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| **HEALING TRAUMA AND DISSOCIATION:**  **RE-MEMBERING DIONYSUS**  Gadi Maoz, Ph.D. (NIJS)  P.O. B. 149, Timrat 36576 Israel. Tel. 972+50+5512534, gadim@yvc.ac.il.  Key words: Trauma, Dissociation, Dionysus, Kalsched, Analysis  Abstract  This case study – described in deference to Kalsched's doctrine on the inner world of trauma (1996) - is based on analytic psychotherapy with a young woman suffering from dissociative disorder, stemming from early childhood traumas. The contents and dynamics of the treatment are reflected symbolically in the myth of Dionysus, both in the origins of trauma and the defense-survival reaction, described by Kalsched as the archetypal self-care system. The connection between Dionysus, trauma and dissociation transpired when the patient desperately described the dissociative phenomena which were haunting her. The fantasies concerning dismemberment and cannibalism of her baby child by her own hands were particularly terrifying. An examination of the symbolic meanings of these visions brought to mind the legendary scene from the mythological narrative, where *Agave* and her mates dismember her son *Pentheus* in frantic fury. Dionysus also personifies the archetypal principle of reintegration – namely, the potential for rejoining the dissociated fragments of the psyche.  Introduction  Irit (altered name), a young woman of 30, experienced prior to the described treatment a severe crisis, accompanied by feelings of anxiety and dissociation at the somatic level (de-personalization) and experiential level (de-realization). The symptomatic picture was one of dissociative disorder and fear that she was going mad. As the youngest of seven children in a family of immigrants, her father was killed in a road accident when she was 3 years old. Six months later her eldest sister suddenly became ill and died. She remembered both incidents only dimly. Her mother had little time to look after her before and after the father’s death, and hence her eldest sister became the surrogate parental figure. When her father disappeared one day from her life she was told: 'Dad has gone to work and won't come back'. She experienced the disappearance of her sister likewise. As a young girl Irit was introverted and lonely. She tended to engage in creative handiwork, which her mother belittled. At the age of 15 she started drifting about, indiscriminately acquainting and forming relations with elder men.  *The Archetypal self-care system*  *“The self-care system seems to carry out its ‘purposes’ through two mechanisms – a preservative effort involving self-hypnosis and encapsulation of a pre-traumatic regressed part-self on the one hand, and a destructive, dismembering activity, involving aggression in the service of dissociation on the other. Encapsulation seems to be a process through which ‘good’ self-states are preserved and isolated from ‘bad’ self-states, while dissociation is the mechanism by which the split compartments of the mind are maintained and amnesia barriers erected among them” (Kalsched, 2003).*  The first year  During the first months of treatment Irit was frightened and worried she would be found psychotically ill. She underwent murderous and devouring fantasies; that she was about to strangle her child with a pillow, cut his body into pieces with a kitchen knife and grind them in a food blender. Sometimes she imagined swallowing the cut pieces. The fantasies of chopping and castrating her son often assumed ceremonial dimensions. She had difficulties functioning and was afraid that I would hospitalize her. Some of the thoughts of dismemberment were also directed at the analyst and had to be dealt with in the context of transference.  As explained by Kalsched (2003), the demonic forces focused mainly on her child, represent the archetypical defenses, which by means of dissociative splits attempt to ensure that the essence of her personality - the core of the inner child within her - be protected against traumatic fear. In dreams and fantasies of patients suffering from dissociative conditions, this personal spirit sometimes assumes the image of a baby or child. Ferenczi, who encountered similar mental images in the dreams of his patients, defined this phenomenon as an archetypal representation of the Wise Child (Fortune 2003). When an infant's developing psyche is traumatized, the fear for survival threatens the continued existence of its personal spirit. Destruction must be prevented at all cost, and hence, as Winnicott (1960) pointed out, a primitive defense mechanism starts operating in order to prevent traumatic dread. The Wise Child – representing the spiritual center of the indestructible self - is an analogous image of the Holy Child derived from Greek mythology, meaning the god-child Dionysus (a name connoting "born twice"), whose conception, birth and childhood were rooted in trauma and in desperate efforts to save his inner basic core. Dionysus' life and actions as a mature god demonstrate in a symbolic manner the attempt to cope with and reintegrate the dissociative splits of his personality, stemming from the dismemberment traumas which he experienced as infant before and after his birth, and then during his childhood. It may be assumed that the polarized splits in the multi-faceted personality of Dionysus derive from the confusion of identities related to the twofold birth from his mother's womb and his father's thigh, and his disguise during childhood as a girl. His traumatic birth, life story and growth to manhood, are archetypal manifestations of the personal spirit and post-traumatic dissociative splits, as well as the hope for re-integration of the fragmented parts.  Kalsched (1996) advocates 'softer' techniques for severe trauma patients. In his opinion the common interpretations and reconstructions should be combined with the “creation of a safe interpersonal environment, within which dreams and fantasies can emerge and be worked with in a more playful, open-ended fashion….” Images of split compartments and barriers appeared in Irit's earlier dreams, symbolizing dissociative processes, as well as symbolic expressions of the 'negative mother complex' (the Terrible Mother archetype), as against images of a basically positive animus³. Individuation, integration, freedom from burden, and dilemmas related to growing-up were reflected in Irit's dreams throughout this period.  Example: *"I am in a place with many people, all of whom have dentures on their natural teeth, like a crown slipped on each tooth to protect it. I, too, have such crowns on my teeth. They cause terrible pressure in my mouth and my head and I want to get rid of them. I arrive at the dental clinic with all the others in order to remove these crowns. I am waiting for my turn but feel I must rid myself of the crowns, otherwise I'll die of the pressure and pain they are causing, and I start to remove them from every tooth despite the pain, and suddenly I swallow a crown by mistake and I'm frightened".*  In this initial dream, Irit unconsciously signals the main issues to be resolved in her analysis: The need to release the confining, though protective, shield of the inner core of the regressed child’s true self. The process (of analysis) must be paced and monitored 'by the clinic' (the analyst), otherwise the danger exists of being swallowed into a uroboric cycle of regression.  We gradually came to understand that Irit’s destructive fantasies were a symbolic expression of the self-care system, a kind of dissociation that had been forming a mechanism of archetypal split since her childhood. In her adult life, whenever anxiety set on, the struggle for survival was projected by her imagination into the dissociative fantasy of dismembering her son.  Second year  Irit noticed a reduced frequency of her destructive dissociations. During this period she had about seventy dreams.  Example: *"I bring my son to the kindergarten, leave the kindergarten and walk to the swimming pool. I jump into the deep water and cannot get out. At last I succeed".*  Her sensations during the dream were those of choking. She was relieved when she managed to break loose. The pool in her dream can be perceived as the unconscious psyche containing the archetypal self-care system with its opposite poles: diving into deep water - the protective encapsulating and purifying aspect of water - while protecting the regressed inner child (personal spirit), placing him (her son) in safety (kindergarten), as against the danger of being devoured (drowning) and annihilated by the aggressive aspect of the self-care system. This dream can also be viewed as a hazardous, yet successful attempt, to cope with the threats on the fragile ego.  In the myth of Dionysus, diving into deep water represents the danger of definite extinction. His aunt and stepmother *Ino,* and her daughter, jump off the cliff to their death into the sea), as well as a sanctuary and maternal shelter from which he can depart and return to after each epic journey (he also flees from the fury of *Lycurgus* and finds protection at *Tethys,* wife of *Oceanus,* ‘ruler of many seas and rivers’).  Personification of the animus was a central theme in Irit's dreams throughout this year. The issues that came up during treatment were generally linked to the figure of the missing father and to a negative animus complex. The transference dynamics in the analysis were also reflected in her dreams, where the therapist was sometimes perceived as possessing Dionysian-like characteristics. In several of her dreams the analyst’s image was associated with erotic contents, which in turn enabled our discussion about "unthinkable" matters such as her transference projections and her view of male figures as either good and pure, or totally evil, lustful, and possessed by their shadows. She also dreamt about infants and children in conflicting and ambivalent situations, sometimes exposed to hardships and hazards. These dreams, again, could signal the mobilization of a coping effort in her psyche. Jung (1990) wrote in this vein: "Abandonment, exposure, danger etc., are all elaborations of the 'child's insignificant beginnings and of its mysterious and miraculous birth".  *Third year*  During the third year of treatment Irit seemed tired most of the time and complained about insomnia. In an attempt to grasp the symbolic significance of the strange and monstrous figures that appeared in her mind and dreams, it was suggested that the demons represented one of the figures which had traumatized her during.  childhood. At this point came to light the dynamics of the archetypal self-care system which enters into action when triggered by unknown association with the original trauma. In order to release her from the demon's unyielding clasp, she had to recognize that the demon was her own and part of her psyche. The release was lastly facilitated by dealing with the transference, mainly by its elaboration in her dreams.  *Example: "I am waiting for our regular meeting and you arrive, supported by someone, and looking like an old man of 80. You are shaking all over and I can't understand what has happened to you. Your teeth chatter and you tremble as if of old age".*  In the associations to her dream, she said: "An old man is a wise man and this is also a sign that you won't leave me but stay with me for a long time".  After the third year of treatment, by means of her dreams and on the background of the transference love-hate relationship with the therapist, a process began to unfold which can be described as an attempt to reach a Dionysian mediation between the fragmented parts of her personality. The process, painful both for the patient and for the analyst, was accompanied by emotions of anger and suffering. Gradually, however, the capability for enduring these feelings was built, enabling Irit’s self to provide her ego with genuine experiences of calmer relations.  Fourth year  During the fourth year of treatment there was a gradual moderation in Irit's dissociative fantasies and their frequency decreased. After a while she became pregnant again, unplanned. As soon as she had learned about her pregnancy and that she was carrying a daughter (her second), the dissociative anxieties reappeared. After giving birth she felt a significant repose and her dissociative symptoms diminished almost completely. Toward the conclusion of her treatment, the so-called "Second Lebanon War" broke out in northern Israel. During this period, while missiles were falling on the region, she called to tell about herself. My impression was that under the prevailing emergency circumstances and with the charge of her two children she was performing quite well. When we renewed our meetings after the cessation of hostilities, it became clear that the treatment was coming to an end.  Irit spoke in a retrospective mood about the process she had gone through, describing her treatment as the most meaningful event she had ever experienced and as something that had "saved her life". To her mind, despite the prolonged therapy, it would not have been possible to achieve these results without such in-depth work. She talked about a renewed sense of control over her daily life and of the very rare cases when a slight feeling of dissociation would appear, such as during the alarm of sirens, which did not bring back anxieties but rather a sense of security, as if some personal defense system was entering into motion  Summary and conclusions  The myth of Dionysus personifies the Archetypal Self-care System, described by Kalsched as a system that enters into action in traumatic situations. “If trauma is to be healed in psychotherapy”, says Kalsched (2003), “the original abuse dynamics must be replayed in the transference in order to be symbolized and worked through. The process of psychotherapy involves a constant struggle with the daimonic. Our goal is to mediate volcanic affect, metabolize violent fantasies, and help ground and humanize the most angelic idealizations as well as the most demonic diabolizations”.  The conception of Dionysus, his parentage and childhood, are replete with repeated traumas. Again and again he is abandoned by motherly figures that meet a cruel end or go mad. After the tragic death of his mother he continues his fetal growth in some kind of masculine phallic womb of a god who represents a powerful archetype, but with the characteristics of a caring and compassionate father. On his birth he is torn into shreds by the Titans, an act defined by Lopez Pedraza (2000) as “a psyche in pieces”. The traumas of dismemberment, first when torn from his mother's womb and then by the Titans, are later reflected in his grown-up personality and its many contradicting faces. The masks of Dionysus represent symbolically the dissociative splits characterizing his deeds and rituals. From the start one can sense the destructive, violent and furious titanic-demonic means, thrown against the immense forces encircling and protecting the core personal spirit. The Holy/Wise Child in the masculine womb of Zeus protects against the destructive forces of fire, dismemberment and persecution. These two archetypal representations alternate in the various tales about his life. As a consequence, mishaps of demonic outbursts and numinous forces take place; deep collective powers of the psyche versus the weaker and vulnerable components of the ego. Dionysus, as the Holy Child archetype is the motherless orphan. As adult he continues to relive the traumas of his painful childhood whenever he feels ignored, attacking with vengeful repetition those who seem to endanger his spiritual existence and who refuse to accept him. He possesses dark sides and is at home in the underworld into which he descends and wherefrom he returns again and again. All this occurs along with lighter and more pleasant sides, yet meaningful in a cultural sense, compassionate and understanding.  Dionysus, as a daimon, symbolizes in his ritual and life story the dynamism which mediates between the mad negative fragmentation and the positive dimension of compassion and concern for accompanying human figures (representing ego components). The contradiction is evident in the struggle between acceptance vs. rejection of Dionysus and his cult, in the sense of embracing the other, strange and alien soul, and its internalization.  The entire essence of Dionysus is the bridging between the divine and the human, the numinous and the mundane, consciousness versus unconsciousness, ego and outer reality. This, indeed, is his life assignment and in this sense the Dionysian myth reflects the archetype of the re-integrative, reconstructive principle. In his basic energetic state, Dionysus has two facets: the maddening and the curing of madness. Thus he is an expression of the collective archetype of trauma, dissociation and re-integration. The transformative relations, treatment techniques and therapist's aptitudes are the Temenos in which the Dionysian drama of the post-traumatic patient must be enacted. When this happens there is a good chance that the patient's need for dissociative protection and tormenting fantasies of dismemberment and destruction will cease.  References  Fortune, C. (2003). The analytic nursery: Ferenczi's ‘wise baby’ meets Jung's ‘divine child’. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 48, 457–466.  Jung, C.G. (1990). *The Archetypes and the collective unconscious, CW* 9i, par. 285. Princeton, Bollingen.  Kalsched, D. (2003). Daimonic elements in early trauma. *Journal of* Analytical *Psychology, 48, 145-159.*  Kalsched, D. (1996). *The inner world of trauma. Archetypal defenses of the personal spirit.* U.S.A.: Routledge.  Lopez-Pedraza, R. (2000). *Dionysus in exile. On the repression of the body and emotion.* Illinois: Chiron.  Winnicott, D.W. 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