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"I tell my story everyday, but still it is painful," recounted a survivor of Auschwitz Concentration Camp, her voice quivering, with a mix of quiet determination and tears. Thus began a five-day dialogue process between descendents of Holocaust survivors, descendents of Nazis, and others deeply connected to the Holocaust, which occurred in Berlin this spring (2002). I participated as a psychologist, and as a child of a Jewish father who served in the American Air Force during WWII.

The 15 participants, who included children of high-ranking Nazis, children of survivors, children of bystanders, and one survivor herself, came to the dialogue with a variety of motivations, including a desire to lighten the burden most report feeling they have inherited as a result of their own or their families' wartime experience. I came with my own mixture of personal and professional motivations. The latter included a desire to better understand the intergenerational transmission of trauma, and to see whether a dialogue of this sort could help participants diminish the likelihood of repeating traumatic patterns.

Despite the importance of attempting to study the psychological dimensions of the Holocaust, a well-documented "conspiracy of silence" has been noted over time, in both the families of Jewish and German descendents (Bar-On, "Attempting"; Barocas and Barocas; Speier). Children on both sides have been left to grapple with the silence and emptiness left by their parents' inability to discuss their wartime experience. Barocas and Barocas, in their psychiatric work with numerous families of Holocaust survivors in the United States, concluded that "Individual and collective ritualized mourning were not experienced, and grief was not worked through" (333). Cultural historian Dominick LaCapra, describing a context in which mourning the Holocaust was often bypassed, states that in Israel "the aim was to go from victim to agent, without passing through survival and the process of working through the past" (158).

Israeli psychologist Dan Bar-on, in studying both the descendents of Holocaust survivors and perpetrators, coined the term "double wall" of silence to describe resistance to speaking about the Holocaust experience, observable not only between survivor/perpetrator parents and their children, but also between patients and their therapists ("Attempting" 167–168). A prominent example of this phenomenon was highlighted by German psychoanalyst Sammy Speier. Speier indicated that the German Psychoanalytic Society (DPV), at the time of his writing in 1993, had failed to deal with the effects of its own, no less its patients', Nazi past, and thus had demonstrated an inability or, more likely, "a refusal to grieve" (64).

On a larger societal level, cultural historian Elizabeth Bellamy suggests that the melancholic strain evident in postmodern philosophy itself reflects a failure adequately to mourn and work through the Holocaust. Bellamy, in her book *Affective Geneologies* writes "postmodernism can be summarized as, among other things, a kind of melancholic reaction to the loss of modernity's narratives of coherence" (2). Bellamy uses the term "melancholia" in the Freudian sense, defining it as "a kind of perversion or distortion of memory–a refusal of salutary remembrance of loss, a refusal to mourn, that condemns the subject to a futile 'acting out' " (2–3). In this context, Bellamy defines the Holocaust as "perhaps the major unresolved trauma lying at 'the core of Western identity,' " and goes on to suggest that this trauma "haunts the divide between modernism and postmodernism" (4). Thus, if one accepts Bellamy's thesis, the inability or refusal to mourn (rather than simply memorialize) the Holocaust, has implications on the individual and collective level, ren-

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dering it difficult to find coherent meaning in its absence, and potentially condemning us to a collective "acting out."

The Berlin dialogue was designed to provide an opportunity for participants to engage in, rather than avoid, a process of genuine mourning. Such mourning included grappling with the emotions associated with the legacy of the Holocaust, exploring its impact on images of self and other, processing its effects on intergenerational family dynamics, and struggling with feelings such as shame, guilt and rage. Interestingly, in this context of genuine mourning, I came away with my own more coherent sense of meaning. Conclusions I drew could have significant clinical implications, especially for working with issues related to the repetition of trauma.

The Dialogue

The dialogue structure consisted of participants having 30 minutes each to tell their stories, and an additional 15 minutes for either taking questions or continuing to speak. Each member of the dialogue group then had time to express how the speaker's story touched them. This process took up most of the week. Significant detail was conveyed, and considerable affect was expressed, within this format.

German dialogue participants reported coming from what they defined as a "typical" German family, a constellation that has been written about extensively, in which the father was totally autocratic and made most, if not all, important decisions for family members. Limited emotion was reportedly expressed in such families beyond the "sudden rages" to which many of these fathers were prone. The family culture also included a tremendous emphasis on obedience, occasional physical beatings, and a complete lack of "pity" (which I deduced to also mean lack of "mercy") shown for others, or exhibited when mistakes were made. If I had not heard this family characterization from participants themselves, I might have felt it was too stereotyped.

This family background appeared to foster degrees of shame and humiliation in children, and most likely promoted a tendency to disavow or split off "unacceptable" traits or feelings such as weakness, vulnerability, dirtiness or inadequacy. However, unlike their parents, rather than project these traits onto a scapegoat, dialogue participants are seeking contact and identification with their parents' victims and their descendents, in an effort to heal their own histories of abuse, as well as the legacy of shame they carry about their parents' Nazi past.

One daughter of a Nazi, despite hearing anti-Semitic attitudes expressed throughout her childhood, felt particularly drawn to meet and learn about Jews. This was a common motivation described by many German participants. In her life this took the form of traveling to Israel when she was 19 years old and staying with a Jewish family. She was at first nervous, and expected to be resented as a German in Israel. To the contrary, she stated that in Israel she discovered the first feeling of family she had ever known. She believed she was embraced, and has since returned to Israel more than 15 times.

In a similar fashion a German American participant, who herself came from a family rife with abuse, stated that she has an "overwhelming need to go to Israel." One of the German dialogue facilitators cautioned that the Judeo-philic attitude, which she identified with herself, could be partly motivated by a desire to bypass the responsibility of fully owning and working through the legacy of Germany's National Socialist past.

Many Germans (as well as Jews) also stated that they grew up largely in a "culture of silence." Little, if anything, was discussed about their parents' experiences during the Nazi era. For the most part, these participants reported that family members of the perpetrator generation never expressed remorse.

One German woman, Marta, who currently lives in the US and has been involved with the dialogue sponsoring organization for ten years, stated: "As Germans we were perpetrators and victims in a way that silences you. It leaves no room for emotional connection; it can feel hopeless, stuck, glassy, and immovable. You can't grieve." She also said that when trying to talk to people in Germany about the dialogue, they often responded either defensively, or would say "just move on with your life." "However, they hadn't moved on at all," she observed. Her perception was that many Germans are still largely in a state of denial and thus unable to engage fully in life.

Related to Marta's perception, one older German dialogue participant stated that his central emotional experience in his family was one of disconnection from emotions. He stated that he struggled with this experience for many years after the war ended, and is still affected to some degree by this sensation today.

Other German dialogue participants described continuing to feel significantly burdened by their nation's Nazi past. Participants reported periods of extended illness, depression, abuse, and even multiple suicides in their family backgrounds, which they attributed, at least in part, to a lingering impact of the National Socialist experience. This lies in some contrast to Bar-on's findings in his research on Nazi perpetrators ("Holocaust"). Bar-on failed to discover evidence of higher than average levels of suicide attempts, psychological breakdowns, or even confessions of guilt to clergy or family members, among perpetrators. However, in this study Bar-On focused on perpetrators themselves, not on the adjustment of family members.

One way or the other, I found it heartening to observe the depth of shame people in this dialogue group seemed to carry. Of course the people who participate in this type of dialogue are a select and unrepresentative group of Germans. Few people of any background are interested in processing feelings, let alone trauma, on an in-depth level. Nonetheless, the sense I got was that the sentiment of shame—and burden—lies just under the surface in many individuals' psyches, even within some who may not fully recognize, or acknowledge, that it is there.

One German young man's transformation over the week seemed particularly illustrative. Initially he introduced himself as the child of a bystander, and expressed his motivation for participating in the dialogue in largely intellectual terms. About two-thirds into the week, this mild mannered man erupted into almost uncontrolled sobbing and outrage. He stated that the weight of sitting with such shame, even as the son of bystanders, was virtually unbearable. It seemed to be quite meaningful for him to give voice to this feeling. He became increasingly animated throughout the week, and developed a playful, close connection with two of the younger Jewish participants.

The issue of faith, as it relates to the Holocaust, occasionally arose in the dialogue. Toward the end of the week a German woman who had been a small child of bystanders during the war, with great seriousness and sincerity to her voice concluded, "The Holocaust could not have happened here if we had truly held onto our Christian faith."

"Sophie," the Auschwitz survivor, when asked how losing all her family members in the camp affected her faith stated, "I don't hold God responsible. If I did, I would be letting humanity off the hook."

The descendents of survivors, as well as Sophie herself, indicated that they did not attend the dialogue expecting "healing" per se. Rather, they were interested to see whether attitudes had changed in Germany, how the legacy of the Holocaust has affected the children of perpetrators, whether perpetrators' descendents express remorse, and also to better understand their parents' world.

The descendents of survivors and descendents of perpetrators discovered that they had certain important things in common. It took many in both groups years to learn about their parents' actual histories; the culture of silence was operative in both sets of families. They also both reported feeling that they carried personal pain or burden associated with their parents' legacy. Members of each group were seeking to lighten this burden through dialogue. Further, they have found that they can help each other in unique ways. "The same thing that is healing me is healing the Jewish person," stated Marta. "We can help each other more than anybody else can."

Putting their experiences into words, telling it to each other, and receiving a hearing, if not empathy, appeared to be meaningful for the descendents of both survivors and perpetrators. Marta states, "Through talking I feel less 'buried.' The less buried and frozen I feel, the more empathic I am able to be with others."

Rachael, a child of survivors who has also been involved with dialogue work for the past decade stated, "I used to feel incredible mistrust and hypervigilance. I put blinders on. I felt that all of Germany was evil incarnate. Through my work with the dialogue I have gotten to meet real German people of my generation, to hear their struggles and their pain. Several Germans are now genuine friends of mine."

Most significantly, some participants report that involvement in the dialogue has helped to expand their

sense of identity. The fact that Jewish participants reassured Germans they do not hold them accountable for their parents' actions, and that German participants expressed feeling shame in reference to these actions, was important for both groups to hear. This sorting out of responsibility may have helped make it possible for survivors' descendents to loosen any lingering internalized sense of low self-esteem, humiliation, or even anti-Semitism they may unconsciously continue to hold. Similarly, descendents of perpetrators might have become better able to differentiate their own sense of self, and responsibility, from those of their parents.

"I no longer feel like a victim," notes Rachael. Similarly, Marta states, "I wanted to feel less like a perpetrator, to be respected, even as a German. The fact that Jewish people were willing to listen to me, even to show some empathy was amazing, wonderfully healing." She added, "I feel less stuck in the identity of perpetrator. Many people prefer to maintain identities as perpetrators or victims. But, that won't get us out of this."

Related to the theme of not getting us "out of this," one of the Jewish dialogue facilitators, Josh, related that his mother, a Holocaust survivor who lost dozens of relatives in the camps, " constantly lives in pain." He explained, "If she didn't, she would feel that she was betraying the memory of her relatives." While acknowledging that the impulse behind maintaining this "pain" is understandable, even admirable, Josh pointed out that the form his mother's loyalty has taken, keeps her stuck.

"One of the biggest opportunities the dialogue process affords participants," Josh observed, "is the ability eventually to feel that 'I am not responsible for my parents' or relatives' pain or crimes.' " Among other benefits, this can allow participants to constitute their relationship to their parents on different grounds, or to maintain loyalty to family members in a more flexible, less self-destructive, or constricting, manner.

Despite its benefits, response to the dialogue was not monolithic, nor without complexity. A daughter of a perpetrator, "Ingrid" reported feeling that she had been unnecessarily cut short by the German facilitators while summarizing her story during a public event held after the end of the formal dialogue. She later asked for an apology, and was offended when, from her perspective, the apology came indirectly. In outrage, Ingrid then determined that while she would continue to do her work of healing, she would no longer do it with the sponsoring organization.

Irrespective of the content of Ingrid's complaint, it is possible to speculate that the strength of her reaction to this incident may have been enhanced by the anxieties aroused in the aftermath of speaking out against her late father, no doubt breaking through layers of personal, familial, and societal resistance. It is also interesting to note the parallel process; a perpetrator's daughter becomes caught up in her need for an "apology," and is unable to accept that it arrives indirectly. This incident highlights the need for dialogue facilitators to pay adequate attention to the potential for a range of reactions post-dialogue, to plan accordingly, and to have follow-up resources available for participants who are interested.

At the end of the dialogue, participants on both sides appeared to feel they had more energy available for responsible action, rather than feeling frozen or stifled by unprocessed guilt, shame, or rage. A descendent of perpetrators stated that her overwhelming burden of shame felt somewhat diminished, and she could reclaim her strength for healing. A descendent of two survivor parents stated, "When I returned home I felt a greater sense of peace. I really can't explain it. I just felt like I was able to put something to rest."

Reflections

Toward the end of the dialogue week I visited the notorious "Haus de Wansee" where Hitler's "final solution" was adopted, as well as Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp. In the context of these visits, as well as throughout the dialogue process, I found it difficult not to reflect upon the "ultimate" question: "How can life itself, no less human life, have dignity or meaning given this evidence of a seemingly limitless human capacity for evil?" While this question may seem more existential than clinical, it is a question that clinicians must at least consider, if we are to help our patients and their descendents find coherence in the aftermath of massive trauma.

At Sachsenhausen a response arose for me—a response that, interestingly, has equal application to both

the German and Jewish wartime experience. This response is also relevant for descendents of survivors and perpetrators seeking to individuate from family themes of victimization or perpetration. It became evident to me that for human life to sustain meaning or dignity we must recognize, and live in the recognition, that there is something more significant to what defines us as human beings than our mere physical existence. Our life can retain integrity if we strive to stay connected to, and honor, this "something" (call it "soul" for lack of a better term), irrespective of our circumstance, and accept that under extreme conditions we might have to sacrifice our physical life, to retain its ultimate meaning.

Related to this "response," a few additional thoughts emerged. Human beings can only retain or reclaim the potential for dignity in the wake of massive trauma if this "soul" is viewed as inherently worthy and unable to be destroyed. The connection to "soul" must be recoverable, irrespective of how badly our bodies or personalities have been humiliated, or even how badly we have humiliated others. I do not think that this perspective requires belief in a Supreme Being, or adherence to an organized religious system.

While these thoughts are far beyond the realm of what is considered "psychoanalytic" per se, I believe they can have significant relevance for psychoanalytic practice in that they provide a means for loosening or breaking into the repetition compulsion. It is hard not to feel a need to retaliate after persecution if one truly believes that one's *essence* has been humiliated. It may be impossible to attempt to regain dignity and balance without retaliation, if this is one's self-perception. However, simply becoming a perpetrator does not lead to emotional liberation (a conclusion strongly confirmed by the dialogue participants), but keeps us imprisoned in the destructive, and unfulfilling, pattern of victimization and perpetration. Coming to believe, and eventually feel, that our *essence* was never, and could never be humiliated, and reconnecting with an inherent sense of worth, diminishes the motivation to retaliate or repeat, and provides us with more salutary, fulfilling options for enhancing self-esteem and gaining satisfaction in life.

Obviously this conception articulates an ideal very few of us could or would live up to (e.g., staying deeply internally or "spiritually" connected) in the face of massive trauma. Perhaps it is less important that many of us be able to fully sustain this sort of connection in the context of trauma, than to recognize that this connection remains possible, and provides us with a potential, during or after traumatic experience, toward which to grow, and with which to heal. Staying mindful of this potential clinicians can help patients slowly reclaim a sense of their own inherent esteem, dignity, and integrity, when these attributes have been badly injured and obscured by psychological trauma.

Among the few inspiring legacies from the Holocaust are depictions from remarkable individuals (both Jewish and German) who were able to maintain such dignity and integrity in the face of overwhelming trauma. Victor Frankl in his classic *Man's Search for Meaning* writes of the possibility of maintaining a sense of dignity and meaning as an inmate in a concentration camp. He concludes, "It is this spiritual freedom—which cannot be taken away—that makes life meaningful and purposeful" (75–76).

German theologian and resistance leader Dietrich Bonhoeffer provided one of the most inspiring examples of an individual apparently able to remain true to his "faith" during the Nazi period; a faith which eventually became completely separated from the Church structure. Bonhoeffer was imprisoned, and later hanged, for his resistance to the Nazi regime and his unwillingness to remain silent in response to the complicity of the institutional German Church.

Before he was martyred, in 1945, Bonhoeffer began writing about faith in a "World come of Age," starting to differentiate the concept of "faith" from "religion', and conceived of what he termed a "Religionless Christianity" (Bethge 774). Bonhoeffer argued that in the current context (the latter stage of the Nazi era), expressions of faith needed to mature. It was no longer adequate to practice a childlike Christian faith, showing up to a church once a week and praying for protection or reward. Instead, Bonhoeffer suggested, one must pray with one's life, grounding one's daily actions and life goals in one's deepest values, and thus participate "in the suffering of God on this earth" (784). He began to consider that this kind of "religionless" faith might be possible to practice even in a secular context.

The call for a maturation of faith could also be in-

terpreted within a psychoanalytic framework. Among the many psychological lenses through which the Holocaust can be viewed is, of course, an Oedipal perspective. One of the many over-determined hypotheses as to why the Nazis targeted the Jews for elimination suggests disdain for the Jews who symbolically represent the "people of the Law," as Holocaust survivor and writer Arnost Lustig observed (Cargas 13).

Juxtaposed with the Nazi project of ultimate egoism, the destruction of the Jews could be viewed as a form of patricide—an attempt to destroy the primacy of commitment to the Divine, in favor of the primacy of commitment to the Aryan, with the prize being world hegemony and the thousand-year Reich. As Freud articulated in *Totem and Taboo*, the aftereffects of a patricide include repression; hence the "conspiracy of silence" evidenced in both the German and Jewish communities since the liberation of the camps. However, the Nazis eventually failed in their project, but not without untold destruction including a shattering of former structures of meaning. The Church was exposed in large measure as inexcusably silent or complicit, while the values of the Enlightenment proved woefully inadequate to stem the tide of horror.

A resolution to this drama could be interpreted as requiring a maturing of faith; perhaps individuals are called neither to "kill" God, nor to maintain a childlike adherence to the institutions of religion or the law. In the wake of civil and religious authority gone mad, perhaps ordinary citizens (like the son in the Freudian Oedipus complex) must instead *identify* with God's project, take responsibility upon themselves and, as Bonhoeffer suggests, grow towards participating " in the suffering of God on this earth" (784); in other words become agents themselves of justice and healing in the world. Thus, in response to the question of how one can maintain faith "after Auschwitz," it could be argued that rather than standing as a testament to the meaninglessness of faith (and perhaps of human life itself), Auschwitz exists as a glaring symbol of the impossibility of life without faith, combined with an urgent need to redefine "faith" in profoundly more mature, and personally demanding, terms.

If a therapist can assist a trauma survivor, or even a perpetrator, to recognize his or her indestructible potential for worthiness (in contrast to the Nazi conception of "unworthy life"), together they can engage in the intense work required to transform a victimized, humiliated or radically shamed self-concept, thus, helping the patient to reconnect with faith—if in nothing else, then in him or herself. The dialogue provided an important forum for engaging in the "intense work" of mourning with others, and thus beginning to work through the internal psychological legacies of large-scale trauma.

Conclusion

The opportunity to engage in a process of interpersonal mourning connected with the Holocaust provided participants many benefits. These benefits could eventually have implications on both an individual and a collective level. Most significantly, participants (especially those who have continued participation with the dialogue process over time) have been able to loosen and broaden their sense of identity away from a more "frozen" identification associated with victimization or perpetration, toward greater individuation. Participants also have become better able to differentiate their own stories from their parents' stories, and to feel less stuck or immobilized by their parents' pain, shame, or rage.

Participating in a process that allowed members to feel and express a range of affect, without being silenced by others' resistance, itself appeared to have been salutary. The legacy of German family conditioning, which participants noted often promoted disconnection from affect, contributed to the abusive humiliation that virtually defined the Holocaust; thus, providing a space where members could fully feel and speak freely, was vital to beginning a healing process.

The dialogue structure and format reinforced the message that participants' full range of feelings, and thus, they themselves, are worthy, and that no matter their family background, they can grow and transform. However, this growth requires processing difficult feelings and accepting responsibility, not bypassing such intense work. Nonetheless, this hopeful message provides a "way out of this," as Marta suggested, a possibility of working through and individuating rather than merely "acting out."

Experiencing members of the "other side" in three-dimensional terms seemed to help participants reduce

stereotyping, and appeared to allow participants to experience themselves in a more dimensional fashion as well. This dimensionality is also likely to diminish participants' tendency to view themselves exclusively as victims, or to view all members of another group exclusively as perpetrators or "enemies."

While participants on both sides concluded that no one should have to remain plagued with guilt for the acts or suffering of their parents, several German and Jewish members expressed feeling that they have inherited a heightened responsibility to work toward making it less likely for atrocities of this dimension to recur. Thus, the dialogue seemed to help participants move from experiencing immobilizing guilt, toward taking active responsibility. This transformation on an individual level mirrors the call on a collective level that Bonhoeffer and others articulated, to move from an immature, more passive version of religious practice, to living responsibly one's "faith" in the world.

Perhaps it was not feasible, nor even desirable, for first generation survivors, perpetrators, or bystanders actively to mourn this unprecedented world trauma within the first generation after it occurred. Countries needed to be built or rebuilt, and families needed to be started. The dimension of this horror was so great, the losses so profound, the impact so overwhelming, it defied adequate symbolization or summary through any medium—in this context Elie Wiesel speaks of the "impotence of language" (Cargas 161). However, with the passage of time and the growth of subsequent generations, it may now be more possible to revisit this "unresolved trauma" that "haunts the divide between modernism and postmodernism" (Bellamy 4) with fresh eyes, and with an aim toward reclaiming, or rebuilding, an individual and collective sense of meaning.

In the context of a genuine mourning process associated with the "defining trauma" heralding the postmodern era, I felt a greater sense of meaning and clarity arise. This clarity did not come in the form of a modernist style "coherent narrative of meaning" for all, nor as a postmodernist style series of personalized fragments of meaning. Rather what came clear to me was a call for individual responsibility, and a challenge for humanity, however imperfectly, to attempt to live its "faith" in the world. This defines the task required to allow us, as a collective, to move incrementally away from the victim/perpetrator dynamic of human history, and ever so slowly, toward agency.

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