

INSIDE OUT: PATTERNS OF INITIATION AND  
BARRIERS TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

RUNING HEAD: Patterns of Initiation

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss barriers to change in society. I suggest that the lack of religious and spiritual values and Eros [relatedness] glue are significant barriers to change in our present secular age and consumer society. I suggest that creative individuals are the source of change and that there is a need to be aware of both destructive and creative forces at work and not to be naïve about the former. I then discuss patterns of initiation and indicate that they are still alive in the unconscious and often compel young people to live them out unconsciously and destructively. I argue that there is a need to recognize these patterns and not doing so there is a third barrier to change. I finally observe there is a need to turn towards a truth beyond the ego, and the failure to do that is a fourth barrier to change in contemporary society.

## INSIDE OUT: PATTERNS OF INITIATION AND BARRIERS TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

### Introduction

I was asked to give a talk on "barriers to change" to a group of counselors and others involved in working with youth and their families. Usually what people are looking for are behavioral techniques or insight into attitudinal barriers which, when applied, lead to improved functioning. Perhaps one can find counsel for dissolving attitudinal and behavioral barriers to change here in what I say. But to focus on that misses the point.

The main theme of this paper is that for true renewal, even of community, there is a need for individuals to turn inside to a truth beyond ego. The concern then becomes not just "change," which can be relatively superficial and compensatory, but transformative change. My talk follows, slightly modified to account for an animated discussion that took place after I had given it.

I have been given some material from the Search Institute to peruse entitled "Healthy Communities: Healthy Youth." I assume that you are all aware of this project and that it informs the work you do here at Coastal Community Services. May I, at the outset, applaud you for your initiatives? When societies and cultures break down, there is surely a need for repair at the level of families and community.

This task, however, seems to be singularly difficult. Although there are efforts to become community conscious today, it seems to have more to do with commercial centers and, perhaps, recreation than anything else. Divorce rates are 45% and above

and many younger people are postponing marriage until they are established professionally and are simply living common law, often without much long term commitment. There are lots of influences today that do not encourage healthy relationships. Chief amongst them is a value hierarchy that puts individual self-fulfillment, that is to say, ego fulfillment at the top of the list. This is a narcissistic position that is doomed to failure. It represents a radical deviation from the view that marriage is an important institution with a sacred significance that has more to do with sacrifice than ego-fulfillment.

Meanwhile, for adults, the most frequently diagnosed psychological diseases of our time, and growing, are depression and depression related. Anxiety and stress are also prevalent. A surprising number of children and adolescents also suffer accordingly. In addition, there is a startling increase in the diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Moreover, as you know, street violence is also increasing, even amongst young women. There is, in other words, loss of energy or misdirected energy, for many, especially adults, and wildly excessive energy for some of our children and adolescents. These are two sides of the same coin; our youth unconsciously carry our unlived lives.

### Barriers to Change

I lived in India for about 3 years between 1969 and 1973, and I went back for a visit last year, after some 25 years. Although there is more wealth there now than previously, India is a country with an overwhelmingly large population and extreme poverty. Yet,

there is social glue that we hardly realize exists any more. Large extended families provide the foundation for a social cohesiveness that impresses itself powerfully on people's lives. It forms such a contrast to the individualistic life patterns and fragmenting nuclear families that we are used to over here.

A second factor of even more central importance is the hold that religion and spiritual values have on people everywhere in India as a living reality. You find ordinary village folk engaged in devotional exercises and even practicing meditation. You don't have to be a yuppie to meditate over there. I once saw a termite hill strewn with flowers, transformed into a kind of temple of the earth.

Perhaps this religious and spiritual activity shouldn't seem so odd; but it is to our eyes. The first two barriers to transformative change, then, is the existential poverty of Eros [love] that provides glue for family and community, along with a paucity of sacred and spiritual values. A sense of the sacredness of life is certainly not central to be the way most people conduct their affairs today. Even if it is for isolated individuals and groups, there is little concern over how this involves the community at large.

In fact, one could articulate the problem we all face today as how to marry individuals and their drive to be themselves with the needs of the community. Both ego individualism and the drive for [ego] self-fulfillment, and an ego imbued with social interest are each ultimately ego-centric. They are not the answer. Yet they represent the unconscious assumptions behind the way most people in our competitive

consumer-society live today, especially ego individualism with its self-interest.

In Ancient Greece, and I suspect all societies that are closely connected to their instinctual roots, there was the understanding that cosmos is the work of creative individuals, that is to say, that cultures and communities are formed thanks to the work of creative people. If you consider the long-term impact of great art, religion and thought on people's lives, this idea should be easy enough to accept. The world we live in today still reverberates with influences that poured out of the hearts and minds of creative geniuses of the Renaissance.

Primal cultures also understood that some individuals can be particularly evil and instruments for dark and destructive forces. This shouldn't be too hard to accept either. All we need to do is study the lives and personalities of certain charismatic individuals who have created chaos and destroyed life and lives over the past 80 years or so.

But our democratic way of thinking and certain humanistic assumptions, for instance, that humans are essentially good, still cloud our understanding. In this light, I was interested to read in an article in the Times Colonist [Thursday, April 29, 1998] that the Dalai Lama is beginning to admit that "nonviolence" is not working for him and his people, although he remains a political moderate. Perhaps he has gained a fuller appreciation of the intractable nature of evil. I would like to think so.

In fact it is worthwhile, I believe, to reflect upon the ambiguous nature of evil and the fact

that its presence is not always so easy to discern. Both geographical and historical cultural relativity clouds the issue. A study of the essential nature of evil, however, reveals, that it involves all manner of falsehood, ignorance, an ethos of death and destructiveness of both life and culture, and the infliction of pain and suffering. It seems to be associated with either a total absence of love and Eros, that is to say relatedness or its gross perversion along with an excessively self-absorbed willfulness.

To understand this phenomenon, I recommend movies such as Stalin with Robert Duval playing the soviet leader, and a movie called The Apostle, again with Robert Duval as the lead character. His depiction of the psychopathic character structure is extraordinary. Stalin is an historically accurate dramatization of a man who killed untold millions and who severely oppressed his people through a reign of terror. Here, one has the sense of being faced with evil beyond human understanding. In the Apostle, Duval plays the role of a charismatic preacher with a dubious conscience.

Individuals are the source of both creative and destructive behavior that has far-reaching effects. This, in itself, justifies an intense focus on individuals and their psycho-spiritual status even for the sake of the community. There is a more profound justification, and that is that individuation, the urge to be one's unique self, which includes one's responsibility to the community, is an instinct that is rooted in the very depths of one's being. It is an instinct that can be either nourished or repressed. Totalitarian and fundamentalist pressures including excessive concern over political correctness represses individuation. So does a one-sided emphasis on science and technology and

commercial values which, in fact, is directly responsible for creating the post-modern confusion of contemporary life. Ethical, spiritual, creative and other forces that promote freedom encourage it.

### Patterns of Initiation

A couple of weeks ago I met a woman who was wearing a badge on her jacket that read "character is destiny." I remarked on it to her, saying: "well that's an interesting message. People don't realize that much any more, do they?" She responded by saying: "Oh it's getting better. More money is being given to help out the socially disadvantaged." I didn't say anything more, but she mixes up, many people mix up, what one might call a social attitude with the ethical attitude and character development.

Character has to do with the moral or ethical mark on one's personality. We speak of people having good character or bad character. The development of good character, or simply what we call character, requires an ethical attitude, not a social attitude. It involves self-discipline and the development of will. In primal societies, including our own native tradition, imprinting character and self-discipline on children and adolescents to transform them into mature adults has been the business of initiation rites. A strong discipline is especially demanded from the young men although sometimes from young women as well. This is based on the fact that there is a need to discipline the trickster attitude and to channel unruly, scattered and aggressive energies

In passing, I can't help but observe that there is a lot of adolescent entertainment today

where the trickster attitude actually prevails, along with either sentimentality or an outpouring of these very energies. You can hear it in the music and see it in the movies, on TV and in the graffiti. The result is that a kind of emotional chaos is encouraged, and not self-discipline which is what is actually instinctually required.

Typically there are three stages to initiation: separation, transition including trials of strength and vision quests, and incorporation. There is then a return to secular society as a responsible contributing member. Separation is primarily directed at the young man's dependence on his mother. The period of transition is the time spent out of society basically being subjected to new learning and discipline. It not only involves the development of character, but learning about cultural values and ways along with adult responsibilities.

Incorporation involves rites that symbolize the meaningful integration of the new learning, values and ways of being. For the young man, the aim of initiation is always the renunciation of all attachments and feelings towards the mother, and the identification with the world of the Father that is to say with will and purpose, and one's role in society. You know how, in our culture, young men in their teens often begin to show animosity towards their mothers or even aggressively reject her. This can be understood as an unconscious desire and need to separate themselves from their mother and all she stands for, to find their own path in life. In other cases, where young men are reluctant to grow up and take on more mature responsibility in life, there is often rejection of authority and defiance demonstrated toward the personal father, as well as clinging to the mother

and the comforts she provides.

Indeed, the initiatory pattern, which we do not consciously encourage in our culture, is alive and well in the unconscious, flowing like an underground current. Many adolescents find themselves compelled to live it out one way or another, sometimes in a perverse, even destructive way. Leaving home, for instance, may be a way to live out the rite of separation, the rite of transition may be lived in a marginal semi-conscious state, possibly on the streets or in gangs or living in a mixed commune of some form. There may even be a self-chosen initiatory leader or leaders like in the Lord of the Flies. The audacious hair styles, tattooing, other body decorations and dress styles, along with the rhythmic sound of the aboriginal drum are all reminiscent of primal cultures and initiatory patterns that are seeping in through the unconscious. So, too, incidentally is the intense involvement and interest in competition and sports.

In the initiation rites of the Gisu tribe in Uganda, for instance, the rite of separation includes shaven heads covered in ashes to represent death of ego attachment to the mother. The rite of transition includes exercises like wrestling competitions in order to curb and channel aggressive and brutal male energy. For the Masai people, birds are hunted in order to gather colorful feathers for the creation of headdresses, which the initiate wears as his hair grows back in. This symbolism seems to indicate that there is a rebirth, of values and ways of being suggested by the new hair, which connects the young man to the sacred and the transpersonal world of the spirit, represented by the feathers.

Being compelled to live the initiation pattern unconsciously, including excessive alcohol and drug use, actually keeps people dependent and does not encourage the development of will necessary for psychological maturity. It keeps one tied to the mother psychologically and not separated as the initiatory pattern actually requires. I see in people's dreams, for instance, that even marijuana and alcohol can be associated with psychological slovenliness, lowering of ego awareness and escape.

The specifically feminine aspect of the initiatory pattern for young women involves not a full separation from the mother as nature demands for young men, but a cycle of separation and return and containment. It begins with the initial onset of menstruation and ends with marriage. It involves solitude and/or association with a few women during periods of menstruation and the learned recognition of one's connection to all women, even all nature. Young women finding companionship in small groups of other young women, or seeking a relationship or mentorship from an older woman, reflect this initiatory pattern. Living in a mixed group of young men and young women dilutes it.

The third barrier to transformative change, then, is that we generally do not recognize these patterns and do little to encourage the necessary discipline and understanding. The result is that individuals often enter adult life emotionally confused and purposeless, and they consequently lead a provisional, uncommitted life. Needless to say, inasmuch as one naturally lives these initiatory patterns, one does find purpose and direction. The work that you do here and the Search Institute initiatives, as I understand them, would, of course, help considerably for these patterns to be realized in the lives of some youth that

would otherwise develop what Eric Erikson calls negative identity.

Even when these initiatory patterns are encouraged, however, there is generally one serious omission, that is, the lack of reference to the sacred. The extraordinary fact that there is reticence or little conception of the deep need to tie the initiate, that is the young person's life to the sacred and the ancestral spirit or traditional values is a basic reason why the culture as a whole is adrift. In traditional cultures, when individuals are going through initiation they are in sacred space and time. The belief that individual lives and cultures can be remade at will, without reference to our spiritual and cultural heritage is a malady of the soul that is tightly interwoven throughout the fabric of our society. It is a deep prejudice of our consumer-oriented scientific age, including cognitively biased therapies, which dominate today.

Along these lines, I was intrigued to read in the Times Colonist just recently [Monday, April 27, 1998, p A3] about the comments of a Victoria police officer, Sgt. Green. Over the past year, he and some of his colleagues have been introduced to a few local native healing traditions. He is quoted as saying "Everyone blames everyone else for the rise of violent crime in our society, but we've taken spirituality out of our culture. We lock up our people in old folk's home. Children don't benefit from the wisdom of the elders." Whatever Sgt. Green may understand by spirituality and wisdom of the elders, something of what I am alluding to is coming through here!

The pattern of initiation wants fulfillment--- if not at the naturally appointed time, then,

later on in life. In fact, people live psychologically confused lives until it does find fulfillment, even when they are materially and socially successful. Although it is preferable for these patterns to be realized when one is younger, all is not lost should that not happen. The advantage to people who become conscious of these patterns later in life is they can do so as part of their inner drive for consciousness, and prepare themselves for more spiritual initiations and individuation.

Initiatory patterns, today, are expressed in dreams, as if to insist on their adaptive nature. Experiments have been done on cats where the part of the brain, which prevents them from living out their dreams, is cut. This forces the animal to act out its dreams. What is expressed is stalking, pouncing, killing and eating prey, that is to say, survival behavior. There is reason to believe that dreams rehearse and prepare humans for survival and adaptive behavior as well. When a culture encourages these patterns to be lived out, they relate people instinctually to mature behavior. Indeed, as a Jungian psychologist, I have the fortune to be privy to people's dreams, and I am often presented with material that has initiatory significance.

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From what I have tried to present you here tonight, the importance of individual responsibility and focus on the individual for renewal of society, culture and community should be obvious. But, it is very long-term task and doesn't come with the clash of cymbals. It is organic, not very obvious, and not subject to outcome studies, especially of a short-term nature. It requires individuals turning inwards to a truth beyond the ego. The fact that most people aren't concerned about this possibility is the fourth barrier to

transformative change.

Despite the four barriers to change that I have indicated: (1) the lack of family and social glue: (2) the lack of interest in the sacredness of life and desire to be connected to it: (3) the lack of awareness of initiatory patterns: and (4) the lack of interest in turning inwards to a truth beyond the ego, we actually live in propitious times. There is a deep constellation of a transpersonal force for renewal that is slowly but surely making its way into the lives of contemporary individuals and society. I know that from my studies of the great spiritual and cultural leaders of our time. As a Jungian-depth psychologist, I also know it first-hand from what I see in the lives of many of my clients.

What I have described as the first three barriers to transformative change are, of course, the status quo, the way things are. How can we help dissolve them? - By taking the time to access that force of renewal. By staying with the conditions of one's life and not escaping them. - By turning within. By coming to terms with the fourth barrier to transformative change and by turning inwards to a truth beyond the ego, everything else ultimately falls into place. It is a question of inside out.