

Being Merciful with Oneself

Beate Rossmannith

Working in a psychiatric clinic with a clear Christian profile, one ethical question in our work is how we can integrate forms of psychotherapy that have been developed in a context of secular relativism, like psychoanalysis or behavioural therapy, or more modern forms of therapy in a context of a certain kind of western «esoteric Buddhism» into a Christian world view.

I want to demonstrate, that it is not only possible to use these forms of therapy in a Christian context, but that Christianity also highlights and promotes these forms of therapy. Psychotherapy is essentially dealing with one's own soul. These forms of therapy can help us in our spiritual growth and inner healing, especially through simply «accepting» ourselves¹. Christianity takes us to the next level by adding «mercy».

There is much evidence of the positive impact of faith on the therapeutic process, especially regarding the attachment relationship, which seems to be the most important effective factor.² In this article I will concentrate on the theoretical background of a Christian approach to three forms of therapy: 1) Psychoanalysis according to C. G. Jung³; 2) Cognitive Biases; and 3) The Inner Child.

1. Psychoanalysis according to C.G. Jung

C. G. Jung's theory, the «Shadow Aspect» or «Shadow Archetype» refers in short words to the aspect of the personality, which the conscious ego does not identify with one-

self⁴. That is, because as children we stand under the look of our parents, friends, society, norms, rules, laws, religions etc. Some parts of our personality are acceptable regarding these people and norms, but some parts are not. A little child does not know how to solve this problem and the only solution remaining is to split the unwanted parts and repress them into the unconscious. In that way the child can see him or herself as good and acceptable «in the eyes of the world». This acceptable part is called by Jung «Persona». However, as we grow, self-recognition develops: Increasingly, we get to know that we are not as perfect as we thought ourselves to be. That can be quite shocking and the first solution is to fight the «evil» shadow like the good knight fights a dragon. The only problem with that is, being part of ourselves, we cannot kill the «dragon» without destroying ourselves. That means, not killing, but integrating the Shadow into the Persona. C. G. Jung saw the Shadow as evil and said that evil should be integrated in our personality. Does that mean we have to integrate evil? Of course, from a Christian standpoint, we cannot, we must not do that. The point is that the Shadow is not essentially evil; it is only the aspect of our personality that is rejected by people and norms. Moreover, It is rejected by what we think people and norms think of it. Ultimately the Shadow is the part of our personality which is rejected by ourselves. What is the solution to that problem?

From a Christian standpoint we can say, being created by God, the Shadow is, as well as our



Psychiatrist and
Psychotherapist,
Bioethicist.

«bright side» essentially good. The problem is that we judge ourselves not according to what God says and how He looks at us, but by what the world says and how it looks at us⁵. This causes us to hide anxiously before the world what seems unwanted and evil. We put ourselves under the look of man –and end up with fear of man. If we start to put ourselves under the look of the Lord, we will end up with fear of the Lord– the beginning of wisdom.

In that way we slowly stop condemning ourselves and come to a more loving embrace and in the end to a more merciful relationship with ourselves. Only, if we love ourselves as God loves us, can we then properly love our neighbours.

2. Cognitive biases

An important aspect of cognitive behavioural therapy is the cognitive restructuring of irrational or maladaptive thoughts, known as cognitive biases⁶. Being developed in a philosophical context of relativism, in behavioural therapy the question of «right and wrong» is not important, rather the question of «Does it work?» is significant. The problem here is: Can we exclude the question of right and wrong? Surely not. Yet, as people normally consider their own cognitions, as weird as they may seem, as true, it does not help in therapy to tell them that they are wrong, because the more central the thoughts are to a personality, by questioning the cognitions you question that very personality and therefore the patient as a human person. To defend themselves, they build up a psychological resistance. By excluding, at least at first the question of right and wrong, the patient would not experience a threat towards his person and it is far easier for him to get involved in a therapeutic process that leads him to a more constructive attitude towards life. However, from a Christian standpoint, the question of right and wrong remains, and

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that is not only about correct or false. It is the question about the truth being Jesus himself who said, «I am the way, the truth and the life»⁷. Furthermore, the question of a biased view of the world in a religious context is not only the question of functionality, but the danger of following the one who is the «father of the lie»⁸, that is the devil. Therefore, from a Christian standpoint these cognitive distortions are not only a dysfunctional way of living, but ultimately believing in the

lies of the devil. By believing these «false» thoughts we condemn ourselves and live a life at least below the standards of the Lord⁹.

The ultimate remedy against lies is truth. And the truth is: We are good no matter what – because we are children of God.

Recognizing this truth is indeed the most merciful act towards ourselves, not

only, because it is a positive statement but because truth will set us free¹⁰.

As Christians, we are then able not only to replace slowly our maladaptive thoughts by more useful ones, but we can reject the lies of the devil in the name of Jesus and proclaim, again in the name of Jesus, the truth. In my personal experience as a psychotherapist that truly promotes healing in believers.

3. The Inner Child

The term «Inner Child» has manifold therapeutic applications, especially in holistic health settings. The concept of the Inner Child belongs to an imaginative approach to inner worlds of experience. Even if C. G. Jung is referred to as the originator of the Child Archetype, the «Inner Child» is mainly known by the books of John Bradshaw and Erika Chopich/Margaret Paul¹¹. It symbolises the recorded feelings, memories and experiences of the own childhood.

As the more central part of our brain, the limbic system thinks more in pictures and

symbols than in abstract cognitions, with the imagination of the Inner Child we have a more existential approach to our own past experiences and the consequences for our present life. Imagining that Inner Child, especially the wounded Inner Child, can help us to re-embrace our rejected parts of our personality, to calm ourselves and develop a more vivid and open attitude towards life.

If we now go back to the concept of «Persona» and «Shadow», it is as if we had two children in us: one who is like a most beloved prince or princess, while the other is like an abandoned orphan, an orphan not living in a well-kept orphanage but on the streets of a third world country. Such a child will do simply anything, in order, to survive: steal, lie, manipulate, rape, prostitute, kill, and take drugs... And that is the source of our bad behaviour, a behaviour we do not want to show but that somehow just happens again and again. Of course, as Christians we must confess our sins and seek the forgiveness of God. But we must also address the source of that behaviour. Like in the case of a real street child, the solution is not to eliminate the child, but the problem that led the child to that behaviour: Being abandoned by his or her parents. In the case of the Inner Child, the parent in question is not our «real» mother or father, but the adult that we are now. That means, that we, as rational and responsible adults must re-embrace the Inner Child that we have so long abandoned. If we imagine a person of 46 years who had rejected a part of his or her personality when he or she has been six years old, we would have an inner child of six years, abandoned for 40 years – by oneself. Will such a child trust the inner adult immediately? Surely not. The relationship has to be built up very carefully, with a lot of patience and also a lot of forgiveness. However, that does not mean that you can accept wrong behaviour in that Inner Child. Like a real child, he or she does not only have to be cuddled but also to be disciplined, but in a loving and merciful way.

Our wounded and weak side is not the «bad» side. In fact, the «Persona» is not better off, being a prince or princess only in the eyes of

the world – and not in the eyes of our loving heavenly father. As the world is so capricious in its moods, luck can change quickly. So the little prince or princess has always to fight to remain the beloved child. Therefore this side of our personality does not feel loved just because it is, but because of its works and merits. If that functions, this side becomes arrogant, being outwardly as good as can be. Let us remember: Jesus did not have so many problems with the obvious sinners. He had much more trouble with the Pharisees: outwardly the perfect religious people, they only wanted to be good in the eyes of the people. That being challenged by Jesus, it was them who wanted to kill him. The obvious sinners on the other side knew that they needed him and received healing and forgiveness. Our weak and unwanted side is like these sinners: this side of us knows that we need him. Therefore, it can become our doorway to God, the escape of the even greater sin of pride.

Andrea Adams-Frey, a Christian singer, wrote the following song about these two sides of us:

I both / Be quiet, you, be silent, you've got no right to say anything, you are ugly, too small and full of fear. / Be quiet, for I want a very great hero and not what you demand now. / I think I am a star, and you are in my way. / I wished, you weren't there at all, if I think properly about it. / I was for a long time silent, hidden behind walls, ugly, too small and full of fear. / But you know, I don't want to cower here anymore, don't you realize what you demand?! / I was always a nothing, worthless, despised, misunderstood. / You the star in the limelight - / But God gave to me his hand. / You need me, I need you. I think, / God wants to show something to us both: / Originally / We have been one¹².

Psychotherapy helps us to be more accepting of ourselves. Yet, for receiving more mercy, we must go to the ultimate source of grace, who is our heavenly father.

How could we be more merciful with ourselves? By bringing our inward experiences, our

thoughts, emotions, our good and our bad sides into the light of Jesus, the son of the eternal father. He will bless them all and with his help, we will be able to integrate our entire being so that we become who the father has meant us to be: His beloved Children and heirs of the Kingdom of God¹³.

NOTE

¹ As the doctoral dissertation of S. FRIEDRICH-KILLINGER, *Die Bindungsbeziehung zu Gott Ein dynamischer Wirkfaktor in der Therapie?*, K. VERLAG, Hamburg (2014) demonstrates, the attachment relationship towards God fulfills not only the criteria of an attachment relationship but does in fact, based on the foundation of attachment, improve the therapeutical outcome of a patient.

² S. FRIEDRICH-KILLINGER: *Die Bindungsbeziehung zu Gott Ein dynamischer Wirkfaktor in der Therapie?*, Verlag Dr. Kovač, Hamburg (2014).

³ See S. MURRAY, C. G. *Jungs Landkarte der Seele: Eine Einführung*, Patmos Verlag; 6. Auflage 2015, chapter 5: Das Enthüllte und das Verborgene in der Beziehung zur Außenwelt (Persona und Schatten)

⁴ According to Jung, the «Persona» is not completely identical with the «I»; there is also an autonomous, subconscious dimension. The «Persona» is more the functional outward and ideal part of the «I», the aspect that makes interaction smoother and gives the feeling of being «good».

⁵ See J. HARTL: *Unter Gottes Blick*, Gebetshaus e.V.

⁶ See M. WENGENROTH, *Das Leben annehmen*, Huber, Bern, 1. Auflage, (28. März 2008), chapter 5: Abstand zu den Gedanken.

⁷ John 14:6.

⁸ John 8:44.

⁹ See C. THURMAN, *Lügen, die wir glauben*, Gerth Medien; Auflage: Nachdruck. (7. Januar 1991).

¹⁰ John 8:32

¹¹ See E. J. CHOPICH, M. PAUL, *Aussöhnung mit dem inneren Kind*, Ullstein Taschenbuch; Auflage: 26 (2009).

¹² English translation from German original: Ich beide / Sei ruhig, du, sei still, du hast nichts zu melden, du bist hässlich, zu klein und voll Angst. / Sei still, denn ich will einen ganz großen Helden, und nicht das, was du jetzt verlangst. / Ich glaube, ich bin ein Star, und du bist mir dabei im Weg. / Ich wünschte, du wärst gar nicht da, wenn ich's mir recht überleg. / Ich war lange still, versteckt hinter Mauern, hässlich, zu klein und voll Angst. / Doch weißt du, ich will hier nicht mehr kauern, merkst du nicht, was du verlangst?! / Ich war zwar immer ein Nichts, wertlos, verachtet, verkannt. / Du der Star im Rampenlicht – / Doch Gott gab mir seine Hand. / Du brauchst mich, ich brauche Dich. / Gott will uns beiden, glaub ich, was zeigen: / Ursprünglich / Warn wir mal eins. In Album: *Aus der Tiefe*, Text and Music: ANDREA ADAMS-FREY, ©2001 FREYKLANG adm. by Gerth Medien, Asslar, Germany.

¹³ See U. WILLMEROOTH & U. RODERUS, *Berufen zum Königskind*, ASAPH-Verlag, 2. Auflage 2013; B. MANNING, *Kind in seinen Armen: Gott als Vater erfahren*, SCM R. Brockhaus; Auflage: 7 (15. Oktober 2013).