

The Absence of Mother

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This presentation is given with due respect for mothers and with empathy for what they have carried emotionally that has been ignored through the generations. This illustrates some of the emotionally complex and internally deadening spaces that can transfer from an absent mother to her child. She is absent to herself and therefore to her child. Becoming aware of how mother images live inside is a part of gaining consciousness. By connecting to those in the unconscious, we can find meaning from the effects of her absence.

I now exist as myself for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self which has most often been described: I am myself because somebody sees me.

--Jean Paul Sartre, 1943

The dynamics here illustrate what happens when there is an absent, emotionally dead, neglectful mother. Her depth has gone unnoticed or the feeling for her not acknowledged or the difficulties she has born, often silently and without recognition. The wounds are addressed to open the cracks, the damages and the old patterns to release the energy for transformation. We look at various stories, both personal and collective that describe the mother absence. The focus is on the negative, the betrayal, the lack of fulfilling the good

maternal promise, the support and loved deprived. How she also must have suffered, whether she was conscious of this or not.

The mother archetype is perceived through a variety of symbols, and cast from personal and historical, conscious and unconscious interactions. Additional images are internalized from the culture, religion, literature, myths, and fairytales reflective of each era. Archetypal patterns give expression to the perennial dilemmas enacted in the psyche of the individual as they spring from the collective unconscious. According to Jung the archetypes of the collective unconscious spontaneously present themselves in dreams, imagination, and vision. When we connect to the universal story we realize we are not alone; that we are also part of humankind. According to classical Jungian thought the archetypes are found in the myths and art of “the most widely separated peoples and races” (Jung, 1990, par. 147). This refers to the idea that the language of archetypes is understood to be both personal and collective.

We come into this world ready for mothering, to seek her, to recognize her, to be with her. We would never survive without a nurturing and caring mother person during our time as helpless infants. Jung conveyed that this innate need for mothering is archetypal, meaning that it reflects a universal symbolic pattern inherent in both the individual and collective unconscious. Therefore, the mother archetype represents this built-in recognition of

mothering. Jung said, “all those influences which the literature describes as being exerted on the children do not come from the mother herself, but rather from the archetype projected upon her, which gives her a mythological background and invests her with authority and numinosity” (Jung, 1990, par. 139).

According to Jung, someone whose mother failed to satisfy the demands of the archetype may transfer the feeling into seeking comfort in the church, or in identification with the motherland. Whatever the image, it often contains great feeling or spiritual uplift. The symbols of mother represent not only our relationship with her, but also how the mother lives inside and how from her we attain growth, independence and love.

Jungian analyst James Hillman contended, “The mother complex is not my mother; it is my complex. It is the way in which my psyche has taken up my mother.” At the core of the mother complex is the mother archetype, which means that behind emotional associations with the personal mother, there is both an archetypal image of nourishment and security on the one hand and an archetypal negative of devouring possessiveness, darkness and deprivation on the other.

As the ‘loving’ mother, she shows nurturing, wisdom, fertility, growth, and rebirth (Jung, 1990, par. 158). On the other hand, she is the ‘terrible’

mother (Jung, 1990, par. 157), devouring her children, poisoning, burning, suffocating, and drowning. She can be seen at work in the fertility of spring or the devastation of drought and flood, both creative and destructive she gives life and takes it away. Kali is a Hindu symbol of the universal mother of all beings; while simultaneously giving birth to all humanity, she devours her own children and wears a bloody belt of severed heads around her waist and a necklace of severed arms. Jung said, “ the mother stands for the collective unconscious, the source of the water of life . . .” (Jung, 1968, para. 92)

The Great Mother is both savage and protective, having an intimate relationship to the underworld. Although she unabashedly gives birth to all creatures, she will destroy those who defy her.

Absent Mothers

But what happens when this tremendous power is not there? The personal mother described here is one who might be present but is experienced as an emotional and/or physical absence and dead inside, full of her own grief, loss and depression with no room for the life of the child. Such absence is transferred to her children; a dead emptiness behind what seems like a silent fault in the earth. Her absence creates no end of emotional distance, lack of internal connection and the self out of kilter with the rest of the personality and with others. Thus, the question where is mother?

One man cannot remember what his mother was like. He could hardly describe her but does recall there was no love given. A woman says her mother hates her, puts her down, denigrates whatever she does, does not listen to her and makes negative comments about her hair, clothes, looks and lifestyle. Another woman describes hate in the look from a mother who never understood her, saw her, or got her desire for learning and knowledge.

When mother is absent to herself, what does she show her child? The consequences are that it damages personality aspects. The child internalizes the absence and develops lack of care. Repressions from the past pile up and eventually call forth change.

The absence of mother brings forward the query of how is it possible to lose a self? The treachery, known and unthinkable, begins with the secret psychic death in childhood—if and when we are not loved and are cut off from our spontaneous wishes...they want him or force him or expect him to be something different than he is. The center of gravity is in them not in one self. It is the paradox. Everything looks normal; no crime overtly intended and with no apparent cause. But, he has felt rejected, not by her only but now it is by his self. The person has lost a true and vital part. In essence, the yes feeling, that is his capacity for growth, the root to the basic system goes missing.

Mother Complex from the Absent Mother

Jung described the complex as feeling toned and shaped by experiences with the personal mother that develops the mother imago within. As Jung said, “to have complexes only means that something discordant, unassimilated and antagonistic exists, perhaps as an obstacle, but also as an incentive to greater effort, and so, perhaps, to new possibilities of achievement. Indeed complexes are focal points of psychic life and they should not be missing, for otherwise psychic activity would come to a fatal standstill.” (Jung, 1971, par. 925)

We all have mother complexes of one sort or another. The question is how we understand our particular complexes. In addition to the personal experiences, the complexes are influenced by the culture and era in which we live. This refers to the variety of religious, social, cultural icons to which we are exposed and that inhabit our psyches.

Classically, complexes occur where the life force is dammed and like a black hole, it draws energy. Marking an unfinished area of the personality and originating from early traumas and/or emotional neglect, a complex splits off and gradually begins to function autonomously. A complex is magnetic and contains conflicting emotions that usually are difficult to reconcile with the conscious mind or the desired image of oneself. The complex involves thoughts, feelings, behavior patterns and somatic forms of expression. When a complex is

constellated there is a loss of conscious attention and the person acts as if possessed and without awareness. One might disappear into the complex.

Knowledge of the make-up of the mother complex is significant because it contains the images showing the unconscious situation to the conscious psyche. Complexes belong to the basic structure of the psyche and can control personal destiny. Unaddressed, the problem can go unresolved through the family and the culture for generations.

The negative mother complex can include self-alienation, being drugged by inertia, living in a trance-like state with no sense of time or worth. It adversely affects confidence, promotes idealization of others and erodes life energy; feeds an internalized cycle of self-hatred, oppression, and vengeance. The child assumes being at fault, a feeling that strikes to the core. In addition, there can develop a coldness and impenetrability that gives little inner or outer access. This may become so severe that she or he slices off contact from the world and, like being half-dead, is taken over by an implacable helplessness, impotence and passivity. The real self remains silent and isolated, so vulnerable it hides in a state of non-communication from the rest of the personality.

Attachment problems manifest in symptoms of distorted body and self-image, feelings of emptiness and restlessness. The negative mother including the blank mother leaves a person without natural flow or authenticity. There is an

aura of aloofness behind which the person exists but in an untouchable domain. A wedge develops preventing access to a loving and reparative self and a scared self takes over. This protects from anything that is outside the carefully orchestrated world. She metaphorically locks herself into her room to defend against the anticipated outer threats yet feels little safety or security.

The negative mother complex as it develops from the absent mother denotes a pull to depression, defeat and resignation, bound by guilt, shame or other emotions causing self-denial and suppression. A mother's absence and emotional deadness can fuel a child's compensatory drivenness or equally it can ignite the flames of despair and gripping self-doubt. An absence of emotional containment or reverie from the mother leaves the child with tumultuous feelings that over time increase in velocity and power, fragmenting the mind and body and scattering the personality through self-disavowal. The messages from the mother who is absent are confusing and turn to be self-blaming. Even a seeming exterior of confidence, put on to assure the absent mother that she is alright, signal the underlying feeling of inadequacy in the child who cannot save the mother.

Mother Archetype

Jung's essay on the Mother Archetype is juxtaposed with the theory of the Dead Mother Complex from French psychoanalyst, Andre Green. Both Jung and Green describe attachment situations where the psyche becomes narrowed and fragmented, affecting experiences of self and other, connection and individuation.

The composite stories depicted here illustrate the situation when the mother is psychically dead and the child is left with her unending blankness, depression and lack. She attempts to repair the damage from the absence of mother through trying to be better and adopting perfectionistic methods. She lives in the shadow of the mother's absence without much pleasure or enjoyment. She is shocked by life. Love feels impossible, mutilated, inhibited.

The false self takes over and the true self goes into hiding. Insufficient mother nurturance and her sorrows and/or betrayals makes the child desolate. She wants mother to see her, to approve, to react. But there is only absence in the mirror of an absent and emotionally dead mother.

Paradoxically, it is these very wounds that open the world of self-discovery providing the impetus for movement and the creativity to exit out of old entrenched positions, psychologically and culturally. These demonstrate many aspects of the struggles of the uneasy integration of the mother, the

feminine and her personal and collective traumas that fuel creation and destruction from mother to child.

Jung's Description of Mother Complex

In addition to the archetypal and mythological depictions of mother and daughter, Jung noted four psychological descriptions of the mother's impact on her daughter, each with enlivening and deadening features. (Jung, 1990, par. 163) We might contemplate how these also apply to the mother/son relationship. He did not address this similarly to the son given the absence of his own mother.

In the first instance, there is the mother who persists in having the right of possession over the child, annihilating the separate personality of her children. This mother is emotionally distant and cannot manage the necessary identification onto her. The reaction to this type of mother either brings an intensification of the maternal instinct to compensate the lacks, or else there is an atrophy of the maternal and she is unable to mother herself or others. Both reflect how little was available from mother.

The more unconsciously destructive the mother, the less the child can bear to separate. The child leads a shadow existence, often visibly sucked dry by the mother. Yet, the child feels they must prolong mother's life by giving a sort of continuous blood transfusion. (Jung, 1990, par. 169)

Another detrimental effect occurs when the child is overly relied on by the mother and has to please her. She feels she must save the mother to obtain a semblance of mothering for herself. However, this brings little sustenance because it is a circuitous route that never finds emotional satisfaction. From maternal rejection and lack of healthy attachment, the development of the child is arrested. The child's security needs cannot be met as the mother splits from being the nurturer to the Terrible Mother or witch. This form of the mother destroys by being progress-inhibiting and the child develops various forms of self-betrayal.

Some women are left so frustrated in how to use their feminine potency that they give up altogether expressing any autonomy. Sometimes there is absence of thought and a creative blank, unable to access the inner space necessary to think, fantasize or find meaning. The mother complex in this person is manifested in depressive moods, constant dissatisfaction with herself and the whole of reality. (von Franz, 2000, p. 126) It is often overlaid with a rigid and brittle exterior.

The mother's vacuum of intimacy and imagery frustrate, agonize and absorb the child. She conveys mixed messages to not leave as the mother's conscious or unconscious fear of loneliness seeps into the child. Jung commented on the inertia of libido, which will relinquish no object of the

past, but would like to hold it fast forever...a passive state where the libido is arrested in the objects of childhood.”(Jung, 1967, par. 253) Throughout life the recapitulations of the personal and archetypal constellation of the abandonments and absence lead to fixation, a state of entrapment, stuck in a mire of suffering and loss. Unable to appreciate the maternal because it was unknown, a child feels unloved and this attitude brings alienation from body, the earth and can escalate into a hatred of life itself. “She started out in the world with averted face...and all the while the world and life pass by her like a dream—an annoying source of illusions, disappointments, and irritations”. (Jung, 1990, par. 185)

Andre Green

Andre Green's article, "The Dead Mother" named a suffering in which all seems to have ended, and like a psychic ruin ‘it becomes forbidden...to be’. (Green, 1986, p.152) He described the ‘lack as absence in the mind, absence of contact, absence of feeling. All these absences can be condensed in the idea of a gap...instead of referring to a simple void or to something which is missing, becomes the substratum of what is real” (Kohon, 1999, p.8). A person is entombed and frozen, distant from authentically living in the world and instead adheres to the inner world of the dead mother.

The Dead Mother Complex of Andre Green references a mother who is psychically dead. She has dissociated from her affects and killed off the process of her inner life. (Kohon, 1999, p100) The mother withdraws attention from her child as she is burdened by her own losses. The mother is essentially and emotionally unavailable and this absence can cause depression and emotional wounding.

The internalization is not of the conscious attributes of mother but her unconscious absence and deadness. For example, a mother might seem appealing to the outer world but be perceived by the child as filled with hatred. The daughter identifies with this aspect of the mother and similarly appears nice but is also hateful to her self and others. (Kohon, p.1999, p.78)

The fading of the internal representation is what Green relates to in terms of feeling a void, emptiness, futility and meaninglessness. (Kohon, 1999, p. 290) The traumatization, loss and melancholic identification with the mother who is destroyed, negatively impacts the child's experience of life. The child is susceptible to be like her and become submerged in the mother who is dead.

Green "charts the psychic reverberations of a child attempting to enliven a depressed, bereft, or absent mother. This resuscitation becomes the life task" (Kohon, 1999, p. 113) and is accomplished through maneuvers

designed to sustain a precarious link to the depleted mother. No life is possible beyond the boundary of the dead mother and there is no peace of mind within her embrace. (Kohon, 1999, p.118) It becomes a kind of war against the self, the body, the affects and functions like a bulwark against desire, emotion and change. The split in the self occur early in childhood leaving no inner harmony nor is there life within an understanding of self and other because she does not know it. (Kohon, 1999, p.101) The mother cannot recognize or support the child's psychic aliveness and this denies permission for the child to exist or be separate.

The image of a living and loving mother is transformed into a distant figure; a toneless, practically inanimate, dead parent. The internalized dead object relationships are characterized by feelings of misery, lack of satisfaction and death. The absence and loss of mother's love can develop into the loss of meaning in life. Internally, nothing makes sense although outwardly life may look like it continues under an appearance of normality.

In adulthood the defenses fail against the depression experienced in the early stages of development. As vain attempts at reparation do not work, feelings of impotence become dominant. The thing that endures is a dull psychic pain, characterized by the incapacity to attach closely with anything to do with affects. The dead mother is omnipresent and seems to

have seized the child, making her captive. “In all, the subject’s objects remain constantly at the limit of the ego, not wholly within, and not quite without...for the place is occupied, in its centre, by the dead mother” (Green, 1986, p.153-54). Love is not possible because it has been mortgaged to the dead mother.

Green noted that those with a dead mother complex exhibit “acute conflicts with those who are close...an impotence to withdraw from a conflictual situation, impotence to love, to make the most of one’s talents, to multiply one’s assets, or when this does take place, a profound dissatisfaction with the results. (Green, 1986, p. 149)

As if

The impoverishment of the self is attributed to the early traumatizing experiences with the longed for and idealized other (Solomon, 2004, p. 639). The early traumas and losses create apprehension. Body and psyche become dysregulated. Even though looking competent to others, she feels a forgery, reacting from pseudo affectivity and living a sham existence. Here is where the adaptation of mimicry and the sense of falsity begin, as the roots to the self seem empty and lost. The personality is reduced to illusion and cover, a survival attempt to compensate the weight of the depressive anxiety.

The person becomes an object fashioned for the adoration of others while the inside and outside remains disparate and unrelated. This is evidenced in the following comments. “I cannot accept the fact that I am who I am. My work is not good enough. I do not remember what I did, felt or thought yesterday.” This hurts as the negative self-images day after day affirm the messages that life is a disaster and not a celebration. Without an accurate inner mirror, she assesses her self to be either inferior or superior. She develops numbness that can obstruct inspiration and effect creativity. Inner deadness from the absent mother reigns. In order to cope with the internal void and the subsequent suffering she becomes separated within and this arrests the natural processes of life. (von Franz, 2000, p. 151)

A mother with unrelated attitudes does not model how to cope with the vicissitudes of life nor the basics of development as a person. She harms the child with unconsciousness and emotional lack. The neglect and absence affect the ability to love or express, bringing about reactions ranging from melancholy to self-destruction. Acquiring self-depleting patterns and behaviors, one grows more and more lost. The lack of the mother as an anchor from within is reflected in part through the difficulty establishing balance between mind, body and soul.

She assumes depersonalized attitudes toward her self and others, feeling unreal and at odds with the world. However, a woman feels the wounds from mother's ignored or betrayed creativity and insufficient use of female potency. This puts her against her mother and in some scenarios she ends up not accepting or knowing how to access her own feminine qualities. An emotional distance, disapproval or blame felt from mother forms a vacuum between them.

Unable to appreciate the maternal, her body becomes unseen. The image is taken over by melancholy and sadness. It is an impersonal reflection that wants only youth, not the beauty of reality or aging. The relationship to the body, like in a distorted mirror is disturbed, maybe even reflecting a fragility that can shatter like glass. The person looks functional but is living below their potential. Passion is curtailed, individual thought unformed and life devalued. With little sense of personal constancy or cohesiveness, she may adopt an attitude of isolation. This is needed to preserve identity but it obstructs intimacy and relationships become stymied.

For example, a woman with an absent mother, as it turns out, comes to therapy questioning the meaning of her life. In her mid-fifties she began Jungian work for the first time although she has meditated for 30 years. She blithely

described her mother, now dead, as a Trump mother. But what does that mean and how was she absent?

Years of unconscious strands, unacknowledged emotional deprivation led to holes in her psyche filled in with huge work loads but little emotional attention from her partner. The early wounding was ignored as she became busy with school, many friends, much scholastic achievement and staying out of her house, away from the inattention and basic lack. She learned to deny body pain and everything was addressed from the point of science and a pill. When anorexic in college she took meds and was then able to eat. She did not tie this behavior to the lack of proper early nourishment both emotionally and physically the self-absorbed mother who remained absent to her needs for love and care.

Her parents divorced when she was a toddler and moved from over seas back to the USA with mother. Father remained far away in another country. She did not see or communicate with him until her teens when she reached out to him.

Mother was imposing, chaotic, self-serving and quickly hooked up with another man. The wealthy family abandoned the mother who was flamboyant and wild and did not follow the prescribed script by divorcing and then marrying someone with little money, drugs and a hippie life style. This mother

rarely provided food or clothing for her. As a teenager, mother paraded seductively in front of her friends.

Now with encroaching physical problems she thinks they are healed with drugs, although they do not work. Highly bright and loquacious her stories are told without emotional expression. Her life has been extroverted, her relationship with her husband distant, she disappointed but tied to him through the huge salary she makes and he controlling the money. He protects the home with numerous alarms, location devices on her phone, etc. and she has had an emotional affair for 5 years with a man she knew in her twenties. Although empathic to her, this man does not work, lives in his parents home, does not drive and lives in a self-imposed isolation.

Initially it seemed she wanted to alter many things in her life. But can she? There is little of the maternal about her, she feels guilty about the affair, but fears her husband like she feared her mother and is cowed in lack of self-expression.

Can she handle intimacy? She wants it but has never known it intimately. Many mothers in the family line committed suicide, one being her grandmother, the mother's mother, whom she loved. She was given no details about the suicide nor told why, nor did she ask.

Very extroverted, she recalls few dreams and the ability to symbolize is

slightly formed. The transference is an identification of similarity. Does this make her feel safe and less threatened or does it allow for unconsciousness?

Her mother was absent emotionally from as early as she can remember, forgetting about her, resenting her desire to have snacks after school or friends over. She described herself in her journal as follows: “This is a woman who would live inside herself, making her hair a long shading roof, her eyes the basement door. This woman would be stone. Oh, look at this, pressing at her face, wondering if she can be opened.”

The benevolent and creative inner structure for security, identity and attachment was not available with this absent mother. Here is reenacted the other early experienced as poisonous to the self. The creation of self is marked by environmental failures. It becomes a “lifeless void and what the psyche does to survive this bleak and often life threatening experience” (Solomon, 2004, p. 642). These dynamics affect child and mother, self and other, body and psyche, conscious and unconscious.

From the relationship with the absent mother the tendency is to resist reality and prefer fantasy. This becomes a defense against getting close to the bones of one’s being. A mother’s neglect and deadness contributes to internal vacuity, vulnerability and lack of psychological connection. Melancholy and passivity become part of the avoidance of her spirit and general loss of feeling.

When a mother cannot fulfill the basic needs for love and affirmation, self-denigrating habits and moods develop. The child has internalized a sad and absent figure; creating a hostile inner world of rage, numbness, or manic reactions obstructing inspiration and arresting self-integration. (Solomon, 1998, p. 40)

In many ways the analyst is tested in the transference if she will be trustworthy, will betray or endanger. Insight and awareness by the analyst are needed to help the person survive the traumas from the past. Yet, these are re-enacted in the present to dismantle the former defensive strategies and psychic panic. When old defenses are ready to be abandoned, it is a risky time. This is when the self becomes more permeable to influence from environmental objects and brings forth the fear, the risk and the transition to new ways of being.

As If Personality Example

A woman named Sara, self-described as mannequin-like, with a persona put together for the approval of others and to hide her real self, explains that relationships complicate her life. Mother was absent emotionally, disengaged and self-absorbed so that Sara could not reach her. The early deficient experiences occurred before the child can process the onslaught that is both too high and/or too low in physical and psychological arousal. [Solomon, transformation of the self, p. 204] There is too much psychic energy spent

hiding from the overwhelming aspects and too much to bear as one feels beaten up.

Further, Solomon reiterates there is a limit on the capacity for integration, individuation and the transcendent functioning. In addition, the deficit of symbolic functioning seems surprising, as there is an ability to work with sophistication, finesse but this comes out as a concrete and inflexible psychic state.

Although attractive and talented, Sara's internalized absent mother mirrors self-doubts, keeping her from developing any serious attitudes about her self. Life through the eyes of an absent mother complex keeps Sara an innocent maiden. In therapy Sara rubbed her eyes, pushing the hair off her face, seemingly to clear the fog of her psyche. Rain and overcast skies were intolerable and reflected her depression. "I felt unsafe with my mother when my father was gone. I wondered what would happen if he ever died--who would protect me? Yet I also knew that he would, in the end, side with my mother against me." She feared that his death would surround her even more with her mother's absence.

Sara does not fully engage with her self or others. She is floating and seems oblivious. Everything remains distantly charming, on hold. She is almost like a statue, acquiring dust as she ages. Unable to awaken, her life stagnates.

She cannot commit, be it to work or love. The basic instincts are blocked, as she has been perpetually moving but not deeply developing. James Hillman describes this as unable to find belonging, place, or the right niche, feeling precarious, needing internal solidity. (Hillman, 1989, p. 25) This signifies the lack of an inner holding place and adversely affects achievements and intimacy, promoting idealization and envy of others.

These are the shallow breathers of life, unable to grasp their value or essence. They are impatient, nervous and lack confidence. Not easy to reach, as they are heavily defended and resistant to being seen, although this is what is desperately desired. The fear is that there is nothing inside and this emptiness will be revealed and known. The layers seemed to form a kind of carapace – a shell that masks the gap, a persistent and agonizing hollowness at the core of her existence, a feeling of absence at the center.

Feminine Body in Shadow

Jung commented that, “some are overflowing with feelings of their own importance...others give up all sense of responsibility, overcome by a sense of powerlessness” (Jung, 1967, par 222). The lively qualities are limited by the shadow that she flees in both its light and dark aspects. In this sense the shadow represents a coming to earth that is necessary for actualizing creativity and living. (von Franz, 2000, p. 128) The Jungian process of individuation is in part

given impetus from within and without by the painful, surprising and perhaps disheartening yet growing awareness of the shadow aspects. As individuation unfolds, so confrontation with the shadow produces a standstill because one must deal with this aspect of life and its physical embodiment.

The shadow becomes apparent as decisions and convictions become ineffective or impossible. The reaction often results in feelings of chaos and melancholy. This includes those moments of despair, mourning and losses and can seem like the darkest time, one of disillusionment and no exit. It signals the necessity to reorder the psychological elements. In most cases the patients themselves have no suspicion whatever of the internecine war raging in their unconscious. If we remember that there are many people who understand nothing at all about themselves we shall be less surprised at the realization that there are also people who are utterly unaware of their actual conflicts. “New Paths in Psychology” (1912). In *CW 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*. P.425

One might feel deadened and not complete when parts stay relegated to the shadow. The person looks a part and functions well according to others, yet feels nothing is meaningful and without meaning the experiences of life are nothing. (von Franz, 2000, p. 148) The shadow calls when enlivening qualities are continually countered by deadening ones. She is internally running from herself, bombarded and harassed. The focus on

impossibilities and aims of perfection turns the present into future orientation, each moment of life gotten through for some ever elusive tomorrow. (Rosie—I have to keep doing more to give my life value, to know there is meaning, to feel I have done something. I have to keep going as my brain tells me daily, do more, go more, have another activity and on and on. I can hardly keep up.)

The inner system is blocked with a misconnection between mind, body and soul coming in part from the missed connection with mother. The dissociation between body and psyche block the ability to love. At core one resists life, fades before the fruit ripens, becoming only possibility and promise, unable to find her meaning and often ending with the defeating thoughts that there is no point anyway. The fantasy of perpetual youth, wishing, envious of what others seem to have avoids exploring one's authentic self.

Erased through nervous self-concern, she is absorbed in watching the scale, hair, the wrinkles and what she considers imperfections. The body is not a focus of care but of worry. A lack of basic trust and security leaves her chasing an ideal through cosmetics, body re-shaping, compulsively negative thoughts and behaviors killing off desires and feelings and causing more dissociation from self and others. Usually these people, mostly women, hardly address, even in

therapy, what they really eat or how they feel about their body except dissatisfaction.

“She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together” (Woolf, 1925, p. 24).

Sara had a dream she related to the time of puberty when she sensed her mother’s growing discomfort with her awakening sexuality. The presence of her mother as a close enough feminine figure was lacking. Here is her dream that addresses the ramifications as she began to deny her sexuality. “A woman is going to commit suicide in a trash bin because she needs to be right for once. The importance of being right equals her very life.” The dream figure, the trash and the trash bin can all symbolize that she is in the shadow—the neglected potential, the unrealized aspects of her feminine being.

Until recounting this dream in therapy Sara did not take seriously the extent of her self-denial, including the relationship to her body. Missing this connection Sara felt a disturbing shock each time she realized her body was indeed hers. She hid her body saying her breasts sagged, her hips had cellulite and she was ashamed of her sexual feelings so tried not to arouse them. Preoccupations with aging and weight kept her negatively self-absorbed. She

avoided being naked and physical display, like emotional exposure, was threatening to her fragile composure to the point where she found herself thinking about how much she weighed while having sex.

A sense of fraudulence as an adult, a basic confusion and the need to control create tension and dissatisfaction were bolstered by the persona of false adaptation. Inordinately identified with the persona suggests that a significant part of the personality exists beneath the façade and resides in the unconscious. Unable to value depth, feeling flawed, the layers of life overwhelm. She is vulnerable, a terrified child fenced off from others. Physical existence is a trial and body feelings are denied, ignored or escaped in order to circumvent feeling. From her untouchable domain the world is observed but at a distance with no one let in. She remains a lonely princess in the castle.

Aloneness both results in and derives from the absence of mother causing subsequent lack of engagement, restlessness, depersonalization and inability to inhabit the present. Sara is an example of those who remain stuck in repeating their own predictable responses and self-deprecating behaviors and thoughts. A split off and unrealistic self-reflection leaves no joy or pleasure and libido is devitalized and scattered.

The non-nourishing self-absorption is a defense learned with the absent mother. This has left a sense of feeling unlovable that keeps getting reinforced.

One experiences shame, smallness, vulnerability and fear. Needing and seeking approval drives a competitive need but this also distances. It is subject to being curbed by the fear that she must not threaten or surpass others because she cannot tolerate being hated or excluded by them.

Along a similar theme and a bit later Sara dreamt, “ I have a silk bag. I want to show my mother who will appreciate its value. But because my father is present, my mother will not approve”. The dream portrayed Sara’s father interfering in the relationship with her mother and showed a different perspective than Sara had presented. Sara depicted her mother as the bad one who did not understand and to whom she could not get close. She sarcastically joked that hers was a typical Oedipal family—she emotionally aligned with her father and her brother with her mother. The joking was no doubt a defense to hide the anxiety about the unconscious material in this situation, highlighted by the lack of acceptance or attention from mother. She feels it is not safe to trust love. After all, love can be painful, as it will mean entering into the heart of the wounds. So, she stops and does not live through these experiences to the instinctual level. (von Franz, 2000. p.39)

Sara is a type of character not easy to pin down. For years she hardly notices who or what is, too preoccupied, floating through life with head in the clouds, an image set for the particular occasion. Feelings of self-

estrangement escalate into various forms of numbing out. She is eaten from within, in an unending war between parts of the self--a war of internal voices that are sadistic, unrelenting and obeyed.

The wounds arise from early losses, rejections and insufficient holding environment arising in part from experiences with the absent and blank mother. They leave behind the nagging feeling of being flawed and inadequate. Perfectionistic habits develop to compensate but do not lead to growth. The driven qualities cause an eventual cave-in as the brilliant surface and the glitter begin to collapse. This erosion is necessary for uncovering and dealing with the effects of the absent mother.

A Man without Mothering

Years ago a man in his mid-thirties, divorced with three teenage children living with their mother, came for psychological work. Over many sessions we roamed the landscape of his psyche—delving into the disturbed relation to his natural physical and emotional instincts; his feeling of duty rather than love towards everyone, even his children; a dislike of dogma from religion; and his attachment to nature. The demand raised by the unconscious moved him from attempts at conformity with the family ethos to finding his natural self.

He had no emotional care from mother, no way for him to feel loved, no memory of hugs or touch, no Eros. There was little love between parents who put up a façade for years until it came out that his father was homosexual which was disallowed by the religion. The mother's emotional distance and the father's deceptiveness in his sexuality and also illicit work ethics created a foundation of distrust and insecurity affecting both body and psyche for Jeff.

Almost no pictures were taken of him when he was a child and few verbal snapshots conveyed about his childhood. Mostly it was hiding and being alone so much that to this day Jeff has difficulty receiving attention or being physically touched. As he grew, Jeff assiduously followed the religious teachings of his mother and family until he left the church in his late twenties. Looking back, he felt his soul was disconnected and the strict church rules without regard for his essence. By internalizing the maternal object that he described as deadened, without connection or show of warmth, Jeff was left depersonalized and numb with a pervasive sense of emptiness. He was always uneasy, subsumed with destructive, obsessive drives and self-persecutory impulses.

Jeff longs to be in a relationship but the fear and distrust of his physical-sensual nature and regarding himself as flawed result in isolation

and alienation. “What to the rational mind seems a flaw is often a profoundly mysterious key to the secret of individual life...When we pathologize human foibles in our relentless way, trying to subdue and ‘purify’ life, we kill the soul” (Hinton, 1993, p. 58).

In order to survive, Jeff hardened emotionally and his interior landscape remained hidden, also from himself. Human infants need secure physical and emotional attachments for developing trust and love. When this is not available protest, despair and detachment become the standard responses. Jeff’s childhood did not support his instinctual, emotional or physical foundations. He remembers one hug from his mother and no other expressions of love from either parent. An example of his mother’s distance and disconnection is a story Jeff told that when a teenager he got a knife stuck in his foot at dinner. No one noticed as he carefully walked out of the room with the knife sticking out of his bleeding foot. He remembered trying to walk normally to avoid the attention he knew would be wrong and did not want.

One of the first dreams Jeff brought portrayed him transported from the city signifying the roots of his religion. He was carried in a large procession because his legs were frozen beer bottles. The people were taking him south where he actually lived and where his legs would thaw. He

periodically returned to this dream, as it seemed basic to his problems and solutions. The city in the dream he associated with the law of the church, the empty origins of his life and his mother's emotional attachment and intimacy to the church, but not to him. Beer was forbidden in his religion, but he drank it now and the beer legs represented a spiritual, phallic and sexual standpoint that was frozen by a religion that carried no feeling for him and was associated with his cold and absent mother. Trying to be normal or fit according to mother and the religion violated Jeff's inner nature and in fact was a form of pathology for him.

His adaptation of psychic numbing was a form of desensitization or incapacity to experience accompanied by the blocking of inner forms or imagery. Jeff described therapy as lancing an abscess in the painful uncovering of disappointments, obscurities, mysteries and tears. Session after session Jeff addressed the reactions, perceptions, thoughts, ideas and emotion flowed he had never acknowledged with anyone. We explored together the psychic landscape and interpreted the interpersonal spaces. We listened carefully and followed a slow but sure rhythm. His natural impulses had been for so long compromised from the mother's emotional and physical lack of attachment, psychic numbing and desensitization, resulting in his own similar responses. What remained was an inner division arising from the

psyche's defenses early in life protecting the self from dissolution (Solomon, 1998, p. 229).

Jeff's mother was devoid of giving love and he reiterated his mother's abhorrence of the natural man according to religious scripture. This translated into his perception that a beautiful woman would turn from him. He was flawed, sexual, unacceptable and even hurtful just because he was male. He thought he should reduce the longing for love to nothing. Assuming he was unlovable, he anticipated this would be apparent to others. He was ashamed that if he got close it would expose his neediness and insecurity about accepting or giving love.

One of the purposes of therapeutic inquiry is to heal the splits that characterize the personal and collective conscious and unconscious and that also carry a spiritual imperative. Living as part of the whole starts from the reality that we are participants, part of the cosmos, an interconnected whole. For Jeff, his journeys into nature were something like this cosmic participation, as he had none with mother. Jeff gained some sense of self while hiking alone, sometimes in dangerous territory, facing the elements and physical discomfort. He became restored in barren nature, yet at the same time longed to be with someone he loves. He learned self-denial from the lack of care and insufficient experiences of the presence of mother love.

By internalizing objects that were dead themselves, Jeff, depersonalized and numb, suffered an unrequited emptiness and lack of healthy self-identification. Always uneasy, he was subsumed with destructive, obsessive drives and self-persecutory impulses. These are the psychological holes that create inability to love or make the most of one's talents (Green, 2001, p. 176).

So he could survive, Jeff based interactions on rules he made up on how he should be. For example, sometimes after or during a session I could feel hopeless or empty, unable to reach him. This might be what Jeff also experienced. If I have become part of his inner world, referred to by Andrew Samuels as the 'embodied counter transference' (2000, p. 411). I also experience the themes active in Jeff's psyche. This was important, as he often just did not feel or was busy masking his responses. These were the ones that went unnoticed by the absence of mother.

A Recurrent Dream

Dreams are both subjective and objective. Inner and outer figures and situations are reflected in the dream and its symbolic language. Jeff reported few dreams but in a recurring one a man was chasing him over, around and through buildings. The dream took place in a cityscape—crowded, impersonal, chaotic and concrete and amorphous. Throughout the dream he

hid and dodged and knew that although remaining uncaught, the man could eventually get him. This city might represent the distance and lack of empathic response as his experience of mother. We discussed the dream man as an aspect of himself and a shadow part of his being that he could not face. What else can we understand of this dream? Who is the dream-other? The unknown man chasing him may represent the others both within and without chasing him as well as the patriarchal/mother culture, society, family and religion, all remaining devoid of spirit and life, cold; he the pursuer and the pursued--dodging, chasing and apprehensive.

The dream image also revealed much that was present in Jeff's psyche—his strength of body, the absolute avoidance of seeking help and also how he learned to steel through pain and panic. It also illustrated there was no thought of reaching out, no cry for help, no one in the dream to assist him. Jeff did not expect help, as he assumed no one would understand, much less care. In this dream image we have a sense of what is both absent and present, the psyche struggling to be heard and seen, yet feared. It is a risk for Jeff to be exposed, human and vulnerable. This all learned from the emotionally absent mother.

The emotional and physical losses and subsequent grief suffered from the beginning affect the imaginary realm and the symbolic entry so early that

the child cannot even name what it has lost nor what it mourns. For Jeff, the maternal/parental presence and experience of being seen or having resonance almost completely barren and his story so devoid of the interpersonal that he experienced the world as offering nothing.

By negating and rejecting parts of himself, Jeff becomes unseen and feels a sense of strangeness. Julia Kristeva, a French psychoanalyst, speaks about the notion of the stranger--the foreigner, outsider, or person who feels alien in a society not their own- -as well as the notion of strangeness within the self, or a person's deep sense of being. Like with the shadow in Jungian psychology, Kristeva suggests that we touch this otherness, escape its hatred and burden though accepting the differences it implies (Kristeva, 1991, p. 3). She refers to the notion of the alienation, or "splitting off" of the self that comes about as the result of the repression of feelings. Kristeva commented that the secret and unknown wound can drive one to wander (Kristeva, 1992, p. 267).

The Blown Apart Place

For Jeff, a defensive structure locked him in internal combat and his self-attacks were vicious, leaving him lacerated and torn apart. The self-disappearance and disinvolvement, self-contempt, destructive withdrawal, and self-depreciation have a predominantly masochistic quality (Green, 1986, p.644).

Jeff's emotional numbness is juxtaposed with his vulnerability shown by the tears he sheds in therapy even though they embarrass him. The sadness represents an expression of the unsymbolizable, unnameable depth of the narcissistic wounding, the profound loss and mourning the absent mother. Sadness became the emotional object of his attachment. The optimal beginnings in a warm loving environment never happened for Jeff. This was what Kristeva calls a lost mirage of the past, feeling only what is missing, becoming depressed and reacting with hatred towards self and others. Kristeva (1992, p.12-13) describes this as melancholia and noncommunicable grief about the sadness, aloneness and offness with others—almost the same words Jeff uses to describe himself.

When instinct turns self-destructive, the ego, from early in life, lacks cohesion and falls into bits). The anxiety and feeling of being destroyed from within is what remains. Jeff lives in a solitary confinement of the self...There was fear of opening to another at the risk of psychological annihilation (Solomon, 1998, p. 228). The lack of maternal devotion affects the development of the person. Solomon goes further to point to the [p. 196 self in transformation] impoverishment of the self from early traumatizing experiences with the longed for and idealized other. the unfolding of the self meets a blank, hostile or inappropriate environ that the person feels unseen

and/or noxiously related to (Solomon, 1998, p. 198). The self seeks the more benevolent and creative inner structure but there remains a sense of neither security of identity or attachment.

When in this emotional space, Jeff could not think, feel or find orientation. Others, he assumed, did not know this psychological place that seemed like an abyss separating him from them. At times he sounded terrified, describing the loneliness punctuated by uncontrollable crying or wildly eating ice cream or cookies. His psyche and body wept for the lack of resonance, the unrequited longing for love and the emotional neglect and lack that propelled his search for self. In despair he feels has been a mediocre version of him self and with others and needs to be a genius, ala Nietzsche who he voraciously reads.

For a long time Jeff seemed unable or resistant to get in touch with “the reality of these interior places distinguished by their lack of structure or organization.” (Green, 1986, p. 37) Andre Green (ibid., p. 42) interpreted this situation as a person needing the container of the analyst for the content to be presented. According to Green (ibid., p. 42) both analyst and analysand witness how the bad object keeps being resurrected and both face the emptiness that returns as layer after layer of the emotional neglect becomes unwrapped. For Jeff, the apparent need to be disengaged and alone to find

his self is paradoxically mixed with an inability to engage with his self. Jeff is disconnected from the inner self and not able to be spontaneous as his creativity must be entirely private and can no longer be communicated. This occurs where there is failure in the parent holding environment and no safety in the external world. A grandiose self affords magical protection and an independent or omnipotent self needs no others as compensation for the absence of safety. (Modell, 1996, p.88). The loss of contact with an authentic self can result in closing oneself off from others. Estranged from one's affective core, life is meaningless, empty and futile. He is unable to generate meaning amidst the unaccountable self-loathing.

Jeff disdained and denied his body instincts, was ridden with negative body feelings, dismayed and ashamed about his sexuality (Modell, 1996, p. 76). So many body desires and love instincts shut off that he sought internet pornography and what he called compulsive masturbation. The traumatic interactions with early maternal caretakers were replicated in an equally traumatic internalized object relationship, leaving in its wake the true self waiting to be found (Modell, 1996, p.86).

This was difficult to access as Jeff felt like a stranger to his mother and the recipient of her numbed emotional reactions and inaccessible love. He described feeling like a stranger with others, the community of the church

and in therapy, as he felt little understanding or connection. Recognizing the far-reaching effect of her neglect, he becomes sad. He exposed vulnerability beneath his outer armor by the tears shed in therapy even though they embarrassed him. His psyche and body need to weep--maybe for the lack of resonance, the unrequited longing and the emotional neglect and lack that propelled his search for self. Jeff described a hole at the center of his being, feelings of loneliness and solitude—a sense of absence in the presence of the other. He felt like a shell, masking what felt like a gap, a persistent and agonizing hollowness at the core. This splitting or parceling of the self has been happening for as long as Jeff can remember.

British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion characterizes the minute splitting; an experience of fragmentation of mind and objects; a feeling of being trapped; a sense of nameless dread; a sense of disintegration; the inability to bear absence (while experiencing links as being filled with cruelty); being bombarded with sensations and not having time to compose thoughts or reactions; intolerance of suffering; manic searches for a container which Jeff calls needing someone to make him whole. (Stevens, 2005, p. 622).

Jeff is often internally bombarded by what he should do or should exercise, or should have a coffee, work or read. He never knew what he wanted to do. This is what Jeff calls the blown apart place where rules

substitute for the spontaneous self. The absence of mother leaves him with the pressure of a terrible insecurity of the self, indifference and lovelessness. These present as images of self-loss, an alienation bringing about what seems like extreme self-involvement, the self not as emergent but fragmented, dissipated, eclipsed. Jeff must address these needs and take them on board if life is to achieve balance and wholeness.

Put another way, Julia Kristeva says that when instinct turns self-destructive, the ego, from early in life, lacks cohesion and falls into bits (1994, p. 19). The anxiety and feeling of being destroyed from within is what remains. Jeff's self-doubt and despair can become excruciating and life feels brutalized. From the trauma of early neglect affective meaning is not only lacking but also turns into psychological numbness and/or physical symptoms. Again, this is the enactment of what Jeff calls the blown apart place where he becomes more alone and without words. Jeff recognizes those who have the same blown apart place and, if women, he is drawn to them. He might have sex but does not stay the night, as this is too intimate. The dominant feature is found to be self-disappearance and disinvolvement (Green, 2001, p. 645).

Andre Green (1986, p. 146) names this situation blank mourning and aligns it with emptiness. A person survives early emotional neglect and grief

but may not be able to handle the vast emptiness that progressively and through life translates into life numbness. Green notes, “The mother’s blank mourning induces blank mourning in the infant burying part of his ego in the maternal necropolis” (1997, p.9). The longing for the mother who has left and does not return emotionally or physically does not diminish, while the hope of its being realized fades and the child withdraws. The feelings of loneliness and solitude and a sense of absence in the presence of the other have been the results of the affective deadness in the mother.

Yet, even with this immense deadness and absence of meaning in life, Jeff persisted with the inner work. Since life cannot tolerate a standstill, a damming up of vital energy results, and this leads to an insupportable condition when the tension of the opposites produces a new, uniting function that transcends them. This function arises quite naturally from the regression of libido caused by the blockage (Jung, 1970, par. 145). The transcendent function described by Jung emerges in the therapeutic relationship. It is a psychic function arising from the tension between consciousness and the unconscious factors, creating a union between them. The raw material leads to a process not of dissolution alone but of construction in which thesis and antithesis both play their part. In this way a new content arises that governs the whole attitude, putting an end to the division and forcing the energy of

the opposites into a common channel. The standstill is overcome and life can flow on with renewed power towards new goals (Ibid., par. 827).

However, therapy remains difficult for Jeff as it dwells in bringing out and sharing what he called the innermost ravages while reflecting on them could lead to psychological movement. Yet, in therapy he insists he feels nothing but discomfort, unease, nothing close. Relating to and having good encounters with the outer world remained void for Jeff, substantiating his feeling of being alone in the universe.

Jung stated, “If you contemplate your lack of fantasy, of inspiration and inner aliveness, which you feel as sheer stagnation and a barren wilderness, and impregnate it with the interest born of alarm at your inner death, then something can take shape in you, for your inner emptiness conceals just as great a fullness if only you will allow it to penetrate into you” (Jung, 1970, par. 190).

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