

What is Biographical Counseling

by Dani Aman

Biographical counseling was born at the meeting point of personal distress, social chaos and the spiritual path. In our age - as psychotherapy proceeds towards the spiritual and students of spiritual science are leaving their mark in the field of psychological healing - this convergence is essential. The phenomenon of personal distress is rooted in childhood experience. The characteristic child of the 20th and 21st centuries, burdened with a long history of incarnations, is a singular entity with stark individual outlines. It craves appreciation of the subtle shades of its being, but is faced by parents who try as they might lack the necessary faculties to fully understand the fine quiver before them.¹

At the end of the first quarter of the age of consciousness soul we are still living with its primary manifestations: the inclination towards egotism, individual insularity and an inability to make contact with the other. These leave a painful mark in the soul of every child. We may therefore say that modern man is a casualty.² Every modern man is the injured king Anfortas, suffering the pain of the wound left by the poisoned lance, repeatedly frustrated in his quest for remedy. Modern psychotherapy³ increasingly appreciates the wound and its major spokespersons have cast off the Freudian trend to associate it with infantile sexuality supposedly transferred onto the parents. In his book *How Does Analysis Cure* Heinz Kohut addresses the protective structures with which an individual buttresses himself in order to maintain the status quo and not be exposed to pain. The following is the picture of Anfortas depicted by Wolfram von Eschenbach: To ease his pain the servants place in the wound the lance that is still smeared with the original poison that caused it. The terrible cold of the wound then congeals into ice upon the lance and affords temporary relief to the sufferer.⁴

In his talk about modern man as wounded Steiner relates the wound to human sexuality. While condemning unbridled sexual license absolutely Steiner helps us understand its origins. Seeking relief from pain the wounded man finds temporary forgetfulness in sexual excitation - the illusion of warmth, intimacy and self-immersion. The two drives of which Freud spoke (sex and death) unite not to define man as such but as expressions of his lower, injured, suffering and helpless part. His spiritual part, having lost touch with the spiritual world, becomes an island of death within him. This territory of misery and death is a landing site for demonical forces - Luciferic, Ahrimanic and Asuric, who - deluding man with transient happiness to ease his suffering - govern him.

This is contemporary man - propelled by powerful sub-conscious demonic forces that are the building blocks of behavioural patterns that govern him unbeknown to himself. Once he embarks upon the path to self-knowledge man meets within himself all those molds that lead him over and over again to abstain from action or to act on the basis of a false image of himself and of the world.

Unfortunately the tools that anthroposophy has come up with since the death of its founder do not sufficiently highlight the persistence with which the demons are taking hold of every element in our being. Anthroposophs therefore, no less than others and with no more recognition of their origin, are governed by these defensive structures. We know that we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven unless we become as little children (Matthew 18:3), but that would entail reliving the terrible pains of childhood. We all tend to gloss over and beautify the bumpy parts of our infancy. As children we offer our parents unconditional love but it is dashed time and again against the impenetrability of the modern consciousness soul. To become the child before the fall, before the wound, we must go through the wounding itself, invoking the forces of healing the while. We must relive the nightmares of infancy, shirking none and undefended, and give expression to the elements of our being that self-preservation has kept mute. The mind body oriented therapy that has proliferated over the past decades brings forth a certain truth. The same wounds that the physical body has sustained in the formative first seven years are those which seek salvation through the link between the consciousness soul and the physical body.⁵

Unveiling the demons behind the curtain of fallacies often involves unbearable pain, a sobering shock in which long held convictions are swept away and we confront ourselves in utter nudity, petrified by the horrific chill and disappointment we experienced in childhood. Then we encounter the face of our adulthood where year in and year out in every encounter we try to evade our pains by hoisting them onto others.⁶ We realize how, unthinking, we hurt our closest and dearest over and over again and a horrible pang of disappointment and grief over missed opportunities may engulf us. That is the moment we realize that the quest for short-term relief and the cosy blanket with which we try to cover our pains will never bring healing. This is the point where the spiritual path becomes a promise, an oath of faith to never cover up again, not to hide or use another as chance remedy to the fathomless abyss of our own pain.

Every man is born with a karmic tree in his heart - a fine mesh of webs woven through many incarnations between himself and those close to him. In the course of life the tree suffers injury and damage through misunderstandings, infidelities, separations and strife. We try to avoid looking sincerely at the impaired tree because should we do so our heart would ache at each bleeding mutilated part of it. This is our own personal wound and accompanying pain, that if we were to carry proudly and bravely about with us, as a constant reminder of our debts and those of others, would become our ears and eyes.⁷ Social chaos is the result of our deafness to the call of destiny. We come into this world set to mend the wounds of the past, the wrongs we did to others in former incarnations. But, in no time, our resolve is shattered against the hard rock of the materialistic world that teaches us to plug our ears to the deep voice of conscience. Thus we turn in perpetual circles of blindness and error, and fail to build bridges of truth, understanding, restitution and love between ourselves and those with which fate has thrown us together. We keep allowing opportunities to slip and inevitably reach the end of the road only to find that in the present incarnation too we have merely reconstructed past mistakes.

This is the path of the new warrior. The same daring and courage is expected of him as of his predecessors, the great warriors of history, but his battle is internal not external. The warrior keeps returning to the places most threatening, painful and frightening for him. He battles his own nature that tries to hold him back from them, and stares again and again at the pains of his life, the wrongs he has inflicted upon others. He makes suffering his constant companion. The events in his life that offend, pain and cross him all direct him to the wound. They guide him towards friends who help him crack the crust coating his heart, expose it to pain, mold it into an ever more perfect organ, one to which the beneficial entities will be increasingly more able to express themselves.

Contrary to the view often held in anthroposophical circles, the painful road along which the demons are met is not a short one. Step by step the veil is lifted with the demons looming behind it ever larger, stronger and better equipped to trick and delude. There is no modern spiritual path leading from light to light, from wisdom to wisdom, from comprehension to comprehension. Only by proceeding ever deeper into the darkness may the fruits of true understanding - immersed in warmth, won through suffering, seeping with love - be gained.

The first calling of biographical counseling is to lift the veil off the molds, patterns, modes of behaviour and fixations, learn that these are evidence of a rich, diverse and powerful demonic world, and understand that the immense difficulty of healing is proportionate to the power of this world. Many despair of psychic healing, but when we are prepared to walk the valley of death surrounded by devils with our eyes wide open, the road to it opens. Now, as humanity is crossing the threshold,⁸ unless we are prepared to look the powers of darkness lurking there full in the face, the powers of healing from the other side will not come to us either. Gone are the days when man's spiritual life could take its safe course within the secure boundaries of his physical existence. Contemporary civilization exercises a strong pull towards the sub-sensible, the material, the low - to all manner of addictions that express the world that lies beneath everyday existence. Across from the sub-sensible is the super-sensible, with beauty, brilliance and love as powerful as that of the Prince of Darkness himself. But in order to invoke him we must first disillusion ourselves with regard to the seeming security of our middle class existence and enter the woods where, among the dragons and monsters, we can find the remedial and beneficial entities. Beings of warmth and love attend our progress and only wait for us to break off another piece of crust from our heart so their words of comfort may reach it. The flabbergasting revelation of this voyage is: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Mathew, 7:7).

Grappling with Evil is humanity's mission in this epoch in the history of civilization,⁹ the evil that furiously flows within us in its devilish trinity, myriad manifestations and tricks. In this confrontation we have on our side the latter-day Christ - as an eternal entity of healing,¹⁰ comfort, hope and knowledge. Steiner refers to psychic healing as emanating from love and belonging in the sphere of love.¹¹ The delicate etheric universe that comes into being in the encounter between therapist and sufferer, counselor and seeker of counsel, the event of a therapist truly ready to meet his patient becomes the grail in which love can incarnate. The therapist has to give himself up time and again and stand with beating heart before the singularity of the human being before him, his unique world and idiosyncratic language. He must repeatedly face his own sense of impotence caused by the meeting with another being, with a different world, thought and language; helpless in his inability to recognize the needs of the other, the demands of the moment.¹²

Regular thought processes and patterns, all advance knowledge and previous information - anthroposophical or other - are the enemy of healing. Attempting to tackle every question by means of the age-chart wisdom of anthroposophy is as futile as any other structured attempt. Healing can only occur as a creation of something from nothing,¹³ as an epiphany of the moment of creation, an outcome of the joint helplessness of the meeting directed as a silent prayer to the healing beings of the ether. It is incumbent upon the therapist to increasingly treat anthroposophy, as he would any other body of knowledge, as a language.¹⁴ The richer, deeper and more multi-hued the language, the greater the intricacies available to the healing entities when they come to bring their message. The more practiced the therapist is in active, varied, non-opinionated thinking,¹⁵ the greater his ease in grasping the moment comprehensively. However, one must not mistake language for healing nor accumulated wisdom for the spiritual message itself.

Psychoanalysis knew from the outset that the therapeutic encounter reconstructs the deep unresolved molds of the patient. People such as Kohut are path blazers in preparing therapists to waive their dignity, opinions, knowledge, their very self in order to become the absolute servants of the remedial process. In this respect psychoanalysis is unwittingly the servant of the Christian impetus.¹⁶ Its narrative always dealt with empathy and the ability to experience the other from within. Recently it has become permissible to speak of the essence itself - of love.¹⁷ Whenever a patient rages at the therapist, insults or even humiliates him all the obstructions inherent in the therapists' own molds are put to the test. He becomes the ultimate opposite of the spiritual mentor of yore - the strong and infallible all-knowing guide.

The therapist must learn to withstand the demonic onslaught aimed at him, to lovingly contain it. In the name of the deep tie between himself and his patient he must stand fast in the undercurrent of responsibility and love that forbids him to abandon the sufferer to his own devices even when external events suggest that he is intent upon leading to separation or conflict. The moments of cure, of insight and of love gain force like water drops engraving the rock. The fruits of healing are assessed in terms of the amount of love in the patient's life, of his ability to experience his life's love ties within his heart, of the extent of freedom he enjoys and delight he finds in giving from the bottom of a loving heart.

Biographical counseling is gaining a foothold in the present social chaos and its mental ailments, and is attempting - in company with other voices¹⁸ - to fill the void in spiritual psychotherapy which is so badly needed today to cure humanity.

¹Concerning the impossibility of parent-child understanding today please see lecture no. 10 (in printout form), 10th October 1916, "How Can the Soul Needs of the Time Be Met?" (GA 168).

²Steiner addresses modern man as a casualty in a lecture of February 7th 1913, "The Mysteries of the East and of Christianity" (GA 144).

³About the wound in psychotherapy see for example Mitchell A. Steven and Black G. Margaret *Freud and Beyond*, BasicBooks, 1995.

⁴Von Eschenbach Wolfram, *Parzival, A Romance of the Middle Ages*, Vintage Books, 1961, p. 262.

⁵A good description of mind-body therapy can be found in Hendrix Gay and Kathlyn, *At the Speed of Life: A New Approach to Personal Change Through Body-Centered Therapy*, Bantam Books, 1996.

⁶See Weil Simone, *Gravity and Grace*, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 5.

⁷About pain and its connection to knowledge see lecture from June 1st 1922, "The Tension between East and West" (GA 83).

⁸See lecture of January 1st 1924, "World History in the Light of Anthroposophy" (GA 233).

⁹See lecture of October 26th 1918, "From Symptom to Reality in Modern History" (GA 185).

¹⁰See lecture of December 7th 1918, "The Challenge of the Times" (GA 186).

¹¹See lecture of May 27th 1910, "Manifestations of Karma" (GA 120).

¹²About the link between helplessness and Christ see lecture of October 16th 1918, "Esoteric Readings" (GA 182).

¹³About creation from nothing see lecture of October 11th 1905, "Foundations of Esotericism" (GA 93a).

¹⁴About Anthroposophy as a language of communication with Christ see lecture from February 6th 1917, "Cosmic and Human Metamorphoses" (GA 175).

¹⁵About the link between discarding opinions and the ability to understand complex life situations see lecture from February 3rd 1913, "Mysteries of the East and of Christianity" (GA 144).

¹⁶See for example Kohut Heinz, *How does Analysis Cure*, University of Chicago Press, 1984.

¹⁷About love in therapy see, for example, Ruth Netzer, *The Quest for the Self* (Hebrew), Modan, 2004, pp. 466-469; Introduction by Ra'anan Kulka in the forward to the Hebrew edition of Kohut Heinz, *How does Analysis Cure*; Claremont de Castillejo Irene, *Knowing Woman: A Feminine Psychology*, Harper and Row, 1974, cp. 8.

¹⁸About attempts to promote Anthroposophical psychotherapy see Dekkers-Appel & all (Editors), *Psychotherapy and Humanity's Struggle to Endure*, Verlag am Goetheanum, 1997.