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National Psyche: Acknowledging National Heritage

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NATIONAL PSYCHE:
ACKNOWLEDGING NATIONAL HERITAGE

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Just as there is a human psyche that experiences different states of consciousness, there is also a national psyche that experiences different states of consciousness. Just as the human psyche has stages of development, so a national psyche has stages of development.

Just as we can look at the human lower unconscious to discover and transform the resistance's that inhibit our development and healing, so we can look at the national lower unconscious to discover and transform its resistances. Just as we can look at the human's higher unconscious to discover the potential for expressing our ability to live in health and harmony, we can also discover the potential for national health and harmony.

Drawing the parallels between these two systems has been a fascinating study for me, one which grew out of a personal path to reconcile and heal my own relationship with my national heritage as a German. It is out of this probing and healing that I have come to believe that if we are willing to explore, face and transform the dark and uncomfortable aspects of the national lower unconscious and if we are willing to explore and express the potential of the national higher unconscious, we will be able to assist the evolution of the national transformation experience which can lead us to a healthier, more harmonious humanity on this planet.

To this end I would like to contribute some insights and new perspectives on my first area of study, the national lower unconscious as I came to understand it through a personal process. The following pages describe my experiences as a psychotherapist, transpersonal psychologist and acupuncturist in private practice in New York City.

Working in Manhattan’s multi-cultural population provided me with a clientele of different nationalities and different religions which allowed me to gain deep insights into various psyches of different nationalities. From this experience I was able to develop various perspectives on personal, group and national psyches and the psyche of humanity as a whole.

A New York Trigger Experience

In Manhattan I had an acupuncture and psychotherapy practice which was very exciting. Clients came from a variety of backgrounds. Spanish clients had different belief systems from the Irish clients, who again had a different value system from Japanese clients. The work also included contacts with Afro-Americans, Greeks, Germans and others. Little by little, I saw more Jewish
clients. Among them were Holocaust survivors and children of Holocaust survivors. Their background was often Polish, German and Russian.

One particular experience allowed me to get in touch with my, until then, unconscious national heritage and prompted me to write a book on Transformation of a National Unconscious.

The client, Alan, was 25. His father was a concentration camp survivor, his mother an American of Jewish extraction. He was a wonderful young man, a pleasure to work with, very gifted in many ways. Alan was an actor, living in a well functioning relationship and with lots of friends. He had changed his family name because it identified him as being Jewish. He did not want to be Jewish, feeling burdened by its history. As he put it: "I can't stand it anymore, all these people bonded through common suffering."

I remember sitting opposite him. There was a very secure space between us, as we were, at that moment, exploring his major issue, being of Jewish origin and culture and unable to consciously accept his heritage. We had no problems establishing a good, therapeutic relationship. We were using a visualisation technique. He and I simultaneously saw the Star of David in our minds. In my vision it shone above his head. I asked him what the Star of David meant to him. He gave me a wonderful, moving explanation about the beauty of the Star of David and the deep meaning it held for him. He said he wanted to place it into his heart where it belonged and he would become it. All of sudden his words triggered a powerful reaction in my body.

As is my practice in a therapeutic role, I was listening both to my client and simultaneously watching myself. Hot waves flooded my body, every cell screaming in me, "No, no you can't!" I was flabbergasted at the intense reaction and reminded myself to take a deep breath, and observe very closely any further reactions. Something screamed in me, "Don't let him take the star in his heart. You cannot do this." My intellect said: "Well, that's strange, of course he can take it, he wants to take it into his heart, that's what he needs to do." I mustered all my energy against screaming, "No" and said, "Why don't you take it into your heart?" As he did that, in his visualisation he experienced a powerful reunion with his cultural background through this symbol.

Within me a storm raged. My body consciousness screamed, and partially through fleeting images and partially in words I understood: "If he puts the symbol into his heart he is condemned to death." Wait a second, where are these powerful emotions and thoughts coming from? What is going on? In a flash I realised, when he said "the Star of David," in my mind its name was "the Jewish Star." For me, born in Germany in 1944, it meant certain death! My whole being was in an upheaval. I sat in front of my client, a son of a Holocaust survivor, and started crying deeply. After some time, I shared with him my personal experience, which led to a deep healing for both of us.

This experience was the first in a sequence triggering the uncomfortable knowing of something I hadn't understood. It became a time of intense introspection. In my psychotherapeutic training, involving many hours of personal psychotherapy, I had touched upon and recognised very early events as far back as inside my mother's womb. To carry within me the knowledge of something which took
place even before my birth, was overwhelming. This young man, Alan, through a symbol, brought up a powerful reaction in me which didn’t seem to make any sense. Born towards the end of the War, how could I possibly know about or feel this overpowering panic and guilt towards someone wearing a Jewish star on his heart? Obviously it was not nonsense since it could cause such tremendous repercussions in my system. My mind knew I’m not guilty, it is impossible. My being, body, emotions, however, were still resonating from the inner upheaval. I began a quest. What is my national heritage and how can one heal one’s national heritage?

Early New York Experience

I remembered an incident when I first came to the United States in 1968. It was my first night in New York City, in an apartment on Fifth Avenue. I recall hearing sirens in the middle of the night. Jumping out of bed, feeling great panic, and fear, I thought, “Alarm, the planes, dropping bombs, run to the shelter.” As soon as I realised what was happening and remembered being in New York City, it was clear that these were New York police car sirens. The sound must have been similar to the war sirens in Germany in 1944, awakening unconscious memories implanted while in my mother’s womb while she was pregnant with me. I do not consciously remember, but there it was, a very instinctive reaction, fear, triggering a vague memory.

Looking back, I can see these events linked like a chain leading me to the point from where I am today, exploring the healing of my heritage.

Healing Techniques

Examining the guilt felt in the session with Alan, I registered that it seemed implanted in every cell of my body. In a technique I call cellular transformation, I use visualisation on an individual cell body. This is a powerful technique I used in those days for people with AIDS and cancer. The goal is to image a healthy cell and cell core. The same technique was used to work with my emotional reaction to Alan. In this particular way of working, I presuppose that the cell core in each individual cell, the DNA, carried the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual information of the whole body.

Putting attention to my own healing I visualised one cell, sensed it, felt it, became acquainted with it. I held a dialogue. Indeed it believed itself to be guilty, it was carrying the guilt of the Holocaust. I explained in our dialogues that it was not born when this occurred. My cell however, still felt it was guilty. I repeated over and over, “You are not guilty.” It remained the same.

I reconsidered. "Not guilty" implies the word "guilt." I repeated instead, "I am innocent, I’m innocent!" I went deeply into meditation and I realised that my whole cellular system did not believe it. My intellect knew I was innocent but my body system did not. If only one body cell could realise it is carrying a false perception, then it could heal and be a catalyst for the other cells. The inner conflict was profound. My intellect knows it is innocent. It took me about an hour and a half talking gently to one cell core, suggesting its innocence.

I sought to change the program of one cell which was programmed by something
very powerful to be guilty. I understood that the fact of being born into a German body, into the German nation, imprinted that cellular program. Eventually the cell surrendered to the continuous suggestion, the membrane broke and I saw a shadow releasing from the core, leaving the cell which began to shine brightly. I then requested the cell to pass the message on to all cells in the body system. Within a moment my whole cellular body, one cell after the other, seemed to explode like soap bubbles releasing shadows. A chain reaction happened throughout the whole body, one cell passing the message to the other. Once one cell was transformed, the others could do the same. I could see with my inner perception shadows leaving individual cells as I handed them over to the light for transformation. Deeply touched, I experienced profound gratitude, a reconnection of the wisdom and healing of this one cell, all other cells.

This experience led to intense reflections and insights on the theme of guilt. Especially noted was how the West views guilt and innocence when compared with Eastern approaches. In the Judeo-Christian religion being born seems already to determine guilt. "The sins of my forefathers and fathers are inherited." The fact of coming into the world, into a nation, into a family, a religion is a determining factor. Being Human in this system implies accumulating sins and guilt before being born and ever thereafter. How can I become a psychologically and emotionally healthy person in such an environment? The chances are pretty minuscule. For Eastern religious approaches, such as Buddhism, one is born with the inherent potential of innocence. The Eastern view permits the new born better chances to grow unburdened into a healthier psychological frame.

As I began to see my inheritance, of being born into the German nation and being born in a Christian setting, both systems steeped in guilt, shame and suffering, I experienced what might be considered healthy anger.

The night following my cellular reprogramming I had a dream. There was a huge mother. She was huge, resting in a seated position, her legs open, giving birth. Dressed and garbed in thick, black cloth covering head and body. This huge mother, in black, opened her legs wider and gave birth. I understood her to be the door through which the unborn must come into this physical reality. On the other side, behind the mother's back, before entering her womb, all the children were of bright light and innocent. Upon entering they were still bright. Being born from between the mother's legs the children seemed dark, having left the innocence and brightness behind. They already wore the black garb.

It was a very powerful dream and I understood that being born through the mother in black, represented the mother of a nation, a Christian Nation. I will carry the heritage of that nation and its religion. Within the dream was a perspective, which empowered me in the personal search for healing and transformation. The cloth was only a cloth covering the innocence and brightness. The cloth can be removed. I resolved to remove mine.

I became more and more aware of seemingly unrelated impressions and feelings linking together. Since entering the United States, I had not identified myself as being German. It was rarely ever mentioned that I was German, it never occurred to me it could have anything to do with the unconscious guilt and burden of my national heritage. Later I discovered the depth of my shame in being German.
German Jewish Project.

In 1988 in Venice, Italy, while presenting at an international conference, I met Naomi Emmerling, a psychotherapist from California. Her presentation related her experience as the facilitator of a group of German and Jewish therapists in California. The German and Jewish individuals in the groups looked at the Holocaust experience to loving (or to grow in...) acceptance and forgiveness from both perspectives. I remember sitting in the audience, my heart beating wildly, thinking, "I will do such a group in New York City." Naomi was very supportive and encouraged me to start a project in New York City. Returning, I began the search for a Jewish partner. I found her quickly. A psychotherapist and daughter of a Jewish, Polish Holocaust survivor family, she seemed the ideal partner. We met over a period of six months to discuss our personal viewpoints, feelings and thoughts about our respective heritage. We agreed to run a program in New York City with the idealistic vision of joining German and Jewish individuals in a group to work on forgiving the past. Carefully we designed a program called, "Healing the Wounds of the Holocaust." We spent ample time preparing to work as a team. She was a child of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, born after World War Two, and I, a daughter of German family also born at the end of World War Two. We decided to have one of the large Jewish or German organizations sponsor and back the program. Systematically we researched Jewish and German organizations. We spoke to many people. Most people were shocked. I recall talking to a program director at the YWCA. A Jewish woman, she broke into tears on the telephone and all I heard was, "No way, no way!" She refused to talk about her reaction and said only it was out of the question to introduce our project into the YWCA's program. For six months we contacted various organizations (American Jewish Congress, Leo Beck Institute, American Jewish Committee, National Conference of Christians and Jews, Goethe House, St John the Divine among others). The reaction to our proposal was similar. Many wonderful words, how wonderful the work was but nobody wanted to touch it. We found that most of the Jewish organizations ran well organized support groups for Holocaust survivors and children of Holocaust survivors.

One of the final meetings to solicit support was held in an old, beautiful building of New York's East side. It had wooden ceilings and high paneling in the various rooms. It was the headquarters of a Jewish-Christian organization. We were to meet the Jewish president in close contact with important people in the Christian church. He travelled on a regular basis to Germany to interact with German churches. We presented our proposal. He was very interested in the wounds of the Holocaust. My partner and I were very interested in a process of healing. The Holocaust was part of that, but the healing was the most important for us. We, the president and us, began to recognise important differences in our approaches to the same theme. These differences became more pronounced as the meeting went on. At some point, I responded: "First I am a human being, second I am a woman, third I was baptised Christian." The president replied: "I am Jewish first." I said, "Oh, you're Jewish first? I am a human being first." My colleague and I looked at each other. With his words something really hit home and he confirmed this by emphasising the importance of reminding the Germans and those of Jewish ancestry of the Holocaust of keeping it alive so it may never be put at rest. It was clear for us, that none of these organizations were really interested in healing and forgiveness work. They were interested in keeping the pain and suffering of the Holocaust alive. I understood common suffering and
pain bind people together—the greater the common suffering, the deeper the bond.

This visit clarified the difficulty of getting support for healing and transformation work from Jewish organisations and agencies. The feedback we had received, ranged from: "It is risky, too powerful, it will turn certain people against you," etc. Slowly but surely a psychological attitude crystallized from these words. Eight months of well motivated efforts were in vain. I sensed the powerful structure of suffering as a glue bonding Jewish heritage dating long before the Holocaust. It includes the suffering of three to four thousand years of Jewish history. This represents a powerful belief system that we were facing.

My colleague and I recognized that it was not the proper time to start our project. It did not seem to be the right place. Too many organizations resisted change, preferring to stay attached to the bond of suffering.

Looking back, my motivation was not to go into that age old suffering. I also became aware that if suffering were not the glue, I questioned what would be. Without the suffering would the Jewish nation, a nation spread through many countries, continue or cease to exist?

After this very revealing and discouraging experience, I returned to my personal practice integrating further body/mind/emotional approaches working with clients with AIDS and cancer through acupuncture and psychotherapy. It took me a while to recuperate from the daring adventure into the world of the Jewish Collective suffering. I had more than enough to trace my German National heritage for the time being.

The following year I travelled across the United States, facilitating various workshops. These ranged from, "Healing Womb Wounds," a workshop for women who had or were planning to have abortions, to "Re-visioning Menopause" and others.

One of these trips led me to San Francisco where I visited Sophia, an old friend of mine, a psychologist, Sufi minister and healer. Sitting together we exchanged our latest discoveries and adventures in personal and professional explorations. I began to talk about the New York experience of, "Healing the wounds of the Holocaust." Sharing it with Sophia allowed me a healthy perspective to check my personal motivation for involvement. After doing some soul searching, I discovered that maybe I was trying to compensate for the guilt I experienced on a national level. It was realized that if I were to continue this work I could not come from guilt. I would be pulled into the suffering and pain, as it happened in New York. However, at this point I felt incapable of approaching the whole affair from such a "Not guilty" perspective. I left San Francisco with a clear idea, that at this point in my life, if ever, I definitely did not wish to get into the suffering of any wounds of the Holocaust. I decided to drop the "National Heritage" guest for a while.

Acknowledging the National Heritage

Three years passed, my practice grew, as did the overseas assignments. I taught professionals internationally, gained insights into the psyches and National Collective Unconscious of different actions. Training in Russia, Switzerland,
Lithuanian, Canada, Germany, England and other countries allowed me to see different national psychological structures enfolding the psyche of individuals. I was fascinated by each nation's complex and multi-dimensional psyche. In 1989 I participated in a year's training course for groups of facilitators at the Concord Institute in Massachusetts. At our last seminar, toward the end of the last day, the following incident which brought me back to my National heritage focus took place.

Thirty-five people were sitting in a big circle. The group process we were involved in lasted approximately one hour and was drawing to a close. At the final stage, one of my colleagues, a Jewish psychotherapist, began to express shame. I remember, initially, not being particularly involved with her process. All of a sudden, I felt an incredible, powerful reaction in my body, very similar to the one I described when working with Alan, seeing the Star of David. Again, I was taken by surprise, initially unable to define it. As my intellect watched heatwaves pulsating through my body, it recognized. It was of utmost importance to speak out. Yet, I knew I could never speak it. For the first time in my life I consciously experienced my historical German shame. A great shame, I was ashamed of being German, being born German. All these years I knew my colleagues, many Jewish colleagues in this circle and I had never mentioned that I was German. I had unconsciously avoided any mention to it. I was living in the United States. I was no longer German. Not once had I stood by my nationality, my heritage. Gigantic heat waves ran through me. I knew I had to speak out. I said very simply, "I know about shame. I am German and I am ashamed to be a German." It was such a simple and powerful statement. My being seemed to burst, my body seemed to burst. I felt the waves reverberating through the circle of the group and the circle of the ones around which were observing and I dared not to look up. It was one of the most difficult things to say and yet it was one of the most liberating statements I have said in my life. I watched myself and then came the fear, "I'm going to be rejected. They will never look at me again. My shame is of such a nature that I will be condemned."

The reaction from the group caught me by surprise. Quite a few of my Jewish colleagues turned to me with tears in their eyes and said simply, "I am with you. I never thought to look at it from your side. I only thought of it from my side and my side is that Germans are killers. Now you're showing us there's another side, and that opens space from coming closer to each other."

The reverberation of this carried on. A large number of colleagues approached me after we finished the group session to share their experience. The following day we worked with issues regarding our roles in cross-cultural relations. This was the second time, in the face of rejection, to stand up among people I knew, respected and cared for, saying I was ashamed of what my nation had done or not done.

Recognizing and expressing this was a real liberation. It helped me gain clearer insights on the issue of guilt. The shame issue was hidden beneath the guilt. I now knew why, when travelling, I never let anybody know that I was German. In all the countries around the world where I travelled, I preferred not to be known as German.

The group process of the previous day was taped on video and I watched it later.
again several times seeing myself in action and being proud of that person who had the courage to say what she felt and to express her feelings. She helped open doors for deeper communication between herself and all her Jewish colleagues, who were in one way or another, affected by the Holocaust. They were carrying the burden of their parents as she was carrying her burden.

The event caused a deep change within me. From then on I was able to acknowledge that I was German, to acknowledge that I was ashamed of being German, and that it was okay to be ashamed. This seemed a big step in my own personal healing process. That particular acknowledgment in the group not only affected myself by transforming my personality, it seemed to reach many other people as I gathered from the feedback received. Openly acknowledging the fact of my collective national shame not only affected the individual unconscious and allowed access to a group or collective unconscious on both sides but somehow brought me closer to the idea of how to approach the work with the national Collective Unconscious.

Unfinished Business

In 1991 I held a Seminar for a group of Japanese businessmen and women. Two were specialists of Chi Kung. Chi Kung is a five thousand year old Chinese method of energy work using acupuncture meridians, by releasing energy through the hands. I accepted the offer of a treatment. I shall never forget the event. All day presenting the Seminar, I felt very stressed. It was a difficult day, I was exhausted. Each time I work with a group from a different nation, I try to see with fresh eyes. I do not base my interactions on my previous learnings since each culture is so different. To connect takes a new approach each time.

The Chi Kung treatment consisted of two women holding their hands extended over my body releasing Chi (life energy). Suddenly, another of my, "German heritage experiences," came to consciousness. As they held their hands extended over me, energy moving through my body, my heart felt like breaking apart. It was an extremely painful experience. With my Inner sight I saw myself in the earth. I was buried. It was a very clear image. And from this perspective I saw and felt thousands and thousands of corpses. I know immediately these were the burial grounds of the Jewish people, the ghettos, the concentration camps. I couldn't stop crying, my heart was in excruciating pain. I had the sudden impression that these corpses wanted to rise upward. It seemed they wanted to but were unable. With precise clarity I recognised their need to be loved by living beings, at this particular moment needing my own love and caring. As soon as I recognised this, some, in their energetic body, began lifting to go up. However, to be able to do so, each one needed to move through my heart. I knew I could not endure this, at this point, believing it would break my heart and kill me. I asked the two Japanese women to stop the Chi Kung.

I listened deep inside myself. A line of thoughts came forth: "The trauma of mass genocide was so horrible. There are may who cannot rest after their death. Their deaths were so sudden, so traumatic, they're confused, waiting to be released. I cannot do this. It will take many to do this." It took several hours to be able to stop crying. The experience stayed with me for a long time.
Thinking of the soundless screams which are resounding with the pain and the anguish of those who died in the camps I asked myself how much of this past is incorporated in the national consciousness of Germany. How to heal such a "thing?" How to lighten the burden? For myself, for others?

Spring is Coming

In Fall 1992 I am in front of the television set watching German counter demonstrations against the Neo Nazi violence directed against foreigners.

The place is Frankfurt exhibition Hall, Rock musicians donating their time and songs to the cause. At one point the announcer states that 150 000 people are assembled. The crowd is mostly younger people, demonstrating against the violence and being dominated by a Neo Nazi minority.

A Rocker on the stage sings a song. All I remember is one line, "My uncle was a Nazi". It goes deep. It is painful and simultaneously freeing-- the admission of it. It is no longer hidden, but out in the open. These demonstrators are the third generation after the Holocaust. Finally they can stand to it. What a relief. Maybe it takes three generations of distance from a national horror to consciously acknowledge it.

Again I am in tears but now tears of relief. I see the acknowledgment as the first step of the healing process, becoming aware and accepting. This opens the doors for healing and transformation. In front of the television I had the vision of all these 150 000 people of the younger generation assembling at the Concentration Camp sites, acknowledging their national heritage and reinforcing their purpose never to let it happen again.

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