

EDITORIAL

At the time of writing, the world is absorbing one of the biggest setbacks for many years to any sense of overall cultural progress. It is becoming apparent that the United States now institutionally endorses torture as a tool of policy. (Anyone who doubts this should look at Mark Danner's two recent articles in the *New York Review of Books*, also available on his Web site (Danner, 2004).) By the time this is read it is very possible that far worse revelations will have emerged.

Combining this development with other phenomena – like the accelerating rate of climate change, and the complete inability of the global political classes to take it seriously; the general degradation of the environment, the extinction of species, the constant eruption of new damage and threats of damage to the planet; the equally endemic spread of large-scale and small-scale violence around the world; the almost universal oppression of women and children; and the continuing omnipresence of poverty and its evil twin, greed – there is much reason to despair about our future. And despair, of course, in a vicious downward spiral, breeds apathy, self-centredness and denial. Despair makes it hard for activists to keep going, and hard for most of us to become activists. Shying away from the pain, we shy away from life.

But despair encountered and endured has a tremendous treasure in it; and psychotherapy knows this, knows that often

the only way forward is *through* our pain, rather than around it, and that when we can allow ourselves to directly experience our 'unbearable' feelings, they tend to transform. This knowledge is generally applied only on the personal level, in the consulting room; but it is also a vital political understanding. The willingness to tolerate and sit with despair is one of psychotherapy's contributions to political life. Joanna Macy – not herself a psychotherapist – has for years been exploring the encounter with despair in her work around rekindling the activist spark, often referred to as 'Despair and Empowerment' (see, for example, Macy, 1983).

I am writing this editorial having just returned from the first UK Ecopsychology Gathering at Laurieston Hall in Scotland (www.ecopsych.org.uk). We had to face a good deal of despair at points during the week: despair both about the planetary situation, and also sometimes about our own ability to cooperate creatively, out of our very different perspectives, in developing a self-structured event. The latter, in fact, seemed to stand as a continuous metaphor for the former: the difficulty human beings experience in making sane decisions is one of the most fundamental issues that ecopsychology addresses.

However, most of us seemed to come away from the week with a deepened optimism – not a superficial fantasy that these huge problems can be solved without loss

and pain, but the hopefulness that flows from an open, broken heart: from a reconnection with spirit. Andrew Samuels' paper in this issue of PPI begins to address spirituality in the same way that he has for years addressed politics: to articulate its intrinsic connection with the whole project of psychotherapy. To go back to the roots of this whole strange enterprise, and discover there such ignored and devalued elements as the political, the spiritual, and the bodily.

This is only one of the powerful and passionate contributions to this issue. Nancy Hollander's and Rachael Peltz's papers – both originally delivered at the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy conference in Santa Monica – explore from different and complementary angles what is happening psychologically in the United States at the moment – what Hollander calls the 'primitive mental states' that are controlling American foreign policy. Apart from the intrinsic importance of this situation to all our futures, these twin analyses also demonstrate psychotherapy's capacity usefully to explore large-scale political and social processes. As Peltz argues, psychotherapy needs to extend its theories beyond the family triad to larger social groupings; and both of these papers take large strides in that direction.

The second part of Sandra Bloom's epic exploration of societal trauma is working the same beat but delving even further into the ways in which humans give up their inherent power to authority. Bloom is trying to do something parallel to what

Freud fantasized about in *Civilization and its Discontents*: to apply the lessons of individual trauma work to the needs of a traumatised culture. And, as a corrective to the inflation which might arise from these demonstrations of psychotherapy's power, Petruska Clarkson's furiously lucid paper reminds us of the beam in our own eye around issues of racism within the therapy world.

These papers, together with reviews and Edward Emery's 'Front Line' contribution – celebrating the life of the assassinated UN envoy in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, through an investigation of shame and violence – constitute another excellent and satisfying issue. The only dissatisfaction, again, is a shortage of material from outside the Anglo-American sphere; we would be grateful for contributions or suggestions from the wider world.

At the end of the last issue's editorial, I quoted George W Bush's extraordinary statement that 'I don't negotiate with myself'. While not wanting to become obsessed with President Bush's psychology, it is hard not to speculate around the latest revelation. When Dubya was seven, it seems, his sister died of leukaemia. His parents held no funeral.

REFERENCES

- Danner M. (Two part article.) Torture and truth, *New York Review of Books*, 10 June 2004; and The logic of torture, *New York Review of Books*, 24 June 2004. Both available online at <http://www.markdanner.com>.
- Macy J. *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age*. Philadelphia: New Society, 1987.