

Sadness after loss

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Summary

The author discussed Maria Orwid's thoughts, using Bion's theory in terms of creating emotional meaning and catastrophic change, as a mass loss of values.

Bion's theory / Holocaust

I feel a special privilege to speak today about the meaning of the topic "Memory and beyond", on the memory of Maria, and in reference to the rich and inspiring lecture of prof. Jacek Bomba [1], I am grateful for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I feel personal responsibility and self reflection to stand here and express myself. Maybe, it is a similar experience to that of a cantor on the day of atonement, not because I represent repentment of others, but because the sense of humbleness, asking for repentment and the deep understanding of why I have not been here in the last 60 years.

I feel that I am speaking not only to you, but also to my previous generations of my fathers and mothers who lived and died here in Kraków, and with whom I have not spoken before, whom I have ignored until the last years.

We meet today in the intersection of the memorial to Maria, and what she symbolises for me, the ability to survive the destruction and death. In a way this is the topic of our meeting - memory and beyond. I would like to relate especially to the idea of Jewish sadness and memory and beyond through my personal experience as a child and adolescent.

We all know about the pain of the survivors that could not be heard when they immigrated to Israel. I remember the rejection and the fear

of the survivors who came from "there", the stories, our fantasies, and especially what was not said, scared us as children. We tended to ignore, and sometimes to mock the children of the survivors, while we were feeling proud through our identity with Israeli heroes.

Looking back, if I am using Melanie Klein's concepts, I think that we were in existential mode of paranoid schizoid position. We existed through a deep sense of being attacked on one hand and desperate to protect ourselves on the other hand. The world was split between good and evil, those that identify and support us, and the bad ones who threaten to exterminate us. I can express the same idea by Bion's terms "fight or flight".

In order to survive, one needs to erase the past and in some sense to give birth to ourselves, to erase our sense of impotence and weakness. We need to sever out ties to our roots, the Diaspora Jews. We and them. Poland was the inconceivable entity, the essence of hell - "another planet" using the term of the writer, Yehial Dinur.

Shoah was not only a physical extermination but also a spiritual one of the Jewish language, culture, etc. In Israel there was a public press to speak Hebrew and not Yiddish, to use Israeli names, etc.

The main road to survive in the shadow of hell was to create and to give birth to something new. One can think that the Nazis succeeded in exterminating the Jewish culture, through the way I

described before. We, the Israelis did not want contact with the horrible past where Jews were perceived to have gone like sheep to slaughter. We had to perceive ourselves as a different breed of Jews. This was an attempt of survival which may have made sense at that time. But it also had the seeds of weakness and emotional fear to be exposed to the hell that we could have been part of.

As I indicated before, I wish to focus on the part of the lecture that relate to the idea of Jewish Sadness.

Prof. Bomba thinks that Maria talked about the sense of massive loss, a physical and cultural loss, as well as loss of meaning.

I wish to relate to this topic through my personal experience.

I grew up in a home with Polish-Jews parents, and as a typical Israeli product, I had very ambivalent relationships to the Diaspora Jews. We are strong, new Israelis and different from the Jews out there. At the same time we were attentive and influenced by what had happened to them.

During the years as a young intern in the psychiatric ward, a new boss arrived from Switzerland, who was the exact opposite of the typical Israeli. I remember the mutual attraction between us, and the complex meetings between the Israeli and Jewish identities. There was something which I had not accepted and understood then, which I understand now. I was both attracted to him and reluctant in relation to him. Something in his position, where the essence of Judaism is of spiritual existence in the Diaspora which I resisted, and he on the other hand came to live in Israel. I regret in retrospect that I was not able to have a more complex dialogue with him.

For me to come to Kraków is almost a concrete touching in the Jewish existence and its loss. This is not only a symbolic touching that I feel connected to, despite the vacuum. I cannot ignore or deny my Jewish roots any more. As I experience them as walking through the district, synagogues, the concerts, workshops and especially in my yearnings connected to the previous generation. Maria talked about the loss of sense related to the destruction of Jewish and European culture.

I wish to extend this and talk about the loss of meaning.

I do not mean meaning in the philosophic and religious sense, but on the meaning in the emotional sense.

Emotional meaning relates to the basic feeling of emotional connection. It is what I feel at this moment, is it real and alive for me. On the contrary, if I am disconnected to what I feel. We can talk about lack of meaning-meaninglessness. I am talking about emotional detachment without contact with my inner self, where I had difficulty with my inner psychic reality and the others. One of the typical signs can lead to concrete behaviour where I hold on to objects, doing, acting out, etc. We feel it as an attack on the self and the inner emotional world and as experience of internal jail (plays by Samuel Beckett, Meltzer).

Meaning therefore is connected at the emotional truth at a given moment. This emotional capacity makes it possible to develop a emotional inner world with the ability to symbolise. This is the ability to develop imagination, to bear contrasts and mental pain that comes from frustrations.

This is the ability to create something new which is not limited to the concrete. It is the extension of our emotional capabilities. These ideas were developed by the British psychoanalysts Bion and Meltzer.

We can say from this perspective that one of the main conflict of the survivors was to deal with the concrete and traumatic experience of the extermination. Versus the need to find emotional meaning.

I want to emphasise that the emotional possibility to give up a "known" emotional state of mind is very difficult. Bion calls it catastrophic change. Which means that every "beyond", means giving up an already "known state of mind", which has some concrete element, and sometimes it is total situation. For example, inner relation to the Diaspora, to the survivors, Poland, etc.

Change includes giving up the familiar, and relinquishment of old defences, which means to release, to dissolve and to soften our inner emotional beliefs and attitudes.

A central question is, do we feel the total loss, or can we also feel that something new is happening which was not there before. This is the

feeling of expansion of the soul, the ability to experience different dimensions with the ability of dialogue, the ability to bear the differences without absolute answers.

For me, coming to Kraków, is to meet the Jewish dimension, something that I denied, but also something that was there and still waiting to be found.

For me this "beyond", is beyond the already known. The Jewish dimension is entangled and connected to the Polish dimension, still waiting to be revealed and found.

REFERENCES

1. Bomba J. Przewyciężając niemożliwość. *Psychoterapia*. 2009, 3 (150): 5-8.

