

The Trauma of Premature Birth and Its Impact in Adult Life: "The Man Who Couldn't Stop Running Away"

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Abstract

This is a single case study of the consequences in adult life of prenatal emotional and physical trauma and premature birth. The patient entered psychotherapy with the author at age 45 after having already had twenty years of therapy intermittently. His presenting symptoms were chronic depression, panic anxiety, sleeplessness and pains in the head, neck, shoulders and abdomen. His life energy was low and his sexuality dormant. Through use of Turner's Prebirth Analysis Matrix and guided fantasy work we were able to recover lost memories and reconstruct traumatic prenatal experiences. In particular, we worked with the panic he felt on seeming to be unwanted and abandoned by his mother after his premature birth. These traumatic experiences had left him with deep self-doubts and distrust of himself and of others. Through a combination of Gestalt-bodywork and rebirthing, hypnosis, and dream analysis we were able to revitalize his energy system and awaken within him a determination to live and continue his lifelong struggle towards autonomy. In time he was able to sufficiently turn around his early programming so that although he suffered from occasional bouts of anxiety and depression he felt strong enough to try again working, setting roots, and establishing an intimate relationship. Such fortitude surprised the author in his suspicion that lifelong consequences of such early damage are often irreparable. Once prenatal and perinatal patterns are clearly recognized and even partially therapeutically explored the possibility for such deeply birth-damaged persons to achieve some degree of responsible functioning may be possible.

Introduction

Birth is one of the fundamental formative experiences of every human being, shaping our fundamental attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns throughout life. Through the birth process, one of the first major experiences of the self in all emotional and sensory areas, the *prenatal* interior relationship of the fetus to one's maternal environment is converted and transformed into the *postnatal* external relationship to one's mother and the world (Janus, 1990).

Today despite extensive research in pre- and perinatal medicine and psychology reports on the influence of early prenatal or perinatal experiences still often meet with incredulity if not outright rejection. This reaction stems from the "common sense" view of the self according to which psychological development proper does not begin until the second or third year of life, the earliest point to which our conscious personal memories extend. Actually, intrauterine life does not constitute a *tabula rasa* of complete unconsciousness. From recent studies of the nine months of gestation we now know much more about the psychic life of the unborn child and the intensive sensory, emotional and holistic experience of the newborn.

All of these processes and experiences are stored at the level of affective-consciousness, as can be seen by someone who has experienced or witnessed the actualization – often over weeks – of details relating to the birth process. Modern psychotherapies (such as Grof's holotropic therapy, Orr's rebirthing, Janov's primal therapy, Turner's whole-self therapy, and neo-psychoanalytic regression therapies, including Kohut's self-psychology) show that an entire cosmos of impressions, emotions, and behavior is stored in us. All evidence points to the fact that the activity of birth is a significant contributory factor in determining the basic configuration of self-feeling and self-esteem as well as the ability to trust and to love in later life.

Historically both in the West and in many other cultures, the pregnant woman and the intrauterine experience has been and, very often in an unconscious way, continues to be envisioned negatively as "a disaster waiting to happen" (Gélis, 1991). According to recent research findings, this need not continue to be the case. The womb is our first ecological environment in which we develop exponentially more than at any other time in our lives. No child is born a *tabula rasa*. We carry our experiences from gestation into the outside world and replicate our intrauterine experience unconsciously in our ways of relating to others and to our world. In this paper I present a case history of the later emotional and behavioral consequences of premature birth and a prenatal toxic environment on the adult life of an unwanted premature baby.

"The Man Who Could Not Stop Running Away"

This is the case history of a male patient (aged 45) we shall call R. I met him when he attended an open workshop in which I used rebirthing (intensive breathing) as the principal technique. He suffered from deep feelings of mistrust of self and world, with tendencies towards paranoia. Though he had been married briefly, for most of his adult life he had been unable to hold a regular steady job or to

commit himself to a stable long-term relationship. He got by with part-time work and a series of brief sexual encounters, but longed for something more lasting. He seemed to be forever dissatisfied with whatever he had and always searching for something new, like the proverbial *puer aeternis*, constantly in hot pursuit of a new idea, a new lifestyle, or a new woman. His previous therapists had often told him that he was running away from himself, but at the time I met him he was still unable to stop his compulsive wandering. He was like a gypsy, without roots anywhere, forever unable to stay put, and this was a particular concern for me.

R. suffered from a paranoid delusional system (Kernberg) which made him feel constantly insecure, unloved and homeless. "I am so lonely. I don't have a home anywhere, and I want one so badly," he would say, even when he had a lovely home, a beautiful woman companion, and a number of friends. But despite this objective reality, subjectively he *felt* exiled and homeless. Many times he had attempted to establish a stable life structure, he said, but after a short time he found that his energy gave out and he toppled to the ground in confusion without understanding how or why he kept producing this disaster scenario. He called this aspect of himself the superpersonality "Splat," because, like a splattered egg, he continually fell to the ground broken, leaving a mess to be cleaned up by others. He told me that he felt like humpty-dumpty of whom it was said that no one, not even the experts (the king's men), could put him back together again.

Like Orestes, the guilt-driven son of Agamemnon, pursued by the irascible punishing furies, R. was restlessly *driven* by constant feelings of guilt and anxiety, unable to pause and rest and put down roots anywhere. He told me he felt like the fictional character E.T. who wanted to "phone home" but (unlike E.T.) R. did not even know where this "home" he needed so desperately was any more. It was this deep sense of uprootedness, homelessness, and existential anxiety, (Yalom, 1989) regardless of the empirical realities of his life, that led me to consider the project of exploring his prenatal experience with him.

By the time R. entered therapy with me he had already seen a number of other therapists. They had helped him feel less hopeless, he said, but he felt he still needed more therapy to help him cope with the deep feelings of despair and desparation that frightened him and threatened to drive him to suicide. He was troubled by depressions, and a general feeling of failure and hopelessness. He said that after so much therapy he felt skeptical about being able to change his destructive patterns; yet he was dissatisfied with himself as he was, and his recurrent emotional pain drove him to have another go with psychotherapy. From what he told me in our first session I expressed doubt that I could help him very much, but he was interested in exploring his prenatal history and was determined to work with me, so I took him on.

Given his instability, I doubted that he could last six months, but he stuck with it for almost a year. I believe that his early programming was so strongly engrained that it continually prevented him from being able to carry out any project to full term. Ripped untimely from his mother's womb, he had learned

to rip himself out of any situation that threatened his deeply ingrained paranoid ego structure.

I saw this patient individually and in a group for approximately 100 hours over the course of a year. I was able to help him to change his profound innate programming sufficiently to change some of his life patterns. I believe this case indicates not only some typical lifetime consequences of actual premature birth trauma, (which can generate a lifelong sense of restlessness and insecurity) but also the ability of a patient to confront and alter deep set behavioral and attitudinal patterns when they are traced to their roots in prenatal and perinatal experiences. For this reason this case may be of some interest. My interpretive theoretical framework is a person-centered self-psychology (Gedo, Goldberg, Kohout, Meissner, and Nemiroff), Gestalt-therapy and whole-self psychology (Turner). Following the principles of "narrative psychology" (Bruner, Conway, Polkinghorn, and Sarbin) I have relied on the "autobiography" my patient wrote while he was undergoing treatment with me and I have chosen to present my interpretation of the case in a "literary" rather than a "scientific" discourse. At the end, however, I have indicated some of the scientific papers behind my analytic conceptualizations and therapeutic interventions and modalities.

The Therapeutic Contract

When R. came into therapy with me, I agreed to see him at least once a week individually and in a group and I asked him to promise to come regularly for at least six months regardless of the anxiety he felt. Then we could review our progress and consider our next steps. He felt he was finished, a dead man, he said. He had just lost a relationship with a woman he loved, as he had lost so many things in his life. He lost her, he said, because he was unwilling to commit himself to marrying her when she indicated that she would leave if he would not marry her. He was homeless again, feeling even without a country. He was also angry with himself, he said, that he *felt* he did not deserve to have nor keep anything. "I have lost everything, over and over again. I can't hold on to anything. I want to break this pattern. I'll do anything you say to do it." So he agreed to my proposed contract. As for what he hoped to get out of our work, he said he hoped I might help him to come to feel more centered in his body, and to be more self-accepting. He hoped through therapy to become more peaceful, not to be so driven by fear, envy, greed, and his other impulses. He wanted to learn to love and accept himself, and to stop being a "looser". "Above all," he said, "I want peace. I'm so tired of running. And I want to learn to be able to love myself and others in a way that is more fulfilling, and less destructive for all concerned."

Materials and Methods

It may be useful at this point to review his early history, based on an autobiographical sketch he wrote at my request. R. was born to an unmarried thirty-eight year old rich eccentric Roman Catholic woman who lived with her ageing parents in New Orleans. She was an artist, a sculptor, and later treated her son as

one of her major “works”. His father, her lover, a Mexican musician, abandoned the mother during the pregnancy, reappeared briefly after the child’s birth to see his son, but then the mother rejected him and sent him packing.

During the pregnancy, being burdened with deep feelings of guilt and self-rejection this mother-to-be tried to induce a miscarriage but without success. In disgrace and shame she fled from her parent’s home and moved to New York to hide her “shameful” condition and have her unwanted baby in secret. In fact, she was so ashamed of her pregnancy that, without considering the psychic damage to her baby, she had her labor artificially induced two months early by an unethical doctor.

R. had to be kept in an incubator for the first few weeks of his life. He was soon shipped off to a house in the country where he was taken care of by various nurses until after his mother married, and came to reclaim him when he was two. Finding that she could not have any more children, after the doctor had damaged her in delivering R., she decided to legally “adopt” her own son without revealing to him that she was his biological mother. He said that she was too ashamed and guilty to confess to him that she was his true mother until he had reached adolescence, when she also finally told him the true identity of his parents.

Occasionally his eccentric mother travelled abroad with various men leaving him in the care of his stepfather, a closet homosexual. During his mother’s absence this pederast used the boy as a sexual object, forcing the boy to watch him masturbating and eventually when the boy grew older indulging in fellatio and anal intercourse with him. When R. reached late adolescence he broke off this relationship. He said that his stepfather told him he would never forgive him for this rejection and threatened to destroy him if he ever told anyone about their affair. He still felt terrified of his “father” and was so afraid of reprisals that he became anxious every time he spoke about this experience. Several times he had tried to tell his mother, he said, but she refused to believe him, as so often happens in such cases.

While R. recalled his childhood with chagrin, his early adult years were his most happy ones. Going away to college enabled him to escape from his destructive home environment. Using his considerable intelligence, he made a name for himself among his teachers and fellow students. In literature he found an area in which he could excel and he decided to become a teacher, throwing himself into his studies with an intensity and passionate delight he had seldom experienced before. In emulating his teachers, he felt he had found his vocation. After graduation he became a high school teacher in private schools, first in the United States, and then in Switzerland.

R. married, in his early twenties, as was common in his generation. However, he never seemed able to commit himself to any woman for long, so his domestic life was filled with strife, and his marriage ended in divorce. In his thirties he began to feel longings for “freedom” from the “womb” that had served as the matrix for his early adult development. He left the security of his private school teaching job, as well as his wife, his house and the children. For a time

he explored a homosexual relationship, but found this unsatisfactory and instead concentrated on seducing various young women to prove his virility to himself.

It was at this time that he first entered therapy with a Jungian analyst in Zürich. He later continued Jungian therapy in the United States. From this Jungian socialization he became adept at analyzing his dreams, and became more comfortable with his inner life, but remained narcissistically and symbiotically tied to his possessive mother and afraid of his stepfather and failed altogether to learn how to adapt to the realities of adult life and interpersonal relationship.

When I asked him about his previous therapy, he boasted about how clever he was in being such a “difficult” case that nobody could cure him. I asked him if nobody else had succeeded in helping him why he had come to me. He was evasive and clever, and indicated that the few sessions of rebirthing we had done in the weekend workshop he had attended had piqued his curiosity and he wanted to explore his birth experience more profoundly with my help.

In the patient’s eyes, the underlying goal of his life remained mysteriously unattainable – finding a satisfying job and loving relationship to give him a sense of security. But how much resistance he put up to this, how clever he was in destroying every structure he created, until he reached a state of absolute despair and paralysis. It seemed as if there were an unconscious undercurrent that tore each of the structures of his life apart from the foundations each time he created them. And it was obvious to me that unless we could alter this deep-set pattern he was doomed to continue his restless flight from one unsuccessful situation to another. I wondered whether it could be related to his traumatic premature birth experience. What was the underlying motive and direction in this life? What was unfolding within it? Was there some underlying pattern we could uncover together that might assist me to understand his life and possibly help him to break free of the destructive destiny that seemingly held him in its unrelenting grip? Although the prospects of success seemed small, given his chequered history, motivated by a combination of curiosity and compassion, I decided to take the case.

Therapeutic Procedure

To me he seemed to be quite out of touch with himself, caught up in his self-torturing fantasies and out of his body much of the time. For this reason I choose a mixed therapeutic strategy combining Gestalt Therapy, neo-Reichean body-work, rebirthing, and J.R. Turner’s (1988) transpersonal Prebirth Analysis Matrix (P.A.M.).

Turner’s hypothesis is that each child is the synthesis not only of the genetic coding of his or her mother and father but of the mental and emotional states of his or her parents from the nine months of gestation. Whatever mother and father are experiencing during the pregnancy becomes part of the emotional repertoire of the baby. Thus the anxiety and stress felt by the mother before and during delivery of the baby, which may be particularly intense with a premature, are transmitted to the baby and become a part of his or her basic emotional structure and style. Because of the fact of R.’s prematurity coupled with his anx-

ious style, I felt that Whole Self Therapy was a particularly suitable therapeutic modality in this case.

It took some time to build a therapeutic alliance with R., as he tended to be distrustful of anyone who got close to him. He had worked with a number of therapists in the past, but had never stayed with any one for more than a year or two. For the first six weeks we worked in a rather conventional way. As I listened to him describe his life as he saw it, and learned of his objectives we began to explore the possibilities of change. One day, as he began to feel more secure in our relationship, he brought me a copy of a letter he had written several years before (at age 40) to his former analyst in New York while he was on vacation in Europe.

I came to Europe soon after I stopped analysis with you and have been testing my belief that my life would be better over here. I find that I am still being driven by the same anxiety and inner pain, impotence, and fear of commitment that held me in its grip back home. I don't know exactly what I am looking for, but I see that whatever it is it is not outside me, not even in Europe. Yet I must confess that I definitely *do* feel better on the whole here in Europe than back home where I suffered from repeated rebuffs, hurts and invalidation from my parents. Here, at least, I feel I have an open horizon. Here I can do what I want without being criticized by my parents or told that I am not good enough. But even here I am fragile and easily discouraged.

It was still his parent's fault. He felt better in Europe because he had less direct contact with them. They were not able to hurt him so often and so deeply as they did when he was back home. "Over here the pressure does not feel so intense. Here in Europe I feel the world is my oyster, and I can do what I want without parental criticism." Yet he had not been able to establish a stable life structure in Europe either, and had eventually returned to his home in the United States where he once again became caught up in the destructive family system.

I asked him why he wanted me to see this letter. "Don't you see?" he asked, surprised. "It's so obvious. I've got to get free of my family. I want you to help me to do that." He shook his fist at me defiantly. "What's preventing you from doing that?" I asked. "I don't know. There's an invisible cord that keeps me tied to them. Every time I've tried to get free of them I fall flat on my face and end up crawling back defeated, humiliated, like a dog with my tail between my legs."

"What do you want from them?"

"Their love and acceptance."

"And if they *could* give that to you, do you think that you would be satisfied?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I really want to be free of them."

"So what holds you?"

"I don't know. I just can't seem to get on my own, that's all. I keep collapsing. I can't sustain the energy. I feel too anxious. I give up, or I get fired, or I get rejected and become too depressed to carry on..."

And so it went. The old familiar story. As I got to know him and to recognize his structure it was obvious to me that we needed to work more intensively on

his birth experience. I felt that this might hold the key that could help him to change the negative programming that had him convinced that he was bound to fail if he tried to stand on his own feet.

Prebirth Analysis Matrix

When we began to explore his feelings and memories about his birth, he acknowledged that he did not feel ready to be born, and that he often experienced the desire to crawl back into the safety of a womb, or as he had so often done, enclosed in a woman's arms, snuggling at her breast. Following the Prebirth Analysis Matrix guidelines I learned from J. R. Turner (1988), R. was able to source his psychological inheritance.

I guided R. through the twenty-two P.A.M. questions from his conception through long the months of his gestation. The relationship of the partners at conception was *emotionally tense*. The man who became the father was driven by passion and forced himself into the reluctant fearful young woman, who was terrified of becoming pregnant out of wedlock or of being discovered by her parents who were downstairs.

This cyclonic conflict set the tone for the emotional life of R. who became a person of emotional intensity who confessed that he had difficulty containing and controlling his emotional energy and his sexual passion. Here are some examples of R.'s responses to several crucial questions.

On learning that she was pregnant, my mother felt despair and was *angry* and *frightened*. She did not want to get pregnant and did not want to have the child. She felt she must; abortion was out of the question for her.

On hearing the news my father was *angry*. He wanted her to get rid of it. She refused. She was afraid to have it, and afraid not to have it.

The sperm was weak and exhausted, swimming to the egg. It barely made it and almost gave up en route.

The emotional environment in which the fetus began to develop was one of despair, exhaustion, fear, and anger. This set the stage for the predominant emotional attitudes that were to dominate R.'s childhood and adult life. He alternated between anger and despair, and lived in constant fear of losing everything, a fear that was self-perpetuating. In particular, he continually felt exhausted, and afraid not to make it, like the sperm that produced him. His inability to stay with anything and his difficulties in maintaining relationships were echoed in his response to the question I asked him about the experience of the fertilized egg anchoring in the womb. His images were transpersonally rich.

3) In experiencing myself *anchoring* I saw myself as a Diamond, centered in a Lotus blossom in a heart growing out of the depths of the ocean/womb. Floating, swaying lotus blossom. Had problems getting anchored. At first as the egg settled it scorched the earth below it, rather like a spaceship landing. I realized then that the fire was coming from me, not from the earth, that I create the destructive situations for myself, and I have the power to transform my behavior and my environment into a supportive one. I then transformed the scorched earth into green pastures. Once I took root, I transformed into a beautiful big tree.

We went more deeply into R.'s awareness of how he tended to destroy whatever he had built up and to be unable to hold on to whatever he acquired, and his feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. "I am like Chronos," he said. "I devour my own children. I can't seem to leave anything alone, to allow it to grow up." It was not difficult to lead him to see the parallels between this metaphor and his premature birth experience, as well as the analogies with the "devouring father" behavior of his stepfather.

Neo-Reichean Bodywork

Through neo-Reichean bodywork and rebirthing we eventually were able to explore R.'s early body-memories. He re-experienced terrifying feelings of suffocating as he lay in his cot shortly after his birth. Doing bodywork, he gave up very quickly on intense breathing, complaining of dizziness and fear of drowning. It was almost impossible for him to stay with any painful experience for any length of time, but we persisted with this work as I was confident that if he could stick with it he could gradually develop a healthier less threatened sense of himself. Lying in his cot, he would cry out for his mother, but no one came and in despair he turned his anger on himself. He was a very angry man, though he had never felt safe enough before to really experience the depth of his anger and to let it out. Gestalt and Reichean bodywork provided a vehicle to discharge some of this pent-up anger. He gradually discovered how he used this anger to protect himself from feeling his profound vulnerability and deeper personal and transpersonal needs. Underneath this layer of anger lay a deep seemingly bottomless pool of pain that was driving him in panic to pick up stakes and leap from place to place forever seeking a safe haven from the threats that now came from within himself. As we began to touch these wounds, R. became terrified and, though I reassured him, I wondered whether he would be able to stick it out. Confronted with the task of going into this pain, he confessed that he really did not want to grow up and take responsibility for taking care of himself. He wanted to be taken care of. Yet he also realized that to refuse to grow up was to stay tied to his parents and to give his power away. I quoted Jung to him: "The victory over the mother is won in everyday life."

Clarifying Motives

For years R. had stubbornly resisted becoming self-supporting preferring to avenge himself on his parents by manipulating them into rescuing him at every turn. Gradually I helped him to realize that this behavior was self-defeating and futile. Even his endlessly unsuccessful "job search" was a reflection and expression of his resistance and ambivalence. At the same time he wanted to get free of his parents, to get even with them, and to win their approval, acceptance and love. Getting a job would get their approval. Failing at every job was a way of getting even with them by disappointing their expectations of him. Mother would then come to his rescue with money and emotional support. That was the family game. Playing the helpless kid, R. continued to get his mother's sympathy

and her money, but this behavior provoked his stepfather's rage and contempt. It was extremely difficult for R. to work through and overcome his resistance to cutting his pathological psychic bonds with his parental home. It took a long time and many tears for him to realize that he could never make a home anywhere else until he completely let go of his attachment to his parents and their home, which had once been his home, but could not be his home anymore. He still resisted leaving the womb, feeling forever unready to face life.

On another occasion we looked at father issues. He soon began to reveal his fear and hostility to his stepfather and he wrote a poem that he felt summed up their relationship. He called the poem *A Stepfather's Revenge*:

He held me tightly between his legs.
 I pleaded with him to let me go.
 As he puffed and his face turned red
 like the devil as the blood rose in him.
 I was terrified and confused.
 I wanted his love
 at any price.

"Why dredge up these old stories now?"
 You're like the child in *The Bad Seed*,
 making things up, to get attention."

"You're God-damned right," I shouted
 flaring up in outraged self-pity.

"I forgive you," I said.

We shook hands on it.

But then I added the terrible PS
 that ruined our reconciliation.

"NEVER TOUCH MY SONS!"

It's all over now, he said.

How dare you even think
 such thoughts of me
 your father?

Through active imagination we uncovered his strong-masochistic fantasies towards this man who was his first raping lover. He found it impossible to tolerate his negative feelings for long, and would become too frightened or sick to his stomach to continue. But I encouraged him to go on exploring his fantasies of this "destructive demon" in conjunction with Reichian bodywork and intensive breathing. While his relationship with his stepfather had left deep wounds, it appeared that his ambivalent pre-Oedipal relationship with his mother was more fundamental. For example, one time when we were doing "father work", when the image of a dragon came up for him, he associated the dragon not with his stepfather but with his mother, and he acknowledged that ultimately he continued to live his life for her, even though he was now a grown adult. I asked him whether he felt he might be willing to experiment with living his life for himself instead. Considering this thoughtfully, he said he wanted to very much, but he did not know how. She was everything to him, and he could not imagine himself living happily except for her. He looked to her for support and protection against his "cruel stepfather".

In the next session he experienced himself as a victim again, chained to a rock, like Prometheus, with an eagle sweeping down to pick at his liver. Sometimes he associated this eagle with his mother, sometimes with his father. He identified with the defiant rock-bound victim hero Prometheus, punished for bringing the gift of fire to mankind. He seemed to feel trapped in a double bind – both to please and yet to defy his mother who had urged him to carry on the torch of creativity she passed to him before she died. His anger protected him from feeling his deeper pain.

“My damned parents have hurt me so much; I hate them for that!” he would say, in the self-pitying angry tones of a hurt child. When I confronted him, he recognized and admitted that it was in fact he, himself who was still choosing to allow his hurt to drive him constantly into a resentment-filled victim stance of defiance, rebellion, and self-pity. He did not know any other way to cope, he said pitifully.

For some time he consciously and assiduously cultivated this victim role, I encouraged this move, trusting that only after he experienced this fully would he be able to free himself of it and move on. And indeed, gradually a new element began to emerge in his fantasies.

Changes

R. began to be able to tolerate staying aware of his body feelings for longer periods and to stay with his experience. The sense of persecution and abandonment was still there, but his response to his feelings changed. After a rebirthing session in our ninth month, he described his experience in these sanguine words:

I let myself experience being helpless again. I knew I must die, and heard the men coming to hunt me down. To my surprise, I did not resist or try to hide or escape. I just let them kill me. The killing took a long, long time. There was much blood flowing out of my heart after a knight stabbed me in my breast. I took my time dying. I watched them hack at the pieces, which wiggled as if still alive. Finally I gave up the ghost. Unto thy hands I commend my spirit, I said.

Then I hovered homeless in a nebulous existence above my severed dead body watching the rats gnaw on my remains, and people cart pieces of my body away. I was surprised to watch all this yet not feel anything. I must be dead, I thought.

After a while I saw a group of Tibetan refugees fleeing from their burning homeland. At first I thought that I had nothing in common with these refugees, but after a while I realized that one thing we shared in common was FLIGHT from a no longer present enemy. I encouraged them to stop and to settle down in the forest where they were. They invited me to join them. I felt threatened and wanted to flee, but decided to stay.

I began looking for a female partner for myself. I saw a beautiful blonde woman who reminded me of M. [the woman he had loved and lost when he refused to marry her]. She beckoned to me to join her, but after considering the invitation I decided to stay in the forest with the refugees, feeling myself to be like them, a refugee from the burning world.

The psychological issues dominating his life were clearly expressed in these images. FLIGHT. Could he stay, or must he run away? Could he learn to tolerate his own feelings of loneliness and vulnerability? RELATIONSHIP. Could he allow

himself to ally with another person, with a partner, with a group? BELONGING. Where did he belong? INCARNATION. Could he accept embodiment and its limitations or must he take flight in angelism like the puer figure Icarus?

The image of *fire* seemed important. It had come up a number of times in our work together from the figure of Prometheus to the burning world from which the refugees sought to escape. I suggested to him that perhaps this fire was the life energy he needed to develop the skill to control and manage so it would not continue to destroy everything he undertook. We explored these themes over many sessions, and gradually he began to experience a new positive masculine energy and decisiveness.

In one rebirthing session he envisioned himself as a woodsman like Daniel Boon. When I asked him his associations as to the characteristics of this figure he said: COURAGE, CARE, PRACTICALITY, KNOW-HOW, SELF-RELIANCE AND INDEPENDENCE. I had him anchor these positive qualities in his heart, and to repeat this daily for twenty-one days, a technique I learned from J. R. Turner. From this vision he concluded that he wanted to begin to take better care of himself and to learn how to live on his own in the woods, to find his own food and to support himself rather than being so dependent on women as mother-substitutes. I proposed that he develop a closer relationship with Mother Earth and had him experiment with neo-Reichean grounding exercises to feel the earth beneath his feet. This seems to have helped him get more grounded and centered in his physical body.

He seemed to be getting better. I felt optimistic. Then one day I received this letter from him:

Please don't be too disappointed, doc, but I've decided to quit therapy now and to try to make it on my own as best I can. I know I've made a lot of progress with you, but not enough. I wish that our therapeutic relationship could have worked out, but, for some reason, I just cannot commit myself to it any longer, I've got to move on. It's not your fault. I feel you have always been accepting of me, but I still feel unsafe and driven by anxiety. I want to run away. I do not know why I am not able to stick it out, to trust you more, but I can't. Thanks for everything. R.

I believe that when he realized that he was going to have to give up his dependent lifestyle he panicked. It is extremely difficult to alter deep-seated life-long patterns. I felt I should not pressure him in any way, but I was concerned about him so after waiting a couple of weeks, I called him. I suggested that it might be helpful if he came in just to talk over his decision with me, but he refused. I told him to feel free to call me if and when he felt he'd like to talk to me. As an afterthought I asked him to drop me a line sometime to let me know how he was doing.

Two years later I received a letter from him indicating that he had bought a house in Lugano in Southern Switzerland, where he had gotten a job teaching in an American private school. An enclosed photograph showed him grinning and standing in front of his Italian-style house with his arms around a rather pretty busy Italian woman obviously younger than him. He wrote, and believed that he could now get along without any further therapy. He still suffered occasionally from anxiety and depressions, he wrote, but he felt he was getting his life

together better than ever before and he hoped to be able to continue to manage on his own. He wanted me to know that he felt our work together had helped him to feel more self-confident and autonomous, he said. Then, almost as an afterthought, he wrote: "My mother died last year and I finally came into my own. I'm free at last."

Discussion

In this case we have seen how the toxic emotional environment of anger, fear and despair at conception and during pregnancy set the tone for the emotional development of the patient, R. We have also seen how, having been ripped untimely from the womb, as an infant, the adult R. tended to repeat this experience unconsciously, continually removing himself from jobs, situations and relationships before the potential within them could be actualized. He never gave himself a chance to experience the satisfaction and results of long-term relationships. Although the therapy employed could not reverse this lifelong pattern, it made the patient more conscious, giving him more freedom of choice for the future.

As Jung believed, the answers to developmental blocks often come from the most unexpected places. In my opinion, it was his mother's death that finally set him free. She may not have wanted him, the product of her passion, but once she had him, she couldn't let him go, for he represented the bond to her lost Mexican lover. And he couldn't let her go either. A mixture of charged love and shameful guilt seems to have held them in a suffocating symbiotic embrace. It took death itself to rupture the umbilical bond and free his energy to flow in more fruitful directions. Once she was gone he had to finally give up being and playing the role of the helpless dependent son. The man who could not stop running away, seems at least to have paused and put down some roots. I suspect that now that the *invisible cord* that had held him in its grip for so long is destroyed, if he were to decide to re-enter psychotherapy sometime he would be able to use it and to benefit from it in ways that he could never have done before.

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