

Hanna Biran

## The Difficulty of Channeling Rage into Dialogue

### Die Schwierigkeit, Wut in Dialog zu lenken

**Zusammenfassung** Mit Hilfe psychoanalytischer Konzepte wird die Beziehung zwischen Israelis und Palästinensern untersucht, die für beide Seiten traumatisch und von Wut geprägt ist. Bion unterscheidet zwischen Elementen vom Typus Alpha und Beta (Beta-Elemente sind „sensory impressions“, die mangels Transformation durch die Alpha-Funktion nicht gedacht oder vorgestellt werden können). Wut ist ein archaisches Beta-Element, das nur die Sprache der Gewalt kennt mit dem Ziel zu zerstören. Der Dialog ist Ausdruck der Alpha-Funktion. Die Konzepte „Omnipotenz“ und „kultureller Narzissmus“ ermöglichen ein vertieftes Verständnis der destruktiven Prozesse, die die Transformation von Besitzstreben in ein Dazugehören zum selben Raum (belonging) auf der metaphorischen Ebene verhindern. Dialogfähigkeit setzt eine gesicherte eigene Identität und die Akzeptanz anderer Identitäten voraus. Zerstörerisch wirkt auch das tägliche mediale Eindringen von Gewalt in die Intimität: Die Tabugrenze zwischen Realität und Phantasie wird unterminiert. Es wird die Frage gestellt nach den Bedingungen für einen möglichen Wandel.

Vorbedingung wäre das Einsetzen eines Trauerprozesses auf nationaler und sozialer Ebene, der Mangel, Verlust, Getrenntheit und das Recht auf Trauer auch der anderen anerkennen würde.

#### Schlüsselwörter:

Trauma; Gewalt; Wut; Omnipotenz; kultureller Narzissmus; Trauer.

In this article I wish to focus on the relationship between the Israeli society and the Palestinian society from a psychoanalytical point of view, while emphasizing the processes taking place in the social domain.

Both Israelis and Palestinians are currently experiencing a traumatic reality, saturated with violence. Both are the victims of an accumulative and incessant terror. Even those persons not directly or physically harmed experience anxiety and agitation. Everyone is exposed to ongoing violence and terror. The constantly decreasing intervals between the repeated acts of revenge on both sides cause the society to be in a fragile and unstable mental state. The repetitiveness of hostility and revenge cause a feeling of helplessness and of life lived inside a trap. The reality is one of escalation. What yesterday seemed to be an unlikely nightmare, today becomes constant reality. The lines between reality and imagination are blurred. When anything is possible, anxiety mounts high.

Rage is a central phenomenon of this traumatic reality. Rage can be defined as a primeval, archaic element which cannot be verbally expressed. It appears in a raw form through actions releasing an accumulated destructive energy. The aim of such actions is to cause the other side a final, irreversible catastrophe, accompanied sometimes by the total sacrifice of the self, such as in the suicide attacks. Thus rage is a primeval substance that knows only one language – the language of violence. Its victims are anonymous and accidental, its one and only aim is to shed blood. The expressions of violence have predetermined scenarios. The next act of violence is very similar to the previous one. The question which rises is: why is it impossible to translate the language of violence into a language of dialogue, in

spite of so many victims of terror and such unbearable pain suffered constantly by both peoples?

If we borrow some major concepts from Bion's theory of thinking (Biran, 1998), we will find these societies suffer a deep-rooted thinking disturbance. As a psychoanalyst, Bion bases his theory on the primary relations between mother and baby, but it is possible to borrow his important concepts and apply them to the social sphere.

Bion (1967) refers to two principle and different elements of thinking. The first is called "Alpha type elements". These are elements that can be thought. The other are the "Beta type elements" of which it is not possible to think.

"Alpha function" is the element, which translates what is absorbed by the baby through the senses in a pre-verbal form into words, dreams, expression of feeling and dialogue. Alpha function makes the transformation from elements that cannot be thought to those which can be thought. Initially the mother provides this function for the baby. She translates the baby's distress for it, gives names to its hardships and anxieties and thus calms and contains it. Through this process she introduces the baby to a kind of container. Through the contact with the containing mother, the baby gradually learns to translate its experiences, to moderate the sensory impressions and bodily sensations, for itself, and, through the mother's mediation, it learns to create thoughts by itself and consequently to build concepts. Through the verbal expression which it will later learn, and through developing the ability to think and sublimate, it will be able to moderate its distresses and frustrations, and learn

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to contain the raw materials through transformation to the level of emotional expression, dream, imagination, dialogue and sublimation.

Contrary to this important developmental process, which is responsible for the ability to transform and therefore for the development of thinking, there are sensory impressions which have not undergone transformation, received a name, translated to a communicative word or appeared as a thought. These sensory impressions just remain as they were in their raw state. Bion calls them "Beta type elements". These are raw materials which have not undergone any processing. They are like undigested particles which cannot be thought or sublimated. The less successfully the Alpha function is executed by the mother, the more the baby is exposed to confusion and frustration, so that more numerous Beta elements remain, emerging mainly at times of distress in the forms of acting out, psychosomatic disturbances, thinking disturbances, violent outbursts and so on.

The quality of the Beta elements is a concrete one, which does not change or transform into a metaphor or an idea. When the baby is overwhelmed by such elements it experiences what Bion calls "nameless dread", finding itself in great distress. This description demonstrates that we are not dealing here with a rational or logical thinking theory, but looking at a thinking created through experiencing and learning from experience. It is an emotional thinking, creating in us the abilities of intuition, common sense and creativity.

If we borrow this system of concepts from Bion and transfer it from the individual to the social range, we will be able to identify in the society, especially in times of distress, a regression to some type of "pockets" of undigested elements which do not undergo a transformation but rather break out as Beta type elements. These elements emerge from storage just as they are. They are repetitive by nature, and learn nothing from experience. Time and life experience have no impact upon them. A prominent and painful example of these social Beta type elements is expressed in the incessant repetitiveness of social violence which has been constant in the Middle East for many years, and except for technological upgrading has undergone no transformation.

These elements are not channeled towards dialogue. They appear as concrete acts. Their expressions are cruel and primitive, and they understand no human language. This is a situation in which society is regressive, and the mother-leader who may cause the transformation is missing. It is a kind of social sickness. The relations between the two peoples, the Israeli and the Palestinian, are on two different levels. One level represents the Alpha functions and is expressed by the peace talks, the attempted dialogue, the efforts for coexistence and the intention of dividing the territory. The other level is that of terror, which represents the Beta elements. Both peoples live in a pathological reality, in which it is impossible to learn from experience, and so, simultaneously, those who talk continue to try talking, and those who kill continue to try killing. They live in a paradox – as the language of dialogue gains force, so does the language of terror. These are two languages which are alien to each other, but respond to each other without communicating. The language of dialogue is one of faith and of looking forward. The language of violence knows no future tense and dreams no dreams; it is constructed on the wish to kill and the thirst for blood. A dialogue will never end at the same point it begins – something must occur along the way. Terror will always begin and end according to a predetermined scenario.

As the mother translates for the baby, the leadership must execute a successful translation from Beta to Alpha for the people.

The nature of the two types of elements are summed up in the Table 1.

I wish to deal with the dilemma: what are the differences between the two qualities appearing in the above table, and what would allow the violence,

which is not channeled and remains in its raw state, to undergo a transformation and be available to the Alpha function? What will make it possible to dissolve the terror and turn it into dialogue? What are the differences between the primitive quality of terror and the mature quality of dialogue?

## I. Omnipotence versus the acknowledgment of limits and limitations

The willingness to kill, to go all the way with the destruction wish, emerges from an omnipotent position. This is the position of the omnipotent and omniscient, who does not recognize the limits of reality or the existence of the other and the different. The need to conquer, to achieve, to rule, derives from this omnipotent position. The leading motivation is to possess. It is a concrete level, similar to that of a little child, who wants a certain toy just because a friend wants it. The need for possessiveness can reach the level of "it shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it" (1 Kings 3:26). A person under the influence of the omnipotent fantasy would feel he deserves all his heart's desires, and would not have the ability to share or to recognize the existence of the other. Cain killed Abel because he had something Cain did not have (Genesis 4). Cain could not bear Abel's advantages or his different identity. Possessiveness is characterized by a total and concrete nature. In our case, it is the wish that the land will belong to me, and me alone.

The willingness for dialogue derives from a much higher level of maturity. A transfer will occur from "possessing" to "belonging". "To belong" indicates a metaphorical level of relating to space. War emerges from the position of possessiveness, while dialogue is born from

Table 1

Beta type elements	Alpha type elements
Elements that cannot be thought.	Elements that can be thought.
Are not channeled to imagination.	Expressed by the ability to imagine.
Concrete. Recognize no past or future.	Expressed by the ability to dream forward.
Are not channeled into words and dialogue.	Expressed by the ability to hold a dialogue.
Expressed through violent actions.	Undergo transformation and moderation.
Emerge impulsively during frustration.	Tolerance of frustration.
Repetitive and circular.	Change and develop.

the position of belonging. When one is willing to belong to a space without being its possessor, it can lead to a situation in which each of the two peoples can project their identity, uniqueness and wishes onto the same space. The same Jerusalem could belong, on the emotional level, to two different peoples. Each one could deposit its own meaning in the same concrete space. Belonging has no concrete limits. Both peoples can dream of Jerusalem, and one dream does not interfere with the other since dreams have an unlimited space.

Both peoples find it difficult to move from the level of possessiveness to that of belonging. It is difficult to move in the space of metaphorical thinking when both existential and paranoid anxieties are at their highest. The fear that the other wishes to annihilate me makes it impossible to reach above the level of concretization. Only once there is development and a movement from possession to belonging would coexistence in the metaphorical space be possible. In the metaphorical space each people can deposit its own history, identity and truth without harming those of the other. What the two peoples are in need of is a transformation from possessiveness to belonging (Table 2).

## II. Extreme social Narcissism versus the ability to love the other

Eissler, in his 1975 book "The Fall of Man", defines the term "Cultural Narcissism". This is the internal force, which pushes us to overestimate our religion, our nation, our political camp and so on. We are impressed by those who resemble and think like us. This force is one of the causes of conflicts and wars.

Andre Green, in his 1981 article "Projection", says that every culture is structured on inherent paranoid processes. The distinctive character of a certain culture is affirmed through the devaluation and rejection of another culture. Often it is the culture of the neighboring people. Minority groups that are different than us are a good object for projection. We project anything which is unbearable within ourselves on these groups, such as evil, aggression, weaknesses, inferiority and so on.

Table 2

Possession	Belonging
Omnipotence	Acknowledging the limitations of power
The need to conquer and rule	The ability to share
To possess	To belong
A concrete space	A metaphorical space

Social or cultural Narcissism is a dangerous force which can become powerful and extreme. Bollas in his 1992 book "Being a Character", speaks of the danger of such Narcissism creating a "fascist mentality". Hidden in such a mentality is the fear of the other, the one different than ourselves. In its extremity this fear is defined as xenophobia.

In its extreme form social Narcissism includes the blind infatuation with a leader, being overwhelmed by his force and losing the individual faculty of judgment. Indeed, Freud (1921) had analyzed this phenomenon already in 1921. The phenomenon grew to monstrous proportions with the rise of Nazism and the blind worship of Hitler as a symbol of nationalistic and racial Narcissism. This type of extreme Narcissism turns others into non-humans and thus objects of violence. The violence of Auschwitz was a statistical, bureaucratic and industrial violence. Terms like man, human being or individual were annihilated.

The Narcissist tendency in society is primitive, defensive and eventually leads to solutions of hatred, rejection and violence. A Narcissist position evolves from superiority and therefore prevents a dialogue. Dialogue is born out of the willingness for reciprocity, from recognizing the other, touching him, being close to him, knowing him without fear. Dialogue is a search for companionship and the willingness to make concessions. It is important that both parties will be able to know, respect and then to love each other. In order to facilitate such a dialogue, a distinct national identity should be created. Differentiation between two cultures, between two peoples, would allow for a discourse which would be less threatening and contain a recognition of mutual existence. Such a dialogue can only take place from the level of recognizing and feeling secure in one's

own identity, while recognizing the different and distinct identity of the other.

On an individual level much has been achieved. Together with reports on the terrible terror attacks directed at anonymous individuals, we read and hear stories of friendship, good neighborliness, trust and sometimes good relations between employee and employer among Israelis and Palestinians. On the human level and among small groups, the grace which seems impossible on the social level sometimes becomes possible. This is the grace which evolves from the individual contact on the human level, and the ability to see the other as a person in distress (Table 3).

## III. Living in a perverse world versus living in a world which recognizes laws and boundaries

Werbart (2000) says that a perverse society is characterized by the ease by which it is possible to break any taboo created by human civilization. The overflow of images saturated with violence which can be witnessed constantly on the television screen turns death into a daily guest in every family's living room. Anything may be shown and no filters are applied. Violent scenes, which would be hidden or blurred in the past, now appear as pornography, as raw material. The exposed and damaged human limbs appear as they are, and in immediate proximity to the violent occurrence. The line between fictional films and the blood-stained reality is blurred. Human beings have the perverse wish to peep at sexual abuse, violence, suffering, torture and death, to satisfy the archaic, primitive part which is buried inside civilized man and which is normally restrained by taboo. Once the taboo is violated, a primitive quality is released, fueling acts of violence and sexual

**La difficulté à canaliser la rage en un dialogue**

**Résumé** Nous examinons à l'aide de concepts psychanalytiques les relations entre Israéliens et Palestiniens, dans tous leurs aspects traumatisants et empreints de colère. Bion distingue des éléments de type alpha et bêta (les éléments bêta sont des « sensory impressions » qui ne peuvent être ni pensées, ni représentées parce qu'elles n'ont pas été transformées par la fonction alpha). La colère est un élément bêta archaïque qui ne connaît que le langage de la violence destructrice. Le dialogue est l'expression de la fonction alpha. Les concepts d'omnipotence et de « narcissisme culturel » permettent de mieux saisir les processus dévastateurs qui empêchent qu'une situation d'occu-

pation se transforme en un sentiment d'appartenance au même territoire. Pour être capable de dialoguer, il faut avoir une identité propre et accepter l'identité des autres. De plus, l'intrusion quotidienne de la violence dans l'intimité, par le biais des médias, a des conséquences néfastes car elle contribue à effacer la frontière séparant réalité et fantasme. La question est posée de savoir comment une transformation pourrait s'effectuer. Il nous semble qu'une condition indispensable au début du processus serait un travail de deuil effectué aux niveaux national et social, incluant le respect des sentiments de manque, de perte, de séparation et le droit au deuil de l'Autre.

abuse in the family and on the street. Seeing the atrocities on television, it seems that anything goes, nothing is forbidden. The taboo's important function is to create frameworks, to draw lines between right and wrong, good and evil, between generations, between that which may be touched and that which may not, between the living and dead, the human and non-human, between that which is publicly permissible and that which is private. The taboo has an important role in development. It represents the father, the law and the boundaries of reality. The line, which may not be crossed in reality, allows for the development of imagination, creativity and art. When once and again we are being exposed to images, which leave no room for imagination, reality becomes chaotic and undifferentiated. Violence becomes banal and mundane, a constant stimulation to human evil.

Life with no boundaries, distinctions or frameworks is a life in a world which encourages expressions of rage, violence and the breaking of all limits. In order to be able to transform these materials into a civilized level of dialogue boundaries must be restored. It is necessary to, once again, identify clearly what we are allowed in our imagination only, but are forbidden in reality, in order to restore human life as a sacred value. A regressive condition of the loss of boundaries could dangerously damage the mental health of the next generation.

So far I have talked of changes in the state of mind of the two peoples, changes required in order to reach a dialogue that strives for peace. These changes are not happening, and even seem to get further away from us. The last year has

been one of the worst ever in the conflict between the two peoples. On the Israeli side, the elements rejecting a dialogue have gained force. The social atmosphere in Israel is saturated with militaristic notions. Alarming phenomena of cultural narcissism are taking place. The feeling is that everyone must identify with the main-stream, and those who think differently feel condemned. It means that the freedom of thought is gradually being lost. Soldiers who refuse to serve in the Territories are regarded as the enemies of the people. The invasion of the Palestinian towns, especially Jenin, by the Israeli army, and the terrible suffering inflicted upon the Palestinian population, indicate the existence of nationalistic forces constantly striving for war. Luxurious settlements are being constructed for Israelis in the midst of a people experiencing constant economic hardships.

We experience a vicious circle of Palestinian terror leading to an Israeli military retaliation, leading again to terror, endlessly. The wish for revenge lead to the death of civilians and soldiers on both sides time and again. This is a war without a victor.

Also on the Palestinian side, those beta-elements which make no dialogue possible became more manifest. The most extreme and disturbing phenome-

non is that of the suicide bombers, constituting the most extreme form of the unwillingness to hold a dialogue.

When analyzing this phenomenon of the suicide bombers, I wish to emphasize that behind them stand the terror organizations. These organizations constitute the psychological infrastructure for the emerging of terror. In order to understand this painful phenomenon we must analyze the psychodynamics of the terror organizations.

A terror organization is a kind of totalitarian organization. Totalitarianism can be defined as a state in which people are told what it means for them to be happy. Individuals lose the right to decide on the course of their own lives. The autonomy of the person is lost. So is the case in terror organizations, where human beings are alienated from themselves, and the control over their consciousness is in the hands of others. The person's awareness is alienated from his identity, and he becomes an actor in a drama written by others, in which he performs a pre-subscribed role. Accordingly, the suicide bomber, as we regard him, or the martyr (Shahid), as regarded by the other side is, by both views, a person robbed of identity as an individual who is the master of his own will.

The terror organization supplies its members with a narcissistic value. They

Table 3

Social Narcissism	Ability to love the other
Impressed by the similar	Accepting the different
Projection on the other	Ability to contain weaknesses and urges
Dehumanizing the other	The ability to defend human dignity
Superiority	Reciprocity

deny being mere mortals. Their death is not experienced as a loss, but as an ideological mission which will bring redemption.

Freud called such a situation, in which we create a representation of such a good world, a situation of ego-ideal. It is a world where vulnerability or mortality do not exist. The ego-ideal rejects and represses the real self. In terror organizations the ego-ideal is realized by the suicide bombers, who are no longer in touch with their natural and spontaneous will to live. The suicide bomber is changed from being a subject to being an object. He turns into being an object in order to become ideal in the eyes of those who send him on his mission. These are usually men older than him by a generation, representing the figure of the ideal, omnipotent father, who receives his legitimation from God, and fulfills a divine mission. The ideal fathers heading the organization create an image of purity and holiness for the acts of terror and murder.

The suicide bomber becomes an object carrying out a mission. In order to exist as such an object, he must lose contact with his real ego. We should assume that in his normal state he has the will for life like any other human being. An acute example for the losing of contact with the will to live and for the continuity of life is the woman, a potential suicide bomber, who after being apprehended spoke without emotion of the possibility that her only daughter would be orphaned. "My daughter will be proud of me for the mission I fulfilled", she said. It means that in this system of values the mission stands much higher than the motherhood instinct that was crashed and repressed.

The shocking, recurring terror incidents demonstrate that the suicide bomber loses himself before the attack to the point of losing contact with his own body. Our body is the closest thing to us, but, inspired by the leaders of terror, the suicide bomber's body is alienated from him. It is no longer his, becoming a mechanical, lifeless object. He is no longer human. He turns into a bomb, with the sole purpose of destroying the evil outside. Anything outside the organization is considered the enemy, without differentiation. It makes no difference whether it is a baby, a pregnant woman, a 16 years old girl or an 80

years old man. The suicide bomber sees no human beings. He sees an undifferentiated human mass. Just as his own individuality was totally erased, so is erased the individuality of the other. This is a state of depersonalization.

Following one of the terror attacks, an eye-witness reported that the suicide bomber smiled before activating his explosive belt. This smile is in great contrast with the horrific seen which followed it. I assume that at this stage the suicide bomber is not in touch with reality, but rather experiences a fantasy, in which he becomes one with the ideology of those who sent him. One cannot smile at such a reality, therefore it seems that his body is here, but his mind is somewhere else, experiencing an acute and ecstatic fusion with the ideology.

In the recent part of my lecture I have shown how an escalation of violence occurred among both peoples, and how they have distanced themselves from the language of dialogue. Instead of dialogue we witness a destructive culture of "let me die with the philistines" (Judges 16, 30). Still, it is our duty to look ahead with some optimism. The current situation cannot go on. My hope is that the recent deterioration will lead to the beginning of the channeling of horror and anger into dialogue.

When society is overwhelmed by such painful processes, we are in need of a working group, combined of representatives of both peoples, willing to think together. We need a group, which possesses creative thinking, which will free their peoples of their paranoia, their redemption fantasies and their delusions of unilateral and omnipotent solutions. Both peoples must build a team that will conduct negotiations in a state of sanity, making its mark on the insane social context in which we find ourselves.

#### **IV. Emptiness and apathy versus the ability to hurt and mourn**

Freud describes trauma as caused by great quantities of stimulations which break the crust protecting the ego, leaving a hole in the mental space. It is like an internal bleeding that empties the ego. Anzieu (1989) developed the term "skin-ego" to describe the crust protecting the ego. He showed that any violent

attack, either physical or mental, is directed against the mental shell protecting the human being. Violent and perverse attacks cross the boundaries, which protect the mental hygiene. Self-defense against such an unbearable pain is often through disengagement and encapsulation or, in other words, putting on a shield. But disconnection and fortification also block the enrichment, growth and nourishing which the psyche gains through its contacts with the outside world. Adopting such a position of disengagement and erecting walls of apathy makes it possible to continue sustaining blows, while simultaneously continue to hurt and destroy, without being able to dissolve or ease the traumatic experiences.

Change will occur only when depression sets in, or with recognition of the damage, victims and suffering caused by the violence. Only with the ability to mourn that which was lost and will never return, can there be movement in the direction of dialogue. This should be mourning on the national and social levels. The omnipotent and Narcissist positions mentioned earlier do not recognize the possibility of "there isn't any" or "there never will be". In these positions, when the world does not give one what one wants, one attacks it. Only through the recognition of want, loss, victims who cannot return, will emotional learning from experience become possible and a strong will to stop the suffering and pain arise. From an apathetic position, the vicious circle can go on forever. Only from a position of recognizing concession, of touching the suffering, would transformations begin. The wounded nation will create for itself a rehabilitated identity, recognizing want, separateness and the right of the other to mourn. Both peoples need to recognize on the emotional level the collective meaning of loss. They need to start a new chapter of both the self and the other.

These thoughts about the possible and the impossible, about the oscillation between hope and despair, lead me to reconsider the human part within ourselves. I believe that the majority of people from both nations want peace and quiet. It is therefore necessary to look once again for answers in the human sphere. We must try to listen to Primo Levi's cry, who, after experiencing the Holocaust, asked "Is this a

Man?" In order to reexamine human fate we may return to the myth of Oedipus Rex, which is in fact a metaphor for every man's search for meaning and separateness. The Oedipus story is a metaphor encapsulating the suffering and destruction through which man must pass in order to discover his human side.

In the Oedipus story the Sphinx appears as a kind of terrifying monster, whose body is combined of human and animal parts. The Sphinx represents enigma, the undeciphered riddle. It asks a riddle: "Who is the one walking on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon and on three by evening?" The answer takes us back to the source, to man himself. He is the one who as an infant walks on fours, at adulthood on two legs and uses a stick in old age. Paradoxically, the riddle is trivially simple, but at the same time illusive and difficult to solve. The answer enfolds the meaning of being human. Man undergoes changes and metamorphoses in order to discover the human aspect within himself. Often we are blind to something basic and simple which is right there in front of our eyes. The Sphinx is unforgiving of this blindness, and it crashes all those who fail to answer its riddle in the abyss. Only Oedipus solves the riddle successfully.

Enigmatic messages have a Sphinx-like quality. They are terrifying and associated with violence and traumatic experiences. They relate to the boundary between life and death, which is often a very thin line. According to the myth, Oedipus suffered a trauma a few days after he was born. His father Laius, who wanted to avoid the curse according to which his son would kill him, gave him to a shepherd with the order of abandoning the baby on Kitarion mountain. King Laius pierced the baby's ankles with a pin, so no one would pick it up. The baby's legs were swollen, hence his name Oedipus ("swollen legs"). The mature Oedipus solved a riddle based on the motif of legs. He had to be in contact with an early traumatic experience, which had a monstrous aspect, and which left its mark on his body. In order to crack the Sphinx's riddle he had to return to the most painful spot, to the cruelty he sustained as an infant.

The person who solves the enigma metaphorically is the leader which soci-

ety requires. He is the leader who first and foremost is in touch with himself, with his humanity. He is the hero who may experience the social trauma in order to be able to heal the society of its afflictions, and for that purpose he must look inside himself. Perhaps the heroism of the leader in our day and age should be the human heroism of sustaining pain and suffering. Touching the suffering paves the way for being empathic to the other's suffering.

The Sphinx's aspect of the story is total and unyielding. There are only two extreme options – to solve the riddle or to die. The Sphinx would not engage in a dialogue. Its language is the one of violence. It can only recognize a glorious victory or a total destruction, with no gradual shades. When Oedipus gives the correct answer, the Sphinx has to commit suicide. The extreme edges are the opposite of dialogue. Oedipus, on the other hand, is gradually becoming more human. Later in the story he will have to discover his true identity, release himself from the perverse act of having had sexual intercourse with his mother, recognize the murder of his father, and thus release society of its afflictions. His own worst affliction as a king was his blindness. He had deluded himself with the delusion of the victor. Victories are grandiose by nature, and the joy of victory is intertwined with the suffering of the vanquished. The Israeli victory in the Six Days War was euphoric, but caused many disasters later on. Victory goes hand in hand with blindness and denial of the price being paid. The circle of victor and vanquished must be broken in favor of humane leadership. In order to see his imaginary victory, in order to see his own delusion, Oedipus had to blind both his eyes and look inside himself. Such perspectives lead to the realization that the enemy is as human as oneself, and that both sides must break the circle of conqueror and conquered, victor and vanquished. Leaders must discover the Oedipal aspect within themselves which had known suffering, pain and concessions. This may sound naive to those cynically inclined. But on the other hand, it may be society itself which does not allow such a leadership to emerge.

Eyad El-Sarraj is a Palestinian psychiatrist, the head of mental health services in Gaza. In recent interviews (2000), including ones with The Wash-

ington Post and Los Angeles Times, Sarraj appealed emotionally to the Palestinian people, proposing to leave behind the guns and the stones, and meet the Israeli soldiers with candles and flowers. He blames the political leaders for lacking vision, and the Moslem religious leaders for encouraging revenge and entrapping the Palestinians in a culture of violence. He speaks also of a kind of double messages exchanged between the two peoples, messages of peace immersed in violence.

Following are some excerpts from one of his articles:

"I was brought up to hate Jews. Jews, I was told, had robbed me of my home in Beer-Sheva and forced my people out of Palestine. Jews were monstrous killers. I lived dreading the day when I would meet my first Jew".

"In 1956, during the Suez War, when Israel occupied Gaza, I met him. I was twelve. He was a soldier pointing a gun at my back as he ordered me to lead him into our underground dark shelter. I was terrified of the gun but amused that the soldier was apparently frightened too. I asked myself then if they have the same feelings as we do".

"The second Jew was shocking. It was in 1971, when I finished my medical degree in Alexandria and was driven by a Red Cross bus across the Suez Canal to serve in Gaza. The Israelis had then occupied Gaza again, along with the West Bank, Sinai desert and Golan Heights following their victory in the Six Day War".

"I was sitting in the front seat of the bus facing an Israeli soldier and his gun. I was angry and frightened. It must have shown on my face because suddenly the young Israeli soldier looked at me with a reassuring smile and said, "Have you been away from your family for long?" "Yes," I said, shocked. He then said, "I hope you will find them all safe and in good health." I will never forget his face. I think that I decided then that Jews are humans as we are and that I would never be able to kill.

"Living and working in Gaza under the Israeli military occupation for the past thirty years has been a rich but painful experience. I was interrogated many times. I was asked to "cooperate." I was treated with arrogance, fired from my job twice, and listened to hundreds of stories of pain and tears. But I met many wonderful Israelis and some be-

came my friends. I learned much from them”.

“Israelis who appear as the masters are in fact victims of a history of pain, suffering persecution and ghettos. They are surrounded by an ocean of hatred as Arabs could not accept defeat, and their rhetoric was fierce”.

“Palestinians are hurt. They felt betrayed by the Arab regimes and unjustly treated by the Western world. Their anger turned into cycles of defiance and rage. Now they fire bullets of despair on a suicidal path.”

“For any peace process to succeed, people need to be liberated. Palestinians and Israelis have yet to realize that they are interdependent.”

“Liberation of the Palestinians from the Israeli occupation of their land, from the humiliation and suffering, will happen when Israelis are liberated from their fear and insecurity. Palestinian bullets only strengthen

Israelis’ sense of victimization and paranoia.”

The ability to see the other in their natural size and recognize them as human beings creates humanization of the enemy. The held up photos become an incrimination of society.

Finally I wish to cite from an article published in the Israeli press not long

after the breaking out of the current Intifada. It happened just when we seemed to begin seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

The article in the daily *Yediot Aharot* (2001) described a meeting between the parents of Muhamad A-Dura, the Palestinian child who became a symbol when he was shot dead in his father’s arms, and the parents of Bat-Hen Shahak, who was killed by a suicide bomber in Tel Aviv. The joint pain of the parents, and the empathy that each couple of parents felt for the other, made dialogue possible. The parents were photographed together, holding the photos of their dead children. This is a picture stronger than any words. They are holding the photos like citations. The meeting itself is human, with no ceremonies or cliches. The ability to see the other in their natural size and recognize them as human beings, creates humanization of the enemy. The held-up photos become an incrimination of society.

What happens to us when we daily watch pictures of the victims of terror? Do we just see them or do we really observe what we see? In the novel by Jose Saramago, “On Blindness”, a whole society is going blind, and only one woman still sees. She is the one enabling the group of blind people to maintain

their human image. She finally asks: why have we gone blind? Answering: “I think we have not gone blind. I think we are blind. We are the blind who see. Blind who even when they see, do not see”. Perhaps we too can tell ourselves: “we saw but we did not observe”. Our role is to prevent blindness to the best of our ability.

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