

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS: SOME REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATION

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In my presidential address I discussed the way transformation has been used in psychoanalysis from its earliest times to the present. It is more than change and less than a metamorphosis. Essentially it is a radical change in appearance or nature as contrasted with a superficial change.

Regardless of orientation, psychoanalysis always sought a transformation in the person. Generally speaking it has sought a radical change in character, self system, and self actualization: changes which reflect a higher level of functioning. From Freud's dictum, "Where id was ego shall be", to the current emergence of relational psychoanalysis a transformation is sought the nature of which depends upon the ethos and viewpoint of the particular orientation.

I briefly reviewed a number of ways that transformation has been used. By analogy, it has been used to refer to the change that takes place from a caterpillar to a butterfly. In this illustration there is a period of gestation in a cocoon in which the person is neither one nor the other and in which the protective environment, holding environment, is essential to the transformation.

Loewald indicates that the very act of interpretation transforms what is being interpreted. He also believes that psychoanalysis transforms "ghosts into ancestors" and in doing so frees the person from being bound to the past while at the same time being able to acknowledge the past. Bion suggests that each expression of an analyst and patient (sufferer) is an attempt at transforming meaning i.e., articulating what heretofore has been inexpressible. In a previous presentation I stated that the transformation from fate into destiny occurs when the internalized objects lose their compelling power thus permitting a new experience.

I discussed a number of clinical examples to illustrate what I meant by a transformation. Since a transformation may take place through life experience independent of psychoanalysis, I referred to Lance Armstrong, who has won the Tour de France for the last five years. He attributes his success to his change resulting from a successful treatment of testicular cancer. His experience of his mortality transformed his way of functioning. He got married, had children, and became more motivated as a cyclist.

I discussed the transformation within myself as a result of doing psychoanalysis. A patient can only grow to the extent that the analyst can be in touch with the patient's experience. To be empathic means being able to move beyond one's own experience and to experience the world from another's viewpoint. To the extent that we can means enlarging our horizons and experiences. I indicated how in retiring from a professorial role, and becoming solely the clinical practitioner, I became more able to be engaged in the patient's and my experience.