

# Healing the inner parent: a transpersonal perspective

## 1. Introduction: the transpersonal perspective

I will deal with the topic concerning the healing of the inner parent, in the reference frame of Transpersonal Psychology. “The word ‘transpersonal’ means that which is beyond the ‘personality’, seen as a ‘mask’ hiding the essence of the human being, and refers to the highest potentialities. Integrating psychology with the meditative tradition, Transpersonal Psychology points out that the state of the ego that is usually considered to be healthy and normal, is actually limited, distorted, and exposed to a suffering that is self-produced and destructive. The transpersonal approach aims at transcending the limits of the ordinary state and integrate the components of human totality (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) eventually realising the transpersonal consciousness, where the sense of identity extends far beyond personality, encompassing wider aspects of the mind, of humanity and the universe”. (\*) This corresponds to an optimal state of development and mental health, which is specifically a field of research within Transpersonal Psychology.

## 2. The present situation: the lack of a responsible and loving inner parent

Transpersonal Psychology addresses its efforts to human suffering, in order to relieve it and to solve the self-produced one. Let's have a look at the present human situation. Despite the progress, with its outcomes often unbelievable and unexpected only few years ago, which brought the human kind to ever higher levels of comfort, and the improvement of the means of communication which brought the global village to be realized, today's man is not able to reach the core of his suffering. Which is the reason why man is now suffering?

If it is true, according to a materialistic vision of life, that man is well when he satisfies his own safety and power needs, it is even more true that many discomforts and misfortunes afflicting the human kind stem from the same man, in that they are a consequence of a disorder existing in the individual consciousness. According to the materialistic vision, in order for man to be well it is necessary to remove the external causes of discomfort, while a more realistic and spiritual vision sees the human limit and its unawareness reflecting on an inner disorder expressed at an interpersonal and social level.

Nobody among us feels directly responsible and joint author of the external disasters made by the human kind, as far as we face our inner life and get the courage to look at what happens inwardly in terms of wickedness and destructiveness. Let us have a look at our external situation as human beings: what is lacking if not a responsible and loving parent? For example we can look at the teens' and children's aggressive behaviour, the so called bullying. If we get deep into it, we see often hiding behind it the need for caring by a good parent; a parent frequently lacking in the reality, or negatively interiorized by the child. Why should a boy choose an aggressive lifestyle, while being at peace with himself? Choosing an aggressive, striking attitude has as its roots the need for caring, and only the parent can serve this purpose, both in the external reality and within the inner world. Likewise, in front of the existential void, the reply is often despair, use of drugs or resort to daring behaviour, because where an encouraging parent is lacking, despair leads to

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experimenting the self-imposed bound, different from a realistic and responsible one which can be given by the parent. This is an irresponsible behaviour, due to the incapability of giving a mature, wise, parental response (response-ability), isn't it?

At last, the parental absence also results in value vacuum. As a matter of fact, value transferability is lacking, because ethics is not transferred; this happens because often the same institution of the parental imago is lacking. We all can witness this fact, at a gross level, within the political and the familiar life. It is quite more difficult to recognize it within one's inner life. The "inner master" is not perceived, because one is not educated to hear his voice so he is replaced by fake models, conveyed by media or by other agents whose aims are often instrumental. The disappearance of the educator's function proves this fact.

Thus, often a strong parental imago is not structured within the individual inner life space and on the contrary a pale and non lovely substitute appears, a "parental false self", which is not ready to receive the influence of the Self. Within the transpersonal perspective, the Self is the unifying centre of the psyche, transcending the conscious ego. According to Assagioli, the self, as a bio-psycho-spiritual unity, is transpersonal, that is beyond the boundaries of the ordinary personality defined by body and mind. That is part of a wider universal Self such as the drop is part of the ocean: the personal ego is only a reflex of the transpersonal self, identified with the instinctual-mental contents and limited by them.

### **3. The forming of the "inner parent"**

What is carried out externally by an individual is a reflex of his inner life and the inner structure has often been conditioned, during her biographical history, by numerous environmental factors. Thus, the lacking of parental mirroring could have given rise to a deficiency, at an intrapsychic level, or to a malfunction of the superego within the tripartite structure. Since I wish to point out the affective constellation of this instance, I will call it the "inner parent", which I will deal with throughout the present lecture.

The main factors of ego suffering are related to narcissism, which Laura Boggio Gilot names the "psychic auto-immune disease", which the other psychopathologies stem from. In this regard, the most responsible psychic structure seems to be the dysfunctional inner parent, this one being the outcome of the relationship experiences held with one or more attachment figures, usually the historical parents.

It is the negative, hypercritical or omnipotent and/or devaluating inner parent who builds up the suffering, and also dysfunctional, inner child. The narcissistic relationship, with its destructiveness, affects the inner relationship between parent and child. According to Almaas, the author of the Diamond Approach, a method aimed to the inner realization, the following are the main environmental factors contributing to the rise of narcissism: 1) *the child is not seen for who he is*: his actions, feelings, expressions, preferences, capacities, accomplishments, motives, and their observable qualities are not recognized or appreciated by the important people in his life so he is likely to become alienated from these elements; 2) *an important aspect of the child is seen but not responded to*; this is bad enough to cause narcissistic alienation; 3) *even though the child might be seen and related to, he might be misunderstood and thus alienated*. This misunderstanding has a deep wounding effect on the child; he will not only feel hurt and betrayed, but is likely to become confused and uncertain about his sense of himself; 4) *even though the child might be seen, recognized and related to, is not appreciated, admired and loved for who he is*. He needs to feel that the admiring attitude is directed to his true self, not to an external part of him or to the parent's projection.

When the inner parent is lacking tuning with regard to the inner child the result is a lack of empathy, whose reflections are the narcissistic grandiose expectations. Then the “inner parent” becomes the guardian of narcissism, eternally witnessing the history of parental abuse and carelessness suffered by the historical child, which had been interiorized and now constitute the history of the present abuse and carelessness within the inner life, a real condemnation banishing the structure of the adapted ego into narcissism.

#### **4. Healing the “inner parent” is a requirement for the healing of the inner child**

When the relationship between the inner parent and the inner child is not good, the ego struggles within itself and feels divided, so it cannot go any farther in its integral growth towards the Self, nor it can fully express its individual potential. Therefore, in its evolution, the ego cannot attain an adequate developmental stage, marked by autonomy and authenticity of thoughts, emotions, action in the world. To that aim it is necessary to calm down the needs of safety, love and esteem, and particularly to overcome the authority conflict, which is specifically related to the relationship between inner parent and inner child.

The first part of the therapeutical work and the very requirement for the healing of the “inner child”, is the healing of the parent. Sometimes misunderstanding or misinformation about the narcissistic processes, mainly committed by therapeutical approaches based on bodily and emotional catharsis – when emphasizing only the discharge of the “inner child”, out of control and in an unethical way – , results in a by-passing of the analysis and healing of the “inner parent”.

#### **5. The meditative self-observing process in psychotherapy and ethics applied to thinking**

The integral approach within Transpersonal Psychology, such as it is applied by Laura Boggio Gilot, points out the importance of two fundamental elements of the healing and transformation process within the narcissistic relationship parent-child: the meditative self-observing practice and ethics applied to thinking. “In meditation we learn how to observe not only the mental content as it flows in the here-and-now, but also the nature of the perceiving subject, that is, the thinking used to judge the other thoughts [...] While the introspective practices within psychotherapy are carried out by a thinking subject identified with a thinking that observes and investigates its inner contents beginning from its assumptions [...], in the meditative self-observing practice the observation manages to understand the thinking subject itself and its assumptions which become perceiving objects, when detached from the centre of consciousness” (\*). As far as ethics applied to thought is concerned, we remark that “the studies on meditation point out that the disturbances of thought prevent transpersonal consciousness from opening, but they are the basement of mental disease as well and are supported mostly by unethical states of the mind, qualified as aversion states. [...] Psychology has emphasized the role of emotional suffering, finding its reasons in the traumas of childhood. Meditative tradition, instead, considers the distorted and illusory thinking as the causal factor of mental suffering and destructiveness. Such as stated by the Upanishad, “you will become what you think [...] therefore you must purify your thinking” (\*\*).

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\* Boggio Gilot L., *Il cammino dello sviluppo integrale*, Satya, Roma 2005, p. 191.

\*\* *Ibidem*, pp. 211-212.

The two mentioned practices give a powerful transforming effect and contribute to the forming of a lovely and fair “inner parent”, this one becoming the inner guide as well, supporting the reabsorption of the narcissistic structure into a responsibility one, based on reality and no more on idealization.

## **6. Healing memory through the encounter with the historical parent**

Within the healing path of the “child” and the “inner parent” the re-examination of the relationship with one’s own historical parent is an essential step. This process is also said of as the healing of memory. Within my own therapeutical path, I began dealing with the affective themes of the child; he had felt neglected, had decided to manage on his own and was firmly idealizing. In time, even after a disappointment in love, the structure of my “inner child” had raised an impenetrable curtain in order to seal off suffering; finally, I chose not to love to avoid any hurt. Therefore, I tried to control my emotions, even detaching from them through a strong rationalization. Firstly, it was necessary to start “feeling” some emotions, allowing the “child” to exist and express himself, in the meanwhile allowing other people to get in and love him. Little by little, a new chance of living was about to open and, unexpectedly, the relationship with the authority arose. After a long psychotherapeutic work I met my father, whom I had always felt far from me, absent, and whom I had always refused to take as any model, never wanted to identify with, except in self-depreciation. He had never had enough self-esteem, and the same happened to me, till I began to work upon me. The background of my life has always been feeling unworthy and needing to overdo in order to reach a just acceptable standard. I could not manage to talk to my father, because I felt angry towards him. My psychotherapist helped me to overcome some emotional disturbances related to my relationship with my father and, consequently, with the authority. Once I gave loose to my energetic blockage, through anger expression and weeping, it was possibile to get my historical father back, whom I look at now more tenderly, because I have understood some difficulties he ran into being a parent, also examining better his child history. This allowed me to draw my attention towards my “inner parent”, whose thinking, structure, affectivity I am now trying to seize, through the meditation self-observing practice, carried on the all day long. The unceasing transformative task which I have devoted myself to concerns the surveillance on my inner characters: the “child”, the “parent”; it is a slow but sure transformation, enlivened by a passionate will of liberation from ignorance and suffering. As we are taught by the developmental studies within Transpersonal Psychology, this ego reconciliation is a requirement not only for psychotherapeutic healing but also for consciousness expansion towards wholeness.

## **References**

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