

VITALIZATON

Perspectives on Being and Becoming

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For the MGM Study Group

CHAPTER FIVE – Between Mythos & Logos - Boaz Shalgi

Surrender, Vitalization & Transformation

(Read Ogden's *Subjects of Analysis* (1994) for more on vitalization and transformation.)

Crossing the Threshold

"It is too late to turn back. Having read the opening words of this book you have already begun to enter into the unsettling experience of finding yourself becoming a subject who you have not yet met, but nonetheless recognize...You, the reader, must allow me to occupy you, your thoughts, your mind, since I have no voice with which to speak other than yours...This book will not be 'understood' by you; you will not simply receive it, incorporate it, digest it, or the like. To the degree that you will have anything at all to do with it, you will transform it...The confrontation with alterity will not let us rest." – Ogden, 1994

The transformative influence which Ogden tries to capture in these beautiful words, an influence which is straightforward, mutual, subjugating, unexplained, or explained only in retrospect, materializes out of a total, whole, all-out openness towards the alterity of an encounter. It is a kind of change which is created when one courageously confronts otherness, be it the otherness within oneself, the otherness of fellow human beings, or the unavoidable, inescapable otherness of sheer reality – the world 'in itself and for itself'. (Hegel, 1807)

This kind of transformative change is about the unique characteristics of an encounter, in which one allows alterity to penetrate, to occupy one's innermost private experiences, to 'let it do things' inside without awareness, introspection, or any sort of control.

This is an influence or control which does not rely on understanding psychic structures or processes, and does not evolve out of reflection, but out of exposing the soul to the relentless and uncompromised influence of reality upon it – and of itself upon reality, including upon its fellow subject.

Emmanuel Ghent would call this 'surrender':

- *Surrender is not an act performed by one psyche on the other, but a letting go, an acceptance of 'what is' – an event between two entities (be they human or non-human)*

in relationship which penetrate and create each other while freeing themselves to experience, moreover, to become whatever is being created among and between them.

- *Surrender is an act of embracing the unknown, whether in a quiet, meditative, receptive way or in an all-out 'active' assertive way, a 'letting it happen'.*
- *Ghent sees surrender as the most basic need of the human psyche.*

This most fundamental need is teeming with terrors and anxieties which sometimes distort the vitalizing 'moment of surrender' into its deadening, petrifying lookalike – submission.

- *A crucial point is that surrender always catches us off guard, unprepared, by surprise.*

Winnicott says that indeed the significant moment is when the child surprising himself or herself. Ghent would say the significant moment in a therapeutic encounter is when the patient and therapist surprise each other.

Transformative change is not a consequence of a logical, sequential, reflected upon process, but of conscious, pre-conscious, and unconscious, mutual penetration.

The goal is not insight or understanding alone, but rather a transformation, a radical change in people's nature as they come into contact with the frozen parts of themselves that are yearning to be reached, known and recognized - a change which is always a result of an interaction.

- *There is a kind of change can happen that is immediate, daring, intensive, and, most importantly, logically incomprehensible and interaction-dependent.*

From Ghent's perspective, interaction leads to transformation, and transformation, in turn, creates new understandings. This is a totally altered way of thinking about and perceiving change.

Logos & Mythos

Logos and Mythos are two categorically distinct systems of thinking. Each presents a way of perceiving and explaining 'all there is' – the universe, the human condition, the existence of God or gods.

- *Logos is the rational faculty, based on reason, linearity, a sequential concept of time, and cause-and-effect laws of explanation.*
- *Mythos is grounded in imagination, intuition, an instantaneous-spontaneous concept of time, inspiration and creativity.*

There is something vital about bringing Mythos more centrally into the therapeutic discourse.

Mythos makes clear a particular phenomenon by creating *a particular story* about it. Mythos creates a collection of stories and legends about men and gods, about deeds and affairs, to ascribe meaning to these phenomena, to the things we see, feel and experience.

- *One of the most fundamental characteristics of Mythos is its respect for diversity, multiplicity, and particularity.*

Logos-based thinking searches for the Universal, and tries to explain the particular through the Universal.

Logos negates specificity, particularity and multiplicity, in search of the one, uniting essence of all things. In contrast, Mythos embraces an assortment of diverse and unique entities, powers, and forces – each exists independently for itself and as itself.

Logos perceives change based on the analytic process, and looks for reasons and causes for it. Mythos does not analyze. One thing acts upon and changes another directly, immediately, and spontaneously.

- *Through Mythos, transformation emerges all at once, without any explicable reason, out of sheer and pure encounter.*

The most basic category of change according to Logos is a gradual, analyzable, cause-and-effect process; for Mythos, the foundation for change is based on immediate, spontaneous, and vitalized interaction.

The characteristics of spontaneity and particularity in the language of Mythos place human beings in a living interactive world which is constantly evolving and transforming.

Mythos offers no consolation. It is not comprised of systemic laws that make the world we live in familiar, predictable, or reliable. It has no constancy. It presents a surprising, unexpected, shifting reality, at times even overwhelming and alarming.

Mythos has no structures, no ‘essences’, only ever-changing interactive qualities.

“Everything is in flux, which means that everything, living or not, is interactive.” (Ghent)

What does Mythos offer in order to make the world more familiar, more conceivable, more possible to live in? It makes it *personal and personally meaningful*. Mythos tells us a particular, personal story.

- *The most meaningful change a person goes through in her or his encounter with reality is transforming what was foreign, external, and threatening, into a part of oneself, that is, a part of one's own subjective reality.*

It is a creative experience of transforming 'not-mine' into 'also-mine', and act of *personal vitalization* of the reality one lives in. (Living your personal myth.)

The *personal vitalization of reality* is an act of infusing life into an experience, or even more so, infusing my own utterly unique and distinctive life into reality – thus transforming it, 'creating it anew', giving life to reality and to myself at the same time.

Myth tells a universal story in a particular, personal way.

The therapeutic power of realizing one's Oedipal drive lies in the specific way ne re-writes the story as one's own.

Myths may be universal, but their transformative impact is not due to their universal meanings. Rather, it stems from their amazing ability to infuse the universal with a very particular subjective sense. (The poem *When I Met My Muse*)

- *A key notion here is that this process, in which the universal becomes personal, in which knowledge becomes personal, in which truth becomes personal, is one of the most transformative processes in life and in psychotherapy.*

It might seem odd to say that one's psychic reality becomes 'personal', since allegedly, one's psychic reality is always a personal reality. But this is not always so.

Indeed, people often experience their psychic realities – be it their instincts, needs, internal objects, wishes, or fantasies – as estranged, as alienated, as being a forced upon them.

The transcendent position is in its essence a surrender to what is, to one's very being, and to what happens in oneself and in the world around, to the mutual influence one experiences with the world.

"The transcendent position accounts for the state of serenity that accompanies one who finally, after traversing the nightmares or the paranoid-schizoid position, and the black holes and mournful inner cathedrals of the depressive position, is able to become reconciled to the experience of pure, unadulterated Being and Happening."

- James Grotstein
Who Is The Dreamer who Dreams the Dream?

The 'reconciliation with experience' has both the qualities of letting go 'into' an experience and of owning it for oneself.

“To me, surrender is an act of embracing the unknown, whether in a quiet, meditative, receptive way or in an all-out, ‘active’ assertive way, a ‘letting it happen’...in surrender, arguing ceases; there is a feeling of liberation...there is no trace of complaint or blame; there is acceptance.”

- Emmanuel Ghent (2001)
- *There is freedom experienced in infusing the external world with one’s one internal agency.*

The transcendent position is the most liberated and vitalized experience one can aspire to. *“Transcending means having the ability to go beyond our defensiveness, our pettiness, our guilt, our shame, our narcissism, our need for certainty, and our structures, in order to achieve or to become ‘one with our aliveness’, or with our very being-ness.”*

- James Grotstein

This is a process of altering our perception of the external world, by re-creating it as one’s own, by personalizing it, by linking it to the numerous seemingly unimportant day-to-day idiosyncratic details that comprise our lives.

By our personalizing our externality, we infuse it with life, we mobilize it, we change it from a motionless, petrified ‘thing in itself’ – an unalterable universal reality – into a particular, ever-changing reality, a vital ‘one with aliveness’ is being created anew, every moment, by every human being.

This kind of transformation (of O) involves the ability to ‘face the music’, to confront reality with open eyes, to pursue the human need for truth.

When one surrenders to ‘what is’, to reality, one accepts it, takes it in, and in the very act transforms it from a Logos reality to a Mythos reality.

This animating transformation cannot be carried out by one person/mind alone. There must always be another person, someone with whom one creates reality together.

- *So here is another paradox – in order to create one’s most inner, private, personal reality, in order to transform indifferent reality into experience which carries personal/emotional meaning – one must ‘join consciousness in companionship’.*
(Being Actively Witnessed)

Through this all-important paradox, the most subjective and personal approach to reality is by its nature intersubjective.

Every interpretation, in order to attain its full meaning, must contain within it, or have links to, three dimensions of experience: *the domain of sense, the domain of myth, and the domain of passion.* (Bion) (Enfleshed-ness, Myth and Eros)

- *The therapist's pursuit of and surrender to these three dimensions of being and experiencing is what vitalizes the lives of both client and therapist.*

This is what transforms the therapeutic couple from estranged and alien life to personal-emotional life, a life that feels worth living, a life one can hate, one can dread, one can desire.

A life one can live.

Sense, Myth & Passion – The Objective, Subjective, Intersubjective Creation of Meaning

(Rilke's poem here – perhaps all the dragons of one's life)

Bion's three domains – of sense, of myth, and of passion – three dimensions of experience and existence through which foreign, strange-to-oneself, alienated 'psychic material' – transforms into an experience which feels like a part of one's self, emotional, personal, intimate and vitalizing.

Regarding the domain of the senses, there is a key point to hold in mind:

- *An interpretation given to a patient must be linked to something real.*

An interpretation has to be joined with an *objective*, palpable certainty, which has 'common sense'. It is an expression that can be understood both as entailing 'common logic' – in that any reasonable person could see and perceive it – and as a 'sense which is common' to more than just one sense – has a communion to more than one sense.

"It must be possible for both the therapist and the client to see that what the therapist is talking about is something that is either audible, visible, palpable or odoriferous at the time." (Bion)

It is of vast importance that the 'psychic material' we are discussing with our clients be present to some degree, accessible to our senses – not as an abstract idea, *but as something which is happening...* that we can feel, almost touch.

Verbal exchanges with our clients need to evolve around the moments of silence which can be felt so palpably between us and them, so as to infuse the exchanges with an immediate, honest, factual, and genuine power, which is invaluable to the work.

- *If we strive to transform what is impersonal, foreign, and alienated into what is personal, into an experience one can own and feel and perceive as a part of oneself, as a real part of one's life, it is tremendously important that the interpretation or*

conversation be linked to a sensual tangible dimension, on objective dimension which pulls the client and therapist into reality.

If the client's verbal content centers around something that took place outside of the room, in another time and place, it will lack the substance of a realistic, authentic dimension of existence, a dimension which is crucial to the process of enlivening the parts of the personality that used to be dead and frozen.

Suppose a client is angry. More meaning is given to this experience if it is described in its particularity – that is he is angry *'like a child that wanted to hit his mother because he has been told he is bad'*. This is a statement of a personal myth.

Bion's notion of a 'personal myth' is linked to the subjective dimension of experience – to the inner, private, delicate world of the client. *It does not aim towards understanding, but towards an extension of the capacity to feel.*

In this way of work, we do not provide theoretical or abstract explanations, and we do not anchor a particular emotion in a universal understanding (for instance, about anger).

Instead, we do the exact opposite. We anchor a universal understanding in the particular and unique ways of our client's personality, circumstance, and experience.

Mythos pulls us into the very personal, familiar, intimate experience of our own.

This type of psychological change is not achieved through explanations, but through emotional/sensual unexplained transformation, which takes place through an instantaneous encounter of the patient with his most private, subjective life.

- *Transformation takes place through the linking of one's present experience to one's most personal mythology.*

(Roberta Flack's song – Killing Me Softly – *'strumming my pain with his fingers, singing my life with his words'*)

Surrendering to the mutually created transformation process, one in which both people are changed, requires passion. A passionate context is often what it takes to make an interpretation valid or meaningful.

When a client is angry, we can see it, we can hear it, we can feel it, we can find its evident, objective dimension in the domain of the senses. We can also link it to the subjective history of the client, to the domain of myth, and with the world in which he lives.

- *Yet these emotional functions cannot generate a personal transformation without another dimension, in which two minds create the newfound experiences in a way which never existed before.*

Awareness of passion is not dependent only on the senses. For the senses to be active, only one mind is necessary.

- *Passion is evidence that two minds are linked and that there cannot possibly be fewer than two minds if passion is present. (Bion)*

Here we encounter the full paradox of 'reclaiming un-lived life', or 'turning dissociation into conflict'.

For one client, the experience of being an 'ordinary person' was intolerable. It threatened her most important and invigorating emotional connection, the special bond she felt with her father.

Thus, the reality of being ordinary had to be dissociated from her psyche and from any relationships she might be a part of. Every relationship holds within it, sooner or later, the feelings of ordinary routine, of day to day living – at times exciting, at others boring and monotonous.

- *Dissociation inescapably impairs one's psychic movement.*

When one feels that part of one's psyche must be avoided at all costs, one finds oneself restricting psychic movement to 'safe zones', in which one feels sheltered and protected from any threat of encountering the dreaded experiences one cannot tolerate.

The presence of dissociation in the psyche does not only divorce us from those enlivening parts of ourselves which had to be 'thrown to the dissociative prison' but also robs us of one of our most quintessential characteristics as human beings: our ability, our aptitude, to move freely between and within our experiences, feelings, and sensations.

Every interpretation therefore must aim at resurrecting the patient's psychic movement, especially in the face of his or her most frightening dissociated experiences.

- *This psychic movement cannot be attained without a passionate, intersubjective encounter between client and therapist.*
- *This passionate encounter, in order to infuse life and rejuvenate the deadened horror-filled areas in the patient's psyche, must to some degree stimulate frozen areas in the therapist's psyche as well.*

- *This is the essence of what can be called 'passion in the midst of terror', the only kind of passion that can help someone encounter the dreaded parts of his or her personality.*

We have to have encounters our own particular fears if we hope to help transform them in our clients. If we don't surrender into having these encounters with our own dreadful anxieties, and enter into the mutual effort to work through these states of being, we will lack a certain passion needed to transform them.

- *Bringing life to deadened areas within one's own soul is one of the hardest and most multi-layered endeavors in psychotherapy.*

This process must take place within the spontaneous, surprising, intersubjective transformation which comprises the 'language of Mythos'.