SPIRITUAL REFUGEE

By

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1 Introduction

Overview

There are some people who leave their native land only in order to preserve their integrity and live with honesty towards themselves. One must have, after all, a certain amount of freedom to be honest as an individual. Without this freedom there is no way for one to take responsibility for his own actions and thoughts and therefore there is no inner life, no place where one experiences himself as an ethical being. Without that private place, others are merely strangers and one is a stranger even to himself.

In a society that does not allow for the existence of individuality, the effort to become an individual invites persecution. Although this sort of persecution is not as visible as political persecution, it is nevertheless fatal to one's spiritual being, so the persecuted person becomes an exile - a spiritual refugee.   One usually goes into this sort of exile only after a sustained battle against the cultural system in which his whole life is wrapped up. The battle is painful. Wounded

and bleeding, one becomes an exile. These people I call

"spiritual refugees", and I consider myself one of them.

Being an artist and being an exile at the same time is no

coincidence, for there is an intrinsic and essential relationship

between art and the status of "refugee".   Art is the means for

searching out the truth, and creating art is itself the process of

reaching integrity.   There were times in history that art

served to glorify kings, monarchies, and churches, and to

inspire wars. But since the development earlier in the 20th

Century of "Modern art", one of the biggest revolutions in art

history, artists have started to create their own inner world.

In modern art, creating art became a psychological, analytical,

confessional truth-seeking: artists examined their own inner

reality with almost brutal honesty. This strong interest in the

inner world of the human psyche became the most

distinguishing characteristic of Modern Art. The meaning of

the word "truthfulness" as applied to art shifts away from a

concern with the accuracy of the artist's portrayal of things

outside himself, to a concern with the authenticity of the

artist's journey into his inner world. The process of creating art has thus become a process of individuation. It requires freedom because only in freedom can artists create art honestly and with integrity. For many decades now, artists have been engaged in a fight for the freedom to reach individuality -- and this is the essence of being a spiritual refugee.

2 Concept of Spiritual Refugee

According to the Convention signed at the United Nations Conference on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, Geneva, 1951, the word "refugee" is defined as a person who (1) has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or holding a political opinion, (2) is outside the country of his nationality, and (3) is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

Persecution

The key word in the definition of refugee in the Convention is "persecution" -- more precisely, "a well founded

fear of being persecuted". The reason for the persecution has to be some violation of fundamental human rights. In this way, the concept of "refugee" is related to notions of fascism, dictatorship and totalitarianism, all of which are forces destructive of human rights and individuality.   I believe that "persecution" in this same sense is an element of the notion of "spiritual refugee" even if the persecution might not involve the application of legal force in a literal sense. These are the reasons that I identify myself as a "spiritual refugee".

The varieties of persecution which refugees have had to endure is huge: their terror, their outrage, their misery, their humiliation, their pain, their remorse --- they are all beyond the power of words to express. So it seemed outrageously insensitive to use the word "refugee" for my own identity. But to formulate a concept of "spiritual refugee" is crucial for anyone whose inner life is important to him, and to accept the fact that I am a refugee is not degrading to refugees at all. Instead, it is to stand a common ground with them. To identify myself with them is to see myself naked, after all the things which I thought I had and which I thought I belonged

to, have been scraped away; and to accept this as the true base of who I am.

Concept of individuality

As a result of the Holocaust, many great thinkers inquired with a fresh urgency into the sources of fascism and totalitarianism. And seeing fascism and totalitarianism as forces destructive of individuality inevitably requires us to inquire and define the word "individuality". If the word "individuality" is confused with the word "individualism", which word often is used as a synonym of egoism, the whole point of the discussion would be completely missed.

The word "individuation" was made up by Carl Jung. He called the process of realizing the possibilities which are innate in each individual and the effort and desire to heighten those possibilities towards higher integrity and wholeness, the individuation process or "self-realization", and he considered it to be a goal of every human being.

An individuated person has fully developed his possibilities and is loving and productive. He forms spontaneous relationships with other human beings and the world. He is capable of taking a serious responsible role in the community. In fact, according to the degree of his being individuated, his participation and productive role in society increases.

But this process of individuation takes greater suffering and danger by itself than people often suspect: in no way is it painless work for any one of us.

Erich Fromm's Thesis

A philosopher, and psychologist Erich Fromm, who was himself a refugee from Nazi Germany, made it astonishingly clear in his many books how essential this individuation process is in order for people not to fall into the abyss of fascism and totalitarianism. And it is in his writings that I found the philosophical basis of my own notion of "spiritual refugee".   He described the process of individual growth as a process of cutting the "primary ties" with the mother - the

figurative umbilical cord which still fastens the child to the mother and to the outside world. This cord gives the child a sense of security and a feeling of belonging even though it restricts his freedom. Primitive societies are built on the foundation of this umbilical cord, on the strong tie to the mother --and by extension to the family and the tribe, to blood and soil; and the relationship of the individual to the world is *symbiotic.*

The process of individuating is a process of getting out of this symbiosis, this "Paradise", to reach the stage where man can be free and yet not alone, critical and yet not filled with doubt, independent and yet an integral part of mankind. This freedom can be attained only by man's being himself and actuating the spontaneous, integrated personality. [Escape from Freedom, pp 256-257.]   In order to reach that stage, each man has to go through a separation from the mother and has to stand alone and face the overwhelming reality of the world. This induces a painful feeling of insignificance in the face of the world, and leads to enormous fear and anxiety.

The process of separation is expressed in mythology as "killing the Great Mother" which Erich Neumann talks about in <u>Origins of Consciousness</u>. He says that one must kill this mythological figure, this terrifying Great Mother who swallows him up into the chaos out of which he was born. If he has not the courage to kill her he will remain tied to this mother forever, figuratively bound by the incestuous tie.   That tie frustrates the natural course of human growth, and so the incestuous attachment causes tremendous confusion, terror, rage, and guilt, and the unindividuated man begins to exhibit pathological symptoms.   He remains imprisoned in a maternal-tribal-racial-national-religious fixation.

It is often said that the unrestrained individuality of modern times has given rise to the serious problems of crime, drugs, and violence in general. But I must say that those social problems are typical symptons of *not* being individuated. For people who cannot go through the process of individuation, for whom the feeling of insignificance is too much to bear in the face of the overwhelming power of the world, and who are therefore filled with an uncontrollable

rage, the solution is to destroy others so that the world ceases to be threatening. "Destructiveness is the outcome of an unlived life", Fromm said; their violence is not the result of excessive individuation but is rather the desperate cry of the unindividuated person.

In order to avoid making the intensely difficult journey towards individuation, Fromm observes that people may choose any of three recognized "escape routes" -- all of which lead away from individuation and exacerbate the unresolved terror, rage, and sense of guilt:

    1.   <u>Submission to authority.</u> By submitting to authority, the weak individual clothes himself with the semblance of power and gains an illusional superiority over less powerful people. This is the path of sadism and masochism.

    2.   <u>Destructiveness</u>. The individual seeks to overcome his feeling of insignificance in the face of the outside world by destroying others. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the more intense becomes the drive towards destruction.

3. <u>Automaton conformity</u>. The person who gives up his identity and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel anxious or alone any more; but the price he pays is the loss of his self.

The process of individuation is a long difficult journey by itself. There is no one person who has fully completed this journey, and nor is there any society which can claim to be free from the danger of becoming fascistic or totalitarian

But Fromm affirms that there is a way to pursue individuality without falling into any of these three escape routes: a way involving a spontaneous relationship to man and nature, a relationship that connects the individual with the world, that is rooted in the integration and strength of the total personality, and the foremost expressions of which are love and productive work.

Here is the place where art can play a strong role. For art is the foremost expression of love and productive work. But not only that: I believe that creating art coincides with the process of individuation. This is *my belief.* And because

of that I also believe that the viewer can reach his own individuation by being open to the encounter with art. Both creating and viewing can be powerful forms of individuation

3.   How is this related to art?

The Process of creating art

Art has been at the center of my life since I was four years old, and my fight against fascism and my journey towards individuation have been carried on through the process of artistic creation.   Carried downward by the artist impulse as by a vehicle, the artist encounters the Image in the depth of her unconscious. Then she brings that image back to the pictorial space. If her emotion is strong enough, she has the greater chance to reach the place we call the "collective consciousness"--that vast ocean of universal consciousness spread beneath the depth of unconsciousness. When that happens, the image which the artist brings back to the pictorial space will work as a symbol for the viewer. That symbol has presence. The more the artist's emotion is personal, the more presence and universal power that symbol

gains. Through that symbol, the viewer starts to identify with that particular reality and it becomes part of his or her own reality. Thus the process of creating art can be described as a process of awakening from unconsciousness to consciousness.

The entire process of creating art in this way takes the form of a process of fighting: a battle between emotion and intellect, between creative and destructive forces, between *thanatos* and *bios*.   The main protagonists in this battle are lines: the artist fights with lines, literally one stroke by one stroke.   Line has two aspects.

The first is <u>emotional</u>: line reflects the range of the artist's emotions from the most subtle movement of mind to the most stormy passion, through the physical trembling of fingers and arms it reflects the movement of the artist's breath.

The other aspect of line is its <u>intellectual</u> component. There is after all no line which exists in nature: line is a product of the human mind.   Line is a

basic element of forming consciousness, an act of will

and an expression of commitment.

These two contradictory aspects of line engage in a struggle

against each other until they finally dance together in the

pictorial space. The purpose of this fighting is for the artist to

reach her own truth and the destroyer of this fighting is the

artist's own defensiveness and fear of being individuated.

These try to prevent the artist from reaching the truth and try

to swallow her up into the chaos out of which she was born.

Thus, the creative process coincides with the psychological

process of individuation. Any disruption of honesty during

this process, any break in the intense concentration, will

instantly kill the legitimacy of the work. But it is through this

process that the artist might finally be able to have the

experience of transendence and reach integrity in the work.

By going through my own creative process, many images

symbolizing the pain, cruelty, and vulnerability which I

experienced during the war and yet repressed for a long time

because they were too frightening, come up to the surface of

my paintings. It is a terrifying, overwhelming process. But it

is a crucial part of transcending which the artist has to go through.

Danceplay of the Red Skirts (Paul Klee, 1924).

I said that viewing art is another powerful way to reach individuality as well as creating it. I would like to share an experience briefly that I had as a viewer. I was 13 years old. I found a small color reproduction of very poor quality in a magazine article which was introducing western art and culture to the Japanese so we could see what was going on in the rest of the world while we were fighting for life day and night. It was several years after Japan's surrender in the War and one year after implementation of the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Finally the war had ended officially for the Japanese. But foreign countries were still very, very far away.

It was a Klee painting titled "Dance Play of the Red Skirts". It is a painting of many women in red skirts scattered all over the paper. But if you look at it carefully, these women are just reflections of one woman and behind her there is a big dark circle. It looks like an empty vacuum --a black hole. The whole image looks as if it is spinning, like the image you

see when you look through a kaleidoscope. The pictorial space looks like the stage of a theater isolated from the world we live in. The feeling of the painting is dark, almost sinister, and it made me afraid. And yet it was profoundly moving.

I identified my own pain with this painting immediately: the pain from all the wounds I had suffered during the war, and the pain in my own paintings which I had already created by that time.   For I had created my paintings with the utmost intensity and honesty in solitude: they are completely different from any tradition of Japanese art which we were taught in school , that fact frightened me and I hid them from the world for fear of being "persecuted". So there was the pain of having a double life and of hiding the most important part of my life.

Klee's painting certainly cannot be said to celebrate the glory of human existence: on the contrary, it is filled with intense loneliness. And yet, the sense of urgency and frighteningness caused by the spinning image of fragments of the woman struck me -very ironically- as evidencing a strong sense of the dignity of human existence.   The loss of

individual dignity which I saw all around me in Japan, was never treated as a tragedy, nor as an urgent reality, by any artist in Japan. The pain of the loss of individuality is not recognized in Japanese art as part of human suffering. My own suffering had nothing to identify with and therefore it was not accepted even by myself. Yet here I found this pain all over Klee's painting.

I saw Klee's painting as standing on a narrow ridge between a nihilistic emptiness on one side, and on the other side, the illusional complacency of a tribal society where the majority of people live.   The work evidences the artist's determination to walk along this narrow ridge with honesty, and trembling fragility.

Finally I was able to re-experience my own suffering at the higher, more universal level of human suffering. It was an experience of Transcendence. This painting of Klee's abated in me all desire for suicide: I received the sense that I was destined to walk on this same narrow ridge all my life.

Looking back, I had an inner experience of the essence of individuality at that time (even though it was a term I did not even know until many years later).

4 Totalitarian tendency in Japan

I was a child in Japan during World War II, and my early memories are of destruction, death, and the grandiosity of rampant tribalism and totalitarianism.

Japan is not a totalitarian nation politically any more. Japan established its new democratic constitution in 1947 under the American occupation, after its unconditional surrender in World War II. That surrender was preceded by a dark fifty years of totalitarian domination and militaristic aggression which left its unhealable scars in the people of the world. Since the surrender of World War II, Japan has been in peace and has never had a war for 60 years. The overwhelming majority has no memories nor any experiences of the war. Japan today is probably one of the most peaceful, free nations in the world. if we look at the surface of the society and at its written laws.   But I came to America from Japan in order to escape totalitarian control and a kind of

persecution which prevented me from growing into myself. It was 1968, in my late 20s, and those dark tendencies were still deeply rooted in people's mind in Japan in those days, in spite of the long years after the end of the war and in spite of the perfectly democratic written law they had.

Several years ago, I encountered some articles in Asahi Shimbun, the leading Japanese daily paper, which reminded me how the fascistic totalitarian trend in the human psyche can be manifested in everyday life without having any form of political fascism or totalitarianism. A series of articles described the phenomenon called *"ijime* in Japanese: a cruel ostracism coupled with bullying and excommunication which happens in many Japanese schools. Often the victims are those students who are different in some way from the rest, such as the children of Japanese parents whose jobs took them to a foreign country for some years and then returned to Japan. These children are often considered to be displaying an "objectionable attitude" which is evidenced by such things as asking questions in class or expressing their opinions

(things which are not encouraged in Japanese school). *Ijime*
continues until the vicitim drops all free spirit and
spontaneity. Sometimes it escalates to serious physical
assault and sadistic public humiliation and torture by the
group: in some cases teachers are the hidden force behind it,
the article said. The victims sometimes commit suicide, and
often need serious psychological and medical treatment.

After all those descriptions the article picked up the story
of a man who stood up against all this: the father of a victim.
His son, a 13-year-old student, committed suicide leaving a
note to his father that he had become a victim of *ijime* in
school and saw no way to get out of the hell. The police
launched a perfunctory investigation, but the school wrote a
letter to the police saying that they found no proof of *ijime* and
the case was closed. The father decided to find out what
exactly happened to his son, and he sent out letters asking for
information. One anonymous letter came back saying that his
son was in fact the victim of *ijime*. But for the most part what
the father received was letters and phone calls accusing him of
disturbing the peace of the school. He was told by his

employer that he must stop his investigation or be fired. He chose to seek the truth. One day he went to the market: people immediately left the market and his own excommunication started. The rumor spread that it was <u>this father</u> who drove his son to suicide. He realized then that the *ijime* his son experienced was what he himself was now experiencing.   He found support in a small group of parents who had lost their own children to *ijime* and he started to speak up in public about his son's suicide and *ijime* and tried to do something to change the consciousness of society.

This story does not amount to real political fascism which I went through during and after the war. These events might be dismissed as horrible but minor incidents that happened in a peaceful country. In fact, today we are living in a world in which violent death occurs every day. The cry of mourning, the cry of anger, groans of desparation fill the world: compared to our urgent present-day situation, this story may look less serious. And yet this story does exhibit all the characteristics of totalitarian control which lie right

below the surface of everyday life without including any political compornent whatsoever. That caught my attention. The essence here is hatred towards what is different, towards the spontaneous and free, for all such people are considered to have "betrayed" their tribe, their groups, and their nations. The hatred of the victim who stands up and seeks the truth is severe. Those victims receive more cruel treatment than the actual offenders. For standing up for the truth is possible only to the individuated, and the truth interests only the individuated, and those who are individuated are more dangerous to the totalitarian group than any criminal. For the deception of the "peaceful" society will be uncovered by those who seek the truth.

If standing up to tell the truth requires one to bring his case to a court of law, then he will find himself the most formidable person in society. He finds himself accused -- not because his claim is unjust, but because he has brought his case to court. He often is fired from his job and excommunicated, becomes the target of death threats, and his children become targets of *ijime* at school. In short: the

plaintiff will be judged and sentenced by the unwritten law of the tribe, long before he is judged in court.   And often it is his closest family and friends who turn out to be the most vindictive members of the tribe.

To seek Justice, to be courageous, to be ethical -- in other words, to choose rational universal standards over loyalty towards the group -- is to be a "traitor"and these individuals break the biggest taboos of the totalitarian society. I experienced these aspects of Japanese society as a form of "persecution " and as a threat to my own integrity.

America accepted me with open arms and gave me enough freedom to start my journey.   But needless to say it would be naive to suppose that America is completely free from the tendency towards the kind of fascism and totalitarianism that I left in Japan.   The deep-seated hatred and fear of the individuated person exists right below the surface everywhere. It is ready to erupt like magma through any conceivable cracks of the society.   And the three "escape

routes" are just as well traveled in America as they are in Japan.

5 The Pain of the spiritual refugee

The Renunciation of Language

Individuation is the process of becoming conscious. Clarity of language is crucial for separation from the symbiotic relationship. The penetrating use of language distinguishes reality from the shared illusion of the tribal society. Individuation is established by the discipline of language.

And yet, in order to live in the place where I came to live as an individual and as a spiritual refugee, I had to accept one condition: losing my own language. My second language, English, which I had studied throughout my school life for more than a decade did not work here almost at all

Language difficulty not only isolates you from society: it also makes you invisible. I found myself losing self-confidence drastically day by day.   America is a very verbal country and language is the weapon you need to assert your right to exist here. The strength of your existence is defined by your level of language.

It was the greatest sacrifice that I had to make, and the greatest irony, that in order to individuate I had to give up my own language skill.

Solitude and Loneliness

Hanna Arendt, a great philosopher and sociologist of the 20th century described how totalitarianism destroys solitude and pushes people towards the abyss of loneliness. Solitude is very different from loneliness: solitude can be fruitful and foster a real unity with the world, while loneliness isolates you and makes you rootless. Even in the midst of my experience of totalitarianism in Japan, I had maintained the fruitfulness of solitude. But once I came here, it became harder and harder to have fruitful solitude, and I felt in danger of slipping into loneliness and isolation. This was because I lost my ability of language, which is the foundation of a good relationship with the world and of a proper self identity and this was the most serious threat to my inner core that I had ever encountered.

The world had turned 180 degrees around me and I had become a minority -- not only in the matter of race but also

because I had to become a member of a less intellectual minority group.

I started noticing the groups of people here who are minorities for one reason or another: because of language or ethnicity, or age, or because of a some physical difficulty. All of them were living in the pain of not being accepted, or respected in this society. I heard their unspoken cry of aspiration, like the howling of a wolf, everywhere I saw them. I identified myself with them and with their cries. I looked back myself at how much I had taken my own language ability for granted: I had been a member of the proud side of society. How much I was proud of being an expert of Japanese, which language is still intensely in my mind like a secret. I have to accept my new reality -- just like a former athlete who is now in a wheelchair has to accept reality and spend all his effort now on physical rehabilitation.

I saw myself as hanging from the cliff of America, by both hands, craving for Japan like a drowning person gasping for air. I kept asking myself: What is the intrinsic meaning of learning English if I have to spend all my energy for the rest of

my life just to master English without ever starting to address

my real purpose in being here?   But the answer was always

the same: never go back to Japan, nothing is worth having if

you have to lose yourself.

For a long time my language was lost.   Those were years

of deep silence - a completely unexplainable time. I did gain

some extraordinary sensitivity -- probably just like a blind

person develops his other senses out of necessity. And my art

reached a consciousness level different from the usual

everyday consciousness - something I call an altered state of

consciousness - and I developed certain working patterns for

my art in ways that only non-language experience could give

me. I found that the most personal quality in art reached a

most universal quality: through several one-person shows I

had during that period I saw viewers identify their own pain

with mine, my most miserable personal pain, which I had

revealed in my works; and seeing my work, they went through

a transcendent experience. The realization that the artist can

reach a universal consciousness by going, with the utmost

sincerity, down deep into her own personal core became a clear reality.   This idea became part of the foundation of my concept of spiritual refugee.

6 Conclusion

Individuation, Spiritual Refugee

The danger of totalitarianism does not lie in the fact that somewhere out there in some foreign country, some madman may become a leader and brainwash the rest of his countrymen: the danger is in our own minds and in our own society. It lies largely in the difficulty of going through our own journeys towards individuality and of maintaining awareness of these issues and of educating ourselves and others to their importance.

Art must be recognized as one of the strongest forces available to help us against fascism and totalitarianism. It is not because art will produce propaganda posters as political statements to change people's opinions but because art embraces all of us in spite of all differences of political, religious, and cultural views; it supports us and walks slowly

with us throughout this extremely difficult journey towards individuation which we are all going through.

As for refugees: they are not "poor people" out there who happened to be stricken by misfortune. They are people who actually go through the hell that we, humankind, have created. To identify ourselves with them inevitably leads us to remember that we all are refugees in one way or another: their fear, their indignation, their vulnerability and their aspirations are our own.

The spiritual refugee who shares a common ground with all refugees has to be aware of these qualities in himself, and has to take them seriously.   Then he will come to realize that he is not isolated or rootless. On the contrary, he is standing in the invisible but firm universal community which is built by all people who are on a serious journey towards their own individuation, and who are ready to help society through their love and productive work.

Thank you.