

The Power of Respect or Creativity and Evil

By Leon Hammer, MD

Of all of the beliefs and values by which we must function for mutual enhancement, **respect is the most ineluctable**. I mean both respect for others and self-respect. I mean respect from the heart as well as from the head. Especially in a therapeutic situation each person knows instinctively the quality of that respect by which he/she is held in the being of the other. At its best authentic respect creates the internal ambiance for trust.

From trust evolves the opportunity for 'new experience' with maladaptive patterns, and for the admission of technique without the dehumanizing alienation of technology. Naturally patients [clients] are by definition those with less self-respect who expect and accept less though are in great need. The therapist may equally suffer the same deficit but the social role and credentials that support it, superficially cancel his/her ostensible vulnerability. The danger is that insecurity in the therapist will cloud the authenticity of the encounter and the evolvment of trust.

The medium for the destructive expression of that insecurity is the misuse of power. The opportunity for that misuse is a **power struggle** of self-esteems in which the therapist uses his natural social advantage and the conceptual club of '**overcoming the resistance**'. We must therefore turn our attention to the subject of **power** as a significant variable upon which the realization of **respect** and **trust** depend.

Power serves all living things as the potential force which when polarized creates the movement essential to life. Power is not inherently evil. It is '**fear of the unknown**' which transmutes this power of life into the power of death before its time. Insecurity, the inevitable condition of living on a ball of material hurtling through space without any good or clear explanation of who we are, why we are here, or where we are going, engenders in most of us the fantasy that the more of this power we possess, the less insecure we will feel.

Fear drives some to accumulate power over the unknown, which includes others who are different. Enlightened faith, love and trust, all essentially the same, rescue us from this fearful preoccupation. Few of us are absolutely rescued; most of us are struggling to achieve some semblance of peace with our insecurity, most of us are caught in the struggle for, or escape from, power.

Some of us prefer to put this power in the bank and let other people manage it. Others prefer to be the managers. The choice in any one person may vary where they feel more or less secure. Overall, two types of people evolve; those who expect to feel secure by holding onto power, and those who expect to feel more secure by giving away their power. (In the therapeutic setting which one is more likely to be the patient and which one the therapist?) Neither is a solution for existential insecurity.

The abandonment of responsibility for life giving power is rationalized by some as faith. I call this 'blind' faith. It must be distinguished from an enlightened faith in which we "abandon the struggle for security to a total and cheerful acceptance of inevitable and endless insecurity", a belief "that life

has a meaning though we may never know it"... and "is worth living even if `being' is absurd", the ultimate paradox.[DRRBF Pg.112] Love is the same leap into the dark.

Our religious institutions confound rather than resolve the dilemma of **power**. The central esoteric credo of the western world is "the Lord our God, the Lord is one". The credo of one God unifies man but it does not unify him/her with God. With a God who serves primarily Himself and for whom man/woman is a dispensable variable for the quenching of His loneliness the issues of power are set. With technology the tables have turned, and man/woman, the groveling, cringing sometimes gratefully reverent and often rebellious servant of God-Nature for eons, now controls the Earth and has brought God to His/Her knees. The Judeo-Christian-Muslim cosmic vision is a feast of division and polarity and embodies all the ingredients which engender a struggle for **power** as the solution to existential insecurity.

The central esoteric credo of the oriental world is that " the Qi is life, the Qi is one" . In the Orient man and God are manifestations of the same Qi, and are therefore theoretically one to begin with. In unity there seemed little to engender a struggle for power. However, this theme of unity with God-Nature disappeared from Chinese history when Lao Tze rejected society and withdrew around five hundred B.C. and Confucius returned home a failure from his lifelong ministry of ethics at about the same time.

The ascendancy and dominance of the pragmatic Legalists culminated in the Qin dynasty in 221 B.C., the first totally ruthless dynasty in an unbroken chain to the present and ultimate police state of China today. In Hindu India a similar evolution occurred. To quote Joseph Cambell,[Oriental Mythology Pg.409,10] "but it must be realized meanwhile that in the actuality of Chinese history an explicit philosophy of altogether contrary kind has been the principal structuring force: that, namely, of the Qin classic of the art of politic., The Book of the Lord Shang(Sang Tzu) which for disillusioned ruthlessness is equaled and surpassed only by its Indian counterpart, the Arthashastra....The latter goes `far beyond the limited imagination of Machiavelli' and thus enables Hindu thinkers to evolve a purely secular theory of state of which the sole basis is **power** ". Again, "A country where the virtuous govern the wicked will suffer from disorder, so that it will be dismembered; but a country where the wicked govern the virtuous will be orderly, so that it will become strong...". And finally "if thing are done that enemy would be ashamed to do, there is an advantage." Ethically and esoterically the East has little better to offer in the conundrum of **power** than the West.

The **power** issue escalates in our professional teaching institutions where the perpetuation of the life giving creative energy with which we are endowed is confused by some with the preservation of an idea that works. When an idea works, recognition and power attain to the creator who then feels less vulnerable. Security feels good and we want to keep it. We want more of it. Those uncertain of their own power invest it in the institutional bank where they sense certainty. Each investment reinforces the creator's security, and causes him to cling to the original formulation of the idea.

An internal **power struggle** ensues between the fragile man-animal ego which pursues safety and the man-god aspect which pursues creation. Freud is a perfect example of a genius whose increasingly sophisticated written works tenaciously abided a basic concept while his actual practice, according to records of those whom he treated, hidden from the scrutiny of his audience, was often outrageous by his own standards and highly innovative.

Sooner or later another **power struggle** ensues this time among the followers. Those who are inspired by the creative transformative process by which a workable idea is generated require change; those who unwittingly are dominated by the need for the security of the original idea require stability. Why rock the boat?

In my experience, the **power struggle** in our psychotherapeutic and analytic institutions has been uneven and entropy has triumphed. Wherever I have sensed and pursued innovative and creative teachers I have had to withdraw quickly from the knowledge and inspiration before it became institutionalized and neutralized by the teacher, the followers or both.

Sometimes there were palace revolutions, sometimes there was collusion, always there was a rigidifying deadening reification of the newly established order and a stultification of imagination and further invention. Our teaching fraternities have become training grounds for the **power** game rather solutions to the dilemma of insecurity.

Avoiding the easy comfortable solutions to the pitfalls of **power** and fear is difficult. For myself, I follow creative individuals rather than institutions when possible. I use institutions and pay dues in money or service, not obedience; I absorb what I can and always keep moving. I am on guard against institutionalizing myself as well as others though I succeed least well with myself. Here **respect** is the safety net between perception and deception of self and others.

I also consider that while life is of course in earnest, it is above all inadvisable to take both the person and his/her original ideas seriously at the same time, and especially oneself and one's own ideas. Between the person and the idea lies the perspective generating the humor which makes life creditable and abideable. When the creator and the creation become confused, perspective is eliminated, evil **power** and institutions rule and there is no art (art cannot flourish).

Perhaps most importantly as a practitioner of a healing art I keep before my consciousness that there is no **resistance** over which a power struggle need ensue. The **intention** of patients is to survive and heal, to stay **intact** while they stay in **contact**. Mal-adaptive contact is their life history, the reason they are coming for help, and not a form of mischief to frustrate hard working therapists. The architecture of our identity is grounded overtly and covertly in the art of saying and meaning "no". Healing begins and the **power struggle** ends with **respect** for this reality.

When **intention is separated from behavior, respect is a reality which returns power to the powerless in the form of self-respect**. One stops hating one's behavior and begins to love the life of one's intention. It is the therapist's real **power** to be the first person in the patient's life to make this most important gift.

Respect is therefore my sword and my shield until, as **I become accustomed to being afraid, love, faith, wisdom or old age settles in**. Perhaps this is most relevant to my own struggle as a therapist and person with **power** and insecurity.

One could begin and end this discussion of **respect** and **power** and the **power of respect** with the timeless observation by the statesman Lord Acton that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts

absolutely." I prefer to end with the hope that psychotherapists, as **healers**, will be the alchemists who transmute Lord Acton's message into '**power can empower, and the power of respect empower absolutely**'.