

Depression and Submission: The Enemy of Our Time

The session begins with a deadly sense of silence. Members seem to have very little to say to one another. There are some comments about the political situation, which seems only to lead to despair and hopelessness. One member talks about a recommendation in the use of Zoom. She commented that it really works when she doesn't pay too much attention to the face, but just listens to the voice and the energy that it carries. Other members conclude that they have more success in working with patients by telephone than Zoom. Finally, a member volunteers to present a case.

The woman patient is in her early sixties. She is Jewish and married to a man who has long standing depression. The patient is currently having a very erotic affair by telephone and zoom with an ultraconservative Non-Jew. They fight a good deal about politics, for the patient is far more liberal in her belief system. Her "lover" is not Jewish and lives in another part of the country. The affair is erotic, but they do not have any sexual contact. The fighting seems to serve as a source of excitement. The husband does not know of this affair. The therapist reports how stuck she is. The patient reports very little about her family of origin, with the exception that they were good people. The patient stays very close to the reporting of this affair, but it has a circular endless quality.

We roleplay as patient and therapist. The affair with a very prejudiced and racist individual must say something about her. She defends any internal investigation and does not see how her affair has anything to do with her religion, background, or her internal rage. I feel increasingly pessimistic as I try to find new areas of confrontation. Slowly, in the roleplaying, I feel exhausted and want to give up. My hunch is that we are replaying the early childhood experience of giving up and surrendering to depression, for there is no way out with such good people but to submit and take care of them. The eroticism of today is the way she deals with her own internal depression. The patient superficially agrees, but makes no connection with any of the other issues in her life. I comment that I surrender to her system of denial and rationalization. My submission must, I believe, and I say this out loud, have something to do with her. We stop the role playing and the therapist recognizes that she has not shared her internal process in working with this patient. She has flattened some of her own anger, her passivity, and her struggle to be alive in the interaction.

We all share a sense of passivity and helplessness in feeling that our future can change. It seems that nothing can be worked out in the present system. I commented that the enemy is hopelessness and despair. You give up fighting and your own aggression and anger,

and you too give up life and look for something to take away your pain. We are all struggling within this mess. Much is happening in a very short time, and it feels overwhelming. If we give up, and we draw into passivity, we become like the good German in a Nazi period of our history. Not daring to combat for fear of our own lives. The problem with this patient represents a problem of our times. The struggle to fight and confront in spite of overwhelming problems becomes an emotional necessity. Giving up is akin to submerging oneself into death.