

THE USE OF HEALING CEREMONIES IN THE TREATMENT OF MULTIPLE PERSONALITY DISORDER

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ABSTRACT

Although talk therapy and abreactive work are crucial in the treatment of multiple personality disorder, these techniques do not always assist the client in bringing closure to other exposed wounds. As a result, some patients continue to feel vulnerable and to doubt their ability to rid themselves of the anguish unleashed by these uncovered memories. Such instances require the therapist to move beyond the usual practices and techniques of therapy and to create alternative methods which will bring the client emotional relief. These procedures may involve any number of the adjunctive therapies as well as the use of ceremony to complete the release and resolution of the memory. This article explores the use of ceremony and gives an example of how ceremony was used successfully in the treatment of a client.

RITUALS, MYTHS, AND PSYCHOLOGY

Rituals are an organized performance of behaviors intended to influence or bring about a desired result. They are stereotyped; there are definite patterns of speech or movement, definite sequences of events that occur performance after performance, identified times (seasonally, annually), reasons for performance (funerals, prayers for the sick), and specific objects (e.g., the cross) that represent an event, a revered person (e.g., Martin Luther King), a relationship (e.g., wedding rings, the symbol of matrimony), or a life cycle (e.g., birthday cake). Symbolic significance is usually attached to the language and behavior of rituals as in the Christian rituals of worship, hymn singing, and baptism (Peoples & Bailey, 1988).

Levi-Strauss (1985) suggests that the true function of ritual is to preserve the continuity of experience. Thus ritual prevents people from forgetting their roots while reinforcing the cultural and societal myths. In some instances, fail-

ure to perform the ritual associated with the myth creates anxiety. For example, when soldiers return from war, the nation in an effort to promote patriotism and show its strength, honors its troops and rewards the military with parades, homecoming parties, and national celebration. When the United States failed to provide such accolades for the Vietnam veterans, the soldiers felt shame, anger, and discouragement within themselves. The country was torn with riots, civil discontentment, and prejudice.

For the most part, rituals are positive and spiritually reinforcing. However, they have been used to strengthen myths such as those associated with evil and corruption. Destructive cults employ the same methods as those used in health and spiritual affirming groups. The difference is that destructive rituals and myths do not validate life, nor do they respect human dignity, concern for animals, or honor the environment.

Myths are oral or written stories about the actions and deeds of cultural heroes, family members, or supernatural powers. They explain how the universe was created, how and why people perform certain behaviors (e.g., throwing salt over one's shoulder if a salt shaker is tipped over), why a family should act in a certain way, or what happened to someone who did something forbidden by society or the family. Myths help people to formulate world views and relate to each other. Thus myths influence how people behave in everyday life. They can even describe mental disorders. In fact, "myths can even diagnose them [psychological problems] while relating those incidents in a character's life which triggered the disorder: repeated social failures, compensated for by inappropriate behavior; or traumatic experience. . . ." (Levi-Strauss, 1985, p. 179).

The psyche is understood through the individual's interpretation of his/her personal story. The client's repetitive behavior, although at times unconscious, is the ritual by which s/he continues to show and tell the world about his/her myth. As with all rituals there are certain distinguishing marks in one's personal myth: circular behavior, internal self-talk, repetitive problem-solving methods, etc. The personal ritual is exquisitely executed and fervently retained since it builds a shell around the person to protect the vulnerability which arises from exposing the most primitive parts of one's self.

Clinicians attempting to ease client suffering must understand the individual's therapeutic myth and personal rituals before formulating a treatment plan. Included in these personal stories are the elements of self, self-in-relation to others, and the internalized ideals of significant others

(Bagarozzi & Anderson, 1989). "The treatment [plan] serves to bring about transformations in the myth which correspond to the appreciation of the client and the social group of which s/he is a member," (van der Hart, 1988, p. 7). Psychotherapy then is the process by which the therapist guides a client through his/her interpretation and understanding of family rules, behaviors, traditions, and beliefs. The combining of all these factors comprises the family myth. The method by which an individual actualizes the family dictates is the ritual.

THERAPEUTIC RITUALS

Within the past decade marriage and family therapists have explored the use of family myths and rituals in the treatment of the family system (Pillari, 1986; Byng-Hall, 1987; Bagarozzi & Anderson, 1989). Milton Erickson (Zeig, 1980), the seminal hypnotist, used stories from his childhood as a way to introduce family myths to his clients, after which he prescribed rituals as methods which enabled his patients to overcome their personal dilemmas. Jay Haley (1973, 1985, 1987), Paul Watzlawick, John Weakland, and Richard Fisch (1974) challenged their clients to change undesirable behaviors by giving them stylized tasks designed to challenge client cognition and affective response. In all these treatment methodologies the therapeutic ritual is constructed to address unresolved conflicts underlying the personal myth. This technique permits the individual to obtain a solution to the personal dilemma without extreme affect-laden or anxiety-producing responses. Ritual prescription is meant to assist the person in working through the major difficulties in his/her personal mythology on an unconscious level.

Reeves and Boersma (1989-90) note that ritual provides personal power for individuals feeling out of control and unable to clarify the issue(s) bothering them. By using the mind and the body to gain a solution to a personal problem, the client achieves mastery over the difficulty and builds a stronger sense of self. Van der Hart (1988) uses rituals similarly. Initially he aids the client in understanding how a leave-taking or healing ritual can help in overcoming the problems expressed in the therapeutic myth. Then van der Hart moves the individual into the reorganization stage in which the client carries out specific tasks which simulate the working through of the identified issue.

Pillari (1986) realized that myths could be toxic or less toxic. The method by which an individual presents his or her myth and the family rituals gives an indication as to the level of pathology within the family system. In other words, the more obscure the myth and rituals, the greater the felt pain within the storyteller. Families tend to cover up secrets such as abuse because they feel that it is unacceptable or damaging to acknowledge the truth. Thus the myth is held as a shared family fantasy to avoid the unspeakable. For the multiple personality disorder (MPD) person, family secrets are inescapable because of the intrusion of flashbacks and mental conversations. In an attempt to organize the internal world and stabilize the external world, the multiple develops an elaborate psychic world predicated on the family myth

and rituals. Thus the multiple creates an existence which is a metaphoric replay of the family of origin. Objects, sounds, and actions by others in the external world become symbols which trigger ritualistic responses in the internal world. Behavior in response to these stimuli becomes codified and, in itself, becomes a ritual which is rigid and specific to the personal myth.

DEVELOPING HEALING RITUALS

Healing rituals prescribed by the therapist are designed to decrease the level of pain and anguish which the MPD person feels. The rites utilize symbols related to the surfacing memories. Various alters relate to the event in idiosyncratic ways. By assisting the alters to process the repressed memories through the use of ceremony, the therapist validates the client and promotes the client's transition to a new life perspective. Developing an effective therapeutic intervention requires the therapist to move beyond the usual practice and techniques of talk therapy to the more creative methods of the adjunctive therapies. Consequently, the procedures may involve art, dance, music, and creative writing in conjunction with psychotherapy. The choices of venue and expression for this segment of therapy are determined by the client and then discussed thoroughly with the therapist. In this way, the client takes charge of the memory which has been controlling his/her life for years.

The development of the ceremony is dependent on the unique personal characteristics of the MPD patient. Some individuals may choose to use various media in the ritual while others may simply wish to have a verbal ceremony similar to ones which they may have experienced in a church, at work, or in a business or social organization. The only requisite for the ceremony is that it be significant for the person and alters involved. The rite must include the appropriate alters, the stated reason for the ritual, the agenda of process by which the ceremony is to unfold, the physical objects, art, music, writing, and other media involved, any friends who are to be included in the event, and the date and place in which the ceremony is to occur. The work may take place in the therapist's office, the hospital, or some location that is significant to the client. Since this is a healing and closure process, the client and the associated alters must be intricately involved both with the development and implementation of the ceremony. It is precisely this commitment to the process that assists the client in cleansing him/herself from the memory.

The ceremony is an addition to the work which has arisen in treatment. It is not separate from the ongoing work nor does it signify a closure to treatment. The ritual is designed to heal the pain and release the emotional energy devoted to a particular traumatic memory, thus enabling the client to move on to other unresolved therapeutic material. It is important that all the alters involved with the memory recognize the significance of the ceremony, otherwise there may be an attempt to sabotage or minimize the work by some of the unconvinced alters. Child alters, manipulative alters, and malevolent alters may see the development of the cer-

emony as a time for them to take over or distract the therapist from the goals of treatment. Indicators of these problems are readily apparent. For example, child alters may get totally absorbed in making things and inviting people to the ceremony while manipulative alters may constantly change the format of the event. Malevolent alters may destroy material prepared for the observance or take the memory of the procedures to carry out the rite away from the participating alters. When this occurs, the disruptive behavior must be confronted, interpreted, and processed with the alters. Generally, the reason for resistance is fear that the alters will die or that the memory of the trauma will be forgotten.

Because ceremonies are used to heal and bring closure to highly painful memories, they can be used equally well with individuals who give a history of having suffered ritualistic abuse. The use of a healthy, planned, behavioral activity and a meaningful written script teaches the ritualistic abuse survivor the possibilities of positive gain from prescribed actions and predetermined words. By enlarging the survivor's knowledge of the healing benefits of ceremony, the ritualistic abuse patient discovers him/herself enriched, enhanced, and supported by a previously dreaded and, perhaps, hated exercise. After all, "It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back," (Campbell, 1973, p. 11).

Certainly before initiating a ceremonial procedure with a ritualistic abuse survivor, the therapist must explore all fears and thoughts the individual has regarding a stylized method of resolving a personal problem. For example, are there certain phrases or sounds which might trigger a flashback or picture which the victim cannot handle? Are there locations or environmental reminders which might provoke an abreaction? The purpose of the ceremony is to dispel the impact of the past trauma and lessen the susceptibility to early narcissistic wounds. Therefore, the therapist must thoroughly comb the proposed ceremony with the client to safeguard against any deleterious effects.

After these questions are resolved, the therapist and client must determine which roles the various alters will take in the rite. The selection of tasks must be worked through as a team effort to insure that each alter can complete the work s/he needs to do in relation to the identified memory. Some alters may wish to write the material, others may arrange the music, while others may perform the ceremony. The alters affiliated with the memory who choose not to participate should be consulted for their input as well as their rationale for not taking part. If the excuses are more resistive than instructive (i.e., a desire to not speak badly or to not harm the perpetrator), then the therapist must process and resolve the defensiveness before the ceremony occurs. Finally, the therapist and client must determine whether the therapist needs to be present during the ritual. Because the ceremony is a potent treatment mechanism, the therapist may need to be present to safeguard against any untoward responses (i.e., self-mutilation) during or after the rite. However, some people may choose to perform the rite individually or with a loved one whom they genuinely trust. If this is the case,

the therapist must walk the client through the ceremony and the possible pitfalls of completing the rite without the therapist. When necessary, the trusted friend or lover can be asked to come to a session prior to the ceremony. During that time, the therapist can explain what the client plans to do and how the friend/lover can assist in the occasion. All possible questions should be addressed and the therapist should be apprised as to when and where the ritual will take place in the event that the client may need to contact the therapist for assistance.

CASE STUDY

In the interest of offering a clear illustration of the development and enactment of a ceremony, a single detailed example rather than several vignettes is offered. What is stated represents the patient's given history and expressed beliefs about her past.

A woman who stated that she was in a druidic cult called the Keltoi, was greatly tormented by memories of rituals and murders of male children. She decided to utilize ceremony to help her break free of the memories of the cult and to connect with her spirituality. This woman is multi-talented and used her creativity and faith to develop her service. The steps of the ceremony were planned with the therapist. The development of the music, the poetry, and the selection of the natural elements which were used in the ceremony, and the location of the event evolved over a series of therapy sessions. Various musical alters were involved in the selection of the symphonic elements, the host wrote the poetry, the religious alter wrote the introduction to the rite, and the ones involved in the Keltoi rituals brought the actual blond-haired braids of the deceased matriarchs, stones, strings, pine cones, and wood. The ceremony was conducted in a small park near the therapist's office within the time constraints of the sixty-minute therapy hour.

What follows is a description of the actual ritual.

The therapist and client left for the park in the client's van. The music from Vaughn Williams Symphony No. 5, *The Lark Ascending*, was playing on the tape deck. At the park, the music ended and they exited the truck. The therapist and client walked to a picnic table with a fire pit. There the client unloaded her sack of materials for the ceremony. She gave the therapist the material which she was to read. The client began:

"The reason for this ceremony is to break free from the Keltoi, cleanse myself from their evil, their wicked acts, from bestiality and murder.

"I want to separate myself from those people and their acts in a ceremony of cleansing. A small fire will burn, representing the burning away of the evil that lingers within me. I want to burn mesquite, which represents cleanliness, and cedar and pine cones. Then a strand of each braid from my ancestors' hair will be burned while reading a poem to free myself.

"The objects themselves will have all their power taken away, will become harmless, evil will be turned to good in Joyce's [the therapist] desire to use the objects to educate,

not torture.

"I will break a stone, definite action of my own free will, breaking all connection with the Keltoi. I will keep a piece to remind me of my own strength, and give a piece to Joyce to remind her of me. A bond will be formed between myself and Joyce.

"Last, I will pray to God, renouncing the Keltoi, asking forgiveness, wholeness, guidance. I will become a new child, a spiritual infant, will experience spiritual birth.

"I have nothing of value to give Him—not even my music speaks to me now. I will become one with the moment, with the earth, with my feelings, and with God.

"Joyce will build a fire while I read the intent of this ceremony. Then I will read while burning a strand from each braid: my mother's, my grandmother's, also to represent the entire Keltoi and my father's complicity. It will symbolize breaking free from the Keltoi.

"You are dead, you have your freedom,
Except within my memory while yet living
A ritual is alive only for those living in it
But a ceremony having no purpose other than self-
perpetuation is a dead ritual.
I do not thank you nor ask you to free me.
You made me the Living Sacrifice of a dead ritual, I
make myself dead to the ritual and alive without
sacrifice.

You are dead, you have your freedom.
I am alive, I take the freedom that is mine."

[Read while giving objects to Joyce.] "The power will be removed from them, she will not be harmed.

"All power for harm no longer exists within these objects.
I carry the pain scarred within my memory,
It will not pass on to anyone else.
All strength, all power, all potential
Lies within your self,
As it is within my self,
Not within these objects.
They have been used by evil to cause great harm.
I give them to you, the healer, to mend that harm.

[Break the stone, give one piece to Joyce, keep one.]

"Each artifact I give to you was used
For a specific reason.
You learned what each was used for.
I give to you half of this stone.
It is to remind you of me,
Of my strength, of my survival,
Of my love and trust in you."

[Final words spoken to my God, Jehovah.]

"The end of the ceremony and experiencing a spiritual birth. Not a re-birth, but a birth.
"God, you are my creator.

I renounce all connection with Lug,
With the Keltoi,
With all that is evil or wicked.
I beg You to forgive my sins
Cleansing my mind, my soul and spirit.
I thank You for the gift of my life.
Poisoned by my parents, not by You.
I thank you for my multiple mind,
Which saved me,
And ask that You give me wholeness.
I thank You for the preciousness
Of my music and ask the opportunity
To praise You with it.
God, You are my Father now,
You are my mother.
I am a newborn.
Free at last to love You.
There is no gift that I can give you
Other than the music which lives within my soul.
But nothing I can create matches your magnificence
Or expresses my yearning,
No music comes to adorn this ceremony.
As it should be and must be,
I stand before You silent.
The one who walked beside me on this journey,
She and I stand in this desert,
And all around the melody of the universe
In all of its grandness and simpleness
Lives.
We become one with the grit beneath our feet,
The dust in the air,
The burning embers, the scented smoke,
We become one with the birds and lizards
The mesquite trees, the saguaro;
We raise our gaze to the outline of the sky
Against the grace of the mountains here;
And we become one with the music of the spheres,
The melody of Your universe,
The Music that is You."

As Nyah spoke the words and carried out the ceremonial acts of removing and burning the symbols of the Keltoi, she became more open to herself and her thoughts. No longer did the Old One, the matriarch of the Keltoi and an introject, dominate her thoughts with threats of death and mutilation. Though the Old One introject did not disappear, her powerful stronghold lessened, and Nyah was able to accept that the *real* Old One was dead, and that the only Old One who remained was an Old One alter. Nyah's musician's block, which had plagued her for weeks, began to weaken. She found that she was able to compose and play her music without fear that her musical ability would vanish or be stolen by members of the Keltoi who were inside her. Perhaps most significantly, she applied to college at age thirty-three, and was accepted on a full academic scholarship.

Certainly, the therapeutic work which Nyah did prior to the ceremony was essential to her progress. But the memories of the Keltoi haunted her daily. She was obsessed with

their rituals, sacrifices, and control held over her by her mother, father, and the malevolent alters. She was all too familiar with the internalized commands of self-mutilation and self-sacrifice whenever she spoke of her involvement with the Keltoi. Through the use of the ceremony, Nyah took control over the inside persecutory alters and her external life.

CONCLUSION

Nyah's story is dramatic. Not all ceremonies are this elaborate, or result in such personal change. But for patients who cannot seem to overcome the perseveration of specific traumatic events, ceremony can offer some relief by creating an experience which can bring closure to the unresolved memory. Behavior rests on certain basic premises; therefore, its meaning is unique to its creator. Thus, there is no absolute treatment form or theoretical framework which can be universally applied to the client. Therapeutic rituals acknowledge the unique quality of the individual's life experience. Because the ceremonies require time, creativity, and dedication, they respect each client's singularity. By having the client design the ceremony, the therapist incorporates the individual in the treatment procedure. This technique gives the person the power to take charge of the healing process while permitting the client and therapist to move closer to an amelioration of the early childhood traumatic injury.

Therapy is a personal experience which acknowledges and validates the individual's life story or myth. The ritual must be closely linked with the myth to insure effectiveness. The symbols, creative media, written passages, and location of the rite are the corrective measures by which the client cleanses the wounds of the past and stimulates the healing in the present. Ceremony is effective because it is the vehicle by which the individual actively demonstrates an acknowledgment of past trauma and proclaims a willingness to seize health.

For those individuals who state that they have suffered years of destructive ritualistic abuse, cleansing rites enable the person to cast off the power of the cultic myth and embrace the healing energy of the treatment process. Then, as the rehabilitation of the psyche grows, the client is able to delve deeper into the forbidden world of memories. As the layers of trauma are uncovered, the survivor may utilize another rite or ceremony to further the healing process. Each rite allows the person to take leave of the traumatic past while permitting the movement toward personal growth and freedom.

The use of ceremony and the understanding of the personal myth assist the client in reclaiming his/herself from a frightening, unsafe world. The type of ritual used for a specific phase of treatment is dependent upon the information which emerges and the strength of the alters to handle the material. When the alters are fragile, young, or severely handicapped, the therapist might consider assisting the alter to age or overcome perceived weakness through a rite of passage (i.e., going into the forest [in the mind] with no map and only personal skills to find a way out). Physical handi-

caps and constraints such as bindings with chains or ropes can be overcome with healing and cleansing rites performed by the mystical or religious alters. Thus the client can overcome the restraints of the inner world with ceremony. The model of self-healing then serves as the paradigm for recovery throughout the various phases of treatment.

The multiple personality client and ritualistic abuse survivor are in exile from themselves and their personal freedom. Many are estranged from their families of origin and any true loving support system. For some of these clients, the therapist is the first trustworthy, accepting individual who is willing to assist them in the journey toward self-acceptance and recovery. As Joseph Campbell states:

Each carries within himself the all; therefore it may be sought and discovered within. The differentiation of sex, age, and occupation are not essential to our character, but mere costumes which we wear for a time on the stage of the world.... Yet such designations do not tell what it is to be man.... What is at the core of us? What is the basic character of our being? (Campbell, 1973, p. 385)

Healing, cleansing, and rite of passage ceremonies combined with personal myth explored through psychodynamic psychotherapy allow the person to delve into the questions of basic character and to map the way toward health and freedom from terrifying pasts. By teaching the client how to develop a self-healing, cleansing, or rite of passage which leads to overcoming traumatic memories based in the personal myth, the therapist empowers the client to take control of his/her life both during the therapeutic journey and beyond. ■

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