi, sadistically taking pleasure in having caught us and in seeing our hopelessness. One of our group of four gets into a confrontation with her and ends up grabbing her and slamming her against the wall. She crumples to the floor and we talk to the man, who seems more compassionate. Somehow a deal is struck that we may leave, although we have to make a

promise to come back the next morning and give some kind of report. The woman is still conscious and aware of what is going on and does not protest. I feel a very slight hesitation to make this false promise, but quickly do so and we are allowed to go outside and join the large caravan of people who are fleeing in buses and trucks. At first we run alongside some of these vehicles and then manage to get aboard one of them. I end up being the driver of a large truck and have to drive hard to keep up the pace and to keep the truck ahead of us in sight. This is important as I don't know the route. We are going uphill in a slightly mountainous area and the road is slippery with water and mud. I downshift skillfully to keep up our speed but and still falling behind the truck ahead of us. It gets far enough ahead of us that we have almost lost sight of it, and we come to a place where there are 3 roads and we have to choose the correct one. I am pretty sure it is the middle road and follow that. I can just barely make out a vehicle far ahead of us on this road and am not completely certain that it is the right road.

Dream 2. People are talking about the man who is called "Rebel" or "The Rebel." He has left his unit in the Confederate Army, where he was a highly valued member, and struck out on his own. Now I see him on a galloping horse. He is riding past a wooded stream valley. An animal, cow or perhaps deer, runs away from him. He fires a strange looking pistol into the wooded area and smiles with delight as he does so. The pistol has a short and very wide barrel, like a flare gun. I have the impression he is just firing randomly into an area where there are enemy soldiers, mostly just to harass them. He draws a few rounds of return fire, but nothing hits him or even threatens him. He starts to look confused or dazed, although I am sure he has not been hit. He seems to be having a stroke or some other kind of internal event that is incapacitating him. Now I see that he has rigged up some kind of support on which he can fire a rifle and maybe a crossbow while riding. As he becomes more incapacitated he drops his rifle and the support gets blown by the wind so that it comes around and hits him in the face. The fact that he is not able to deflect it reflects how incapacitated he is, and it looks like he will fall off his horse.

Now he had been captured and is tied up and lying on his back. He no longer is wearing his grey Confederate jacket. He is wearing a white shirt that is clean and almost formal. One of his captors, who may be an Indian [Native American], is pacing around agitatedly and seems to be advocating that he be killed right now rather than waiting to hang him. The concern seems to be that he is very

clever and might escape. As he paces barefooted I realize that I can't tell if the ground is covered with sand or snow, but conclude it cannot be snow since he has no shoes. Another captor is fastening a metal band around his neck. He makes it too tight, so the man can hardly breathe. I am very moved by his suffering as it looks like he may suffocate. I cry gently, fighting back much more powerful sobbing. It feels like sadness that is in response to something larger than just this one man. I point this out to the man who had placed the metal collar that it is too tight and he comes over loosens it. He seems genuinely merciful and the man with the metal collar says "thank you," which is exactly what I had been thinking.

Dream 3. I am standing near a rail yard. Grandma Premer [my maternal grandmother] and a few other people are there. It seems to be in the 1920s or 1930s. Two men walk off toward an open area near some trees. They are dressed in formal clothing, as if they were going to an elegant event. I notice one of them has a revolver and I realize they are going to have a duel. They take positions about 50 feet from each other and at some signal raise their guns and fire at each other. One man seems to be mortally wounded and staggers, looking as if he is going to fall to the ground and die. Suddenly he recovers, stands up, and fires another shot at the second man. Now the second man seems to be mortally wounded, staggers, and almost falls. Now he recovers and fires again at the first man, who again is hit and seems about to die. Again he staggers a few steps, recovers, and fires again at the second man. This exchange goes on for many rounds, with each set of staggering steps bringing the two men closer together. Finally they both stagger a few more steps toward each other and actually do fall to the ground. As they die their hands touch and fingers intertwine.

Dream 4. I am looking at a painting of a large Civil War battle, perhaps Gettysburg. In a stand of white trees, perhaps aspen, a large number of men are firing at each other at very close range. There are big white puffs of smoke from the guns and all the men are still standing and firing, as if the battle has just begun and none have been killed yet. I have the idea that this is somehow quite a realistic portrayal of this kind of battle. The men are not distinguishable from one another by uniform or any other means. They are distinguished only by the fact that one group is firing toward the right of the picture and the other toward the left. There is no discernible distance between the two groups. In the middle of the picture is a man in a bright blue shirt who stands out from all the

rest. He does not seem to have a gun and is calmly doing something with his hands, perhaps pouring something from a vessel like a powder horn into something else. As I am noticing the large scope of the battle, and how many men are involved, the camera pans back to a wider view and I see that the picture is in fact much larger than what I had originally seen, but is simply more of the same groups of men shooting at each other.

NOTES

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