



Full Length Research Paper

Severance of the parent-child structure and little red riding hood

¹Daliah Hanah and ²Jonina Kaylah

¹Tel Aviv University

²The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Accepted 2 October 2016

In a previous work, dealing with the folktale about the wolf and the kids, we emphasized the baby's failure to identify threats and protect his/her mental system (Raufman and Yigael in press). The tale about little red riding hood relates the serious complications of this failure. Behind the apparently optimistic starting point, in which we are told about a sweet, beloved little girl, a mental wound already exists, threatening to distort the girl's ability to identify her challenges and correctly choose how to react. Similarly to the tale about the wolf and the kids, this tale illustrates important things about the human mind, in a way which differs from any other attempt to reach these distant, early experiences. Clinical vignettes serve to exemplify this idea.

Keywords: Fairy tales, parent-child relationships, mental organization

INTRODUCTION

Background

The gap between psychoanalytic practice and theory has already been presented in our previous work, as well as the need to create a clear observation in order to accurately identify the nature of early experiences (Raufman and Yigael in press). In our understanding, fairy-tales portray examples of mental coping in regard to common familial situations. The tale about the wolf and the kids, as analyzed in our previous work, demonstrates how early experiences that distort mental life, gradually penetrate the baby's mental realm from the external surroundings. The baby fails to differentiate between what is right and helpful, and that which is wrong and harmful. The ability to defend oneself is not innate, but is rather acquired, and might become damaged, due to the

fact that most disturbances that penetrate the mental realm originate from caregivers, the same people who are supposed to protect the baby. We are not talking about neglectful or abusive parents. In general, they are loving parents, whose daily stress and anxiety simply penetrate into the baby's world. The baby's inability to protect himself and his complete exposure towards his caregivers make him vulnerable to everything his parents are occupied with, without being able to identify what actually relates to him and what does not. In the same work, we assumed that the primary failure to protect the self and the resulting mental organization would create the nucleus of all pathological behavior. In order to deal with the "flooding" (which results from the failure to differentiate between helpful and harmful), the baby needs to learn how to identify hostile components that

have already penetrated the mental realm, and be able to cope with them. However, it seems that this difficulty to differentiate, which characterizes early childhood and the lack of previous experience related to similar situations, prevent the baby from finding ways to neutralize the influence of hostile components. This situation results in a mental organization aimed at defending the most vulnerable components of the psyche. This is the component which is supposed to become the inner

"voice" that guides one's mental life. As a result of this early penetration of the unprotected mental realm, the mechanism is responsible for directing the mental life remains hidden, in order to defend itself. This happens at a very early stage. We refer to this mechanism as "the autonomic subject". In the tale about the wolf and the kids, it is identified with the kid. However, it is possible that we are, in fact, talking about what in daily language is referred to as the "spirit". In other words, distortions in the ability to differentiate, force this nucleus or mechanism to operate in a partial, impractical and inefficient manner.

Our interpretation of "Little Red Riding Hood" is based on two assumptions: 1. The tale describes a developmental stage which follows the one described in the tale about the wolf and the kids. 2. The result of the failure to protect the psyche (as described in the tale about the wolf and the kids) exists from the beginning in the tale about little red riding hood. (We should mention here that, although psychoanalysis views early distortions as influencing the entire mental development process, the various analytic theories still find it difficult to accurately describe the nature of early experiences and the ways in which they exist and operate in adult life). Put simply, this means that our understanding of the tale about Red Riding Hood relates to our interpretation of the earlier distortions that appear in the tale about the wolf and kids. Before analyzing the tale, we should present some key terms that explain the language of fairy-tales and what they tell us about mental reality.

The language of the psyche

In analyzing fairy-tales, we should always remember that they use words in order to describe pre-verbal mental events, represented not in words, but rather in pictures (as in dreams. For further reading, see, for example, Raufman 2012). The picture is comprised of details which carry a denotative or literal meaning. However, the connotations depend on the context, such as other details in the picture, the entire plot, and so forth. In the tale about the wolf and the kids, we identified three details which we called: "keys": 1. Animals appearing in the tale represent the primary levels of mental organization (these levels govern the psyche up until the ability to speak has developed, and they exist in all later developmental stages). 2. The house is the place of the

subject. It represents the mental realm, which is familiar to the subject and differentiates it from all other realms (other parts of the mind, the body, and the external environment) and in which the subject feels protected. 3. The wolf represents a threat to the mental realm - a kind of hostile entity, which is wrong/out of place and dangerous to the psyche.

These keys are not arbitrary, but are rather based on mapping the primary functions and levels of mental organization. The basic assumption is that the meaning of each key is constant: animals always represent the primary levels of the psyche, the house always represents the place of the subject, and the wolf always represents a threat and danger. However, the meaning of each key depends on the context and may alter from one tale to another. For example, the wolf in the tale about Red Riding Hood certainly poses a threat to the subject (the girl) and her mental system. However, this threat exists from the very beginning of the tale and operates from a different starting point compared to the way it operates in the tale about the wolf and the kids, where the wolf (the threat) first appears outside the house (the place where the subject lives). Only after penetrating into the system (the house), does the wolf operate from within. The result (as we can see in the tale about Red Riding Hood) is that it is not always possible to identify the wolf as a threat emerging from the outside.

To the three keys described in our previous work (and also operate in the tale about Red Riding Hood), we now add four more keys. Before presenting them, a few words should be said regarding the term "key" and the way it differs from the term "symbol". Freud and Jung viewed symbols as figurative representations of unconscious components. Despite the differences between the two approaches, they both viewed symbols as a kind of language of the unconscious. In this respect, the "keys" in our interpretation are similar to the meaning of symbols, as viewed by Freud and Jung: keys are symbols, as they create a figurative language, which differs from verbal language. Figurative language renders mental messages that cannot express themselves verbally. What specifies the keys is that they are identified inside of fairy-tales, and within the context of fairy-tales, whereas Freud and Jung developed their language of symbols from other sources. These keys have many other complex characteristics that cannot be fully discussed within the framework of this paper.

Fairy-tales as a source of knowledge

The widespread distribution of fairy-tales and their ability to remain fresh and vivid for thousands of years, in a way that goes beyond time and space testifies, more than any other literary genre (including other folk genres), to their ability to reflect and echo universal mental structures and situations. The varied versions of these tales reflect the

cultural or local design that each society gives to the repeated narratives, which always tell us about the psyche and its functioning, during different periods of life, and in the face of diverse life circumstances. Our assumption is that each fairy-tale relates to the psyche's ways of coping in different situations. Most of these mental situations are universal or at least widespread; however, each of them may have a wide range of "solutions". One may view fairy-tales as the psyche's hieroglyphs: they speak in the language of the psyche itself. This is why deciphering fairy-tales is so useful in understanding mental situations and processes in the analytic endeavor. Freud has already related to the unique status of fairy-tales in understanding the human psyche, which is similar to that of dreams (Freud 1913, vol XII). In order to express the workings of the psyche, fairy-tales use a cross-cultural key system. In this respect, it seems that Jung was right in assuming the existence of cross-cultural symbols. However, this does not necessarily testify to the existence of a collective unconscious. These symbols are fundamental forms of the inner dialogue of the psyche with itself. They originate from the place in which deep and basic experiences, such as the subject, its place (house), and threats and so on, are recorded. Our interpretation of the tale about little red riding hood is based on the Grimm's version, as it is both familiar and well-known. It should be mentioned that earlier versions (mostly those appearing in the Middle Ages) present the tale differently, especially in regard to the child's behavior (see, for example, Zipes 1993). These differences are crucial, but unrelated to the issues we emphasize in our interpretation, as we focus on the psyche's coping methods. Below is the Grimm version:

Little Red Riding Hood was a sweet girl, beloved by everyone, especially her grandmother, who gave her a lovely cap. One day, her mother sends her to bring food and wine to her sick grandmother, after warning her not to stray from the path. The girl walks through the wood.

A wolf who wants to eat the girl approaches her, but she is not aware of how dangerous he is and does not fear the wolf. She naïvely tells him where she is going and how to get into the house. He suggests the girl pick some flowers, which she does, in order to please her grandmother. In the meantime, the wolf quickly goes to the grandmother's house and gains entry by pretending to be the girl. He swallows the sick grandmother whole, and waits for the girl, disguised as the grandmother.

When the girl arrives, she notices that her grandmother looks very strange. Little Red Riding Hood then says, "What a deep voice you have". "The better to greet you with," answers the wolf/grandmother. "Goodness, what big eyes you have", says the little girl. "The better to see you with", returns the wolf. "And what big hands you have!" exclaims Little Red Riding Hood, stepping over to

the bed. "The better to hug you with," says the wolf. "What a big mouth you have," the little girl murmurs in a weak voice. "The better to eat you with!" roars the wolf, and jumping out of bed, he swallows her up as well. Then, with a fat, full tummy, he falls fast asleep.

A lumberjack, however, soon comes to the rescue and with his axe he cuts open the sleeping wolf. Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother emerge unharmed, but the grandmother is still sick. She regains her health only after eating and drinking the food and wine. They then fill the wolf's body with heavy stones. The wolf awakens and tries to flee, but the stones cause him to collapse and die (Grimm and Grimm, 1891). This tale has attained a vast number of interpretations over the years (Becket 2005, Mackintosh 2004, Hamersak 2004, Anderson 2003, Orenstein 2002, Attwood 1999, Verdier 1997, Douglas 1995, Zipes 1993, Johnson and Carroll 1992, Dundes 1989, Shavit 1986, Soriano 1986). Whereas some major psychoanalytic interpretations will be presented throughout our analysis, at this point it is important to mention that the centrality of the parent-child relationship in the red-riding-hood tale was emphasized not only by psychoanalysts, but also in folkloristic investigations. For example, Dundes related to the inter-generational confrontation that exists in the fairytale „Red Riding Hood“. According to Dundes, pinpointing the similarity between this fairytale and the oral versions of the tale "The Wolf and the Kids" reveals that at the core of the story is not the confrontation with the wolf, but rather between a mother and her daughter (Dundes 1989). Others focused on the position of the little girl in society. Zipes, for example, criticized claims suggesting that the text contains the message: „women want to be raped“ (Zipes 1993) and referred to the girl's difficulty to safely express her healthy curious nature.

Following this view, we have to ask: what does the wolf represent? As will be soon argued, our interpretation views the wolf as a threat coming from within the psyche, resulting from the failure of the mental system to protect itself from the penetration of external threats when the parent fails to support a sufficient protection. Our interpretation differs from the more common interpretations that view this tale as a warning tale, expressing social and educational viewpoints aimed at showing the dangers involved in conversing with strangers. For example, Rumpf showed that one of the most common European „warning stories“ from the Middle

Agnes included hostile forces that threatened defenseless girls (Rumpf 1951. In: Zipes 1993, 18). The story, from this perspective, assumes a didactic message teaching young girls to listen to their parents' instructions. However, we believe that such a didactic attitude cannot explain the wide distribution of this tale all around the

¹ Among the analytic scholars who dedicated their work to analytic interpretations of fairy tales it is possible to mention Bruno Bettelheim (1976), Erich Neumann (1976) and Marie-Louis von Franz, (Franz, 1978).

world, even in societies in which children are educated to be independent in a very young age. We view the popularity of the tale, which is wide distributed in both western and non-western cultures as associated with a more deep and general aspect of the psyche.

The starting point of the mental journey

The opening of each fairy-tale expresses something about the state of the psyche. The opening of this tale seems promising, as it describes a girl who is beloved by all. However, a more careful reading exposes a problematic situation: the opening reveals the familiar phenomenon wherein little children are viewed as individuals who are expected to be sweet and make everybody love them. This trait does not characterize only human babies, but is rather true for other species as well. The aim of this trait is to protect babies and take care of them, as they are helpless (Tinbergen 1951). Apparently, the starting point of the Red Riding Hood tale resembles the starting point of every baby - being sweet and beloved. A good starting point may create a mental foundation that helps the subject understand how to make good decisions and efficiently manage various situations. However, the ongoing plot teaches us that something has gone wrong. In order to better understand this distortion, we shall now present a few additional keys.

Key no. 4: Human characters

As was previously mentioned, the house is where the subject lives. However, in contrast to the tale about the wolf and the kids, the subject in the tale about Red Riding Hood is not an animal, but rather a human being. If animals represent the primary levels of the psyche, human beings represent that which is specific to mankind - the "I", meaning: the tale focuses on a different mental level, compared to the tale about the wolf and the kids. The meaning of each human figure may vary from one tale to another (a boy, a girl, a king, a queen, etc.), but we are always talking about the "I". In "Little Red Riding Hood", the key shows that we are dealing with the primary level of organization of the ego - that of a little girl. Even though it is a higher level than the one illustrated in the tale about the kids, the house includes only two figures: the mother and the girl. We should remember that fairy-tales always report a specific mental reality, rather than a real, objective reality. In the mental reality of Red Riding Hood, there are no fathers, brothers or sisters. This does not mean that they don't exist in her objective reality, but they still don't have a place in her inner, mental reality. This means that on the level of mental development, Red Riding Hood's level of differentiation is poor. Her relations with others include

only one object. In her "mental house", there is only room for two.

Key no. 5- Food and drink

In daily language and in the objective world, food and drink are essential to physical survival. The mental parallel for food and drink is everything that supports mental maintenance: emotional relations, emotional support, and love, just to name a few. Many fairy-tales differentiate between food and drink, and their meanings are often determined by the specific contexts of each tale. In the tale about Red Riding Hood, the food and drink represent a kind of emotional support.

Key no. 6: The path

This key is important for understanding the plot in many tales. If the house represents the place where the subject lives, the path represents the subject's progression from one emotional condition to another (a different house), or the way back to the place from which the subject first set out (back to the same house). Here, too, the meaning of the path may vary in each tale (familiar or unfamiliar, dangerous or not, and so forth). The path is an emotional condition in which the subject is exposed to experiences that may either strengthen or weaken him/her. In the tale about Red Riding Hood, we are told that the path leads to a different emotional condition (a different house), but the original expectation is that it will be different, yet familiar, as it leads to the grandmother's house. However, the emotional journey of Little Red has an existential meaning. It is not simply another visit to granny, but rather a new kind of visit - the girl is expected to bring food and drink, which will help her grandmother get better. The mother warns the girl to stay on the path and not stray - not because of any danger, but rather in order to reach her grandmother's house as quickly as possible.

Thus, the meaning here is two-fold: Red's mother is not aware of the dangers and risks involved in the mission on which she has sent her daughter. More than this, she warns her daughter to stick with the mission and never abandon it (never stray from the path). For the mother, abandoning the mission (the path) is the most dangerous thing of all.

Key no. 7: The forest

In many cases, the forest, which is a frequent backdrop in fairy-tales, serves as a substitute for the house, especially when the subjects are children. The forest is the place where wild animals, as well as homeless people, live. It represents the primary levels of mental organization, the wild areas of the psyche, and the loneliness and isolation of the homeless. It also

symbolizes the subject's ability to be either assisted, or alternatively threatened by the primary levels, to deal with them, and so forth. Leaving the house and entering the forest represents a mental state that is more vulnerable, lonely, disturbed and unstable. At the same time, it represents the mobility of the psyche, and the potential of coping abilities, growth and development.

Interpretation

An accurate interpretation should deal with two central, independent aspects. Both aspects relate to the fact that, despite the apparently promising starting point of the little heroine, she fails to make the right decisions: 1. Red Riding Hood was a sweet, beloved girl. 2. Her deviation from the path is forbidden not because of the potential danger, but rather because of her mission, which should, at all costs, be completed. In other words, the same path that is usually familiar and friendly and which connects two protecting, loving homes, takes on a totally different meaning for the girl when she becomes responsible for her grandmother's health.

Why should a beloved and well-nurtured girl, sent out upon a familiar path to help her grandmother, suddenly find herself in a situation of existential danger? Any attempt to interpret the tale must necessarily close the gap between the promising opening and the threat that follows. Another failure relates to the baby's magic and charm - a trait that is geared towards ensuring the provision of good care on the part of the caregivers during the infant's first period of life. However, when things go wrong and the protection provided by the surrounding environment becomes insufficient, the baby fails to protect himself/herself. Hence, (the use of) personal charm might become a kind of behavioral pattern and useless defense mechanism towards an unknown threat. As a result, this defensive behavior may actually hurt or damage that which it aims to protect. As a kind of defense, personal charm is aimed towards preventing damage of the primary mental component, which is forced to hide against threats already existing in the mental system. However, as a defense mechanism whose goal is to protect the psyche against the external environment, it can do nothing against internal threats already existing and operating within the psyche. Moreover, it might even find itself supporting these threats in an indirect manner. If we view the wolf as representing anxiety or stress, the story of Red Riding Hood attains a totally different interpretation, in which the girl is not a victim of any hostile, external entity, but rather of her own anxiety (or other difficult feelings), which have already penetrated her inner world. Add to this the fact that her knowledge about these feelings is very vague and limited. It is not difficult to identify at least three failures in her management of the action as the plot unfolds: First, she fails to identify the wolf's threatening intentions.

Scholars who deal with this tale from an analytic perspective have raised the question of how a normal girl, who is neither psychotic nor mentally handicapped, fails to differentiate between a wolf and her own grandmother (Barzilai 1999). Whereas the answers given up until now adopted ideas developed within the scope of existing psychoanalytical models, we base our explanation on an evolutionary model dealing with the mapping of the mental functions (Raufman and Yigael 2010).

Another failure relates to the fact that the girl is tempted to stray from the path and gather flowers for her grandmother, who is expecting another kind of help (food rather than flowers). We may ask then, why this kind of effort and deviation from the original plan are needed, in order to bring something which is not essential to the grandmother's health. And finally, even though the girl notices the frightening changes in her grandmother, she does not reach the right conclusions, so that she can save herself. Interpreting this tale requires dealing with the question of how a beloved girl with such a promising beginning, manages so poorly and fails to understand what is really going on around her. A consistent interpretation should also address the question of why the wolf even bothers to deceive the girl, instead of swallowing her up immediately in the forest, after receiving all the necessary information about her sick grandmother.

Analysis

In the tale about the wolf and the kids, the threat (the wolf) manages to enter the subject's mental realm (the house). Our assumption regarding Red Riding Hood is that the wolf (as a threat) in her case operates from within her inner world from the very beginning, which is why she fails to identify the wolf's true motives. From this perspective, the fairy-tale presents a kind of mental logic or mental truth. This mental logic is often identified in the analytic endeavor. Assuming that the threat already operating from within is a kind of fear or anxiety, and that Red Riding Hood defends herself against these bad feelings by being lovely, satisfying and charming, her story will appear as follows: On the path that should lead to her grandmother's house, an inner thought (reflected in the figure of the tempting wolf) surfaces: maybe, in addition to food and drink (emotional support), it would also be nice if she brought her grandmother some flowers. As a lovely, charming girl, she believes that the world is as lovely as she is: the wolf is nice; the forest is wonderful, etc. As long as she is charming, she will succeed in life, and achieve protection and support. She is totally unaware of the fact that this thought is a fixed pattern, a defense mechanism against anxiety, and that her lack of differentiation in regard to herself is also true

in regard to her relation to the world at large. One thing that contributes to this lack of differentiation is the fact that a central component of her psyche - the one which we call "the autonomic subject" - is so well-hidden that it is hard to identify it inside herself and follow its guidance. The personal charm and willingness to satisfy she displays, and which operate as a defensive pattern, have no real idea of when they are necessary and useful and when they are not. Meanwhile, the grandmother remains helpless, and no help arrives. When Red Riding Hood reaches her grandmother's dwelling, she feels that something has changed. However, lacking awareness of her inner feelings, she fails to identify the grandmother's feelings or the true situation staring her in the face, until it gains control over her as well. Only an external component (the hunter) succeeds in solving the problematic situation. However, this rescue does not cancel out the girl's mission. In order to recover, the grandmother still needs her emotional support. It seems that the girl has not learned much. Her comment to herself - that next time she will follow her mother's instructions - means that her role as someone who is supposed to support her grandmother has been recorded very deeply, and she lacks the resources to identify its dangerous implications. As stated, we view the tale as being told from the point of view of the mental organization, and in the language of the psyche. The way in which it was designed started earlier - in the tale about the wolf and the kids. The tale of Red Riding Hood presents the possible implications of a mental state in which the wolf, which has succeeded to penetrate it, has already become a part of it. This situation leads the psyche to create various mechanisms in order to cope with this problematic infiltration. In the case of Red Riding Hood, these defense mechanisms include charm and the tendency to satisfy others. Her story reconstructs the story of many adults who, as children, experienced the need and the expectation to satisfy their parents and fulfill their wishes. Apparently, at least from the point of view of the fairy-tale, these children find it difficult to escape this trap. If they deviate from this role and act like children who are allowed to forget or abandon their missions, they find themselves dealing with a parental reality that is anxious, angry, and so forth. On the other hand, if they fulfill their role without straying from the path, they often find themselves locked within the parent's world. Nevertheless, the tale also includes a moment of choice, in the form of the questions the girl asks her grandmother. This is an example of the huge importance of differentiation and its level of accuracy: the house is the same house; the bed is the same bed, but still, something is different. The subject is not the same. The girl is aware of a difference, but not enough to operate differently. Hence, she is swallowed up (deceived). The tale subtly suggests that if she had sharper differentiation capabilities, she could have rescued herself.

Red Riding Hood as a mental state

If we ignore for a moment the roles of the mother and grandmother and focus only on the girl's defensive pattern, we realize that it may characterize many patients in our clinic, especially women. Usually, these are pretty, talented young women that tend to attribute their success predominantly to their personal charm. Inside, however, they sometimes feel frightened, valueless and miserable. They think that if someone really gets to know them, he will discover that they lack uniqueness, interest, and other positive characteristics. They perceive their personal charm as no more than an external illusion. Therefore, they do not trust themselves or their perceptions, and experience their accomplishments as something that may collapse at any minute. As a result, they are never really sure if they are operating or functioning for the right reasons (bringing food to the grandmother) or simply in order to please other people (bringing flowers). For the same reason, they are also unsure about what actually "worked" for them: Was it the food, the flowers or both?

A deeper understanding of the dynamic and behavioral patterns of these patients requires an additional discussion of the connection between the mental state described in the tale about Red Riding Hood, and the earlier state described in the tale about the wolf and the kids. We divide our explanation into two parts: the first part resembles the situation described in the tale about the wolf and the kids; the second, which follows it, discusses the mental state described in Red Riding Hood: 1. The inability of the baby to accurately differentiate between that which supports the mental system and that which harms it (against which he/she should be protected) leads to the penetration of hostile components which damage mental activity. The thing that is hurt is, in fact, the most vulnerable component of the mental organization, the component that should develop into the mental organization's independent, autonomic point of view, which unfortunately can now no longer function freely. This component hides deep inside the psyche, in opposition to the hostile components that have penetrated the psyche. The mental state resulting from this dynamic has many expressions, all of which are perceived as negative: anxiety, fears, stress and low self-esteem, just to name a few. In this state, the psyche experiences itself as being unsure and vulnerable, which leads it to search for various ways to protect itself. One central defense, which becomes salient in Red Riding Hood, is being a "good girl", pleasing and charming; as she is beloved by everyone, nobody ever wishes to hurt her. Thus, she is protected. 2. This form of defense, which manages Red Riding Hood, is directed outward towards the external environment, but it cannot protect her from the way in which she experiences herself from within, as she perceives and experiences herself in negative terms. This is only one thing, among others,

which turn this defense into one that operates against the psyche, which it is trying to protect. Lacking the ability to believe in themselves and their motives, the mental state of these patients is characterized by the inability to differentiate between right and wrong reasons for their behavior. This brings about a kind of blindness regarding the relation between one's motives and actions, and their implications and meanings. Red Riding Hood does not recognize the wolf as a threat. She does not reach the proper conclusions when she realizes that things have changed in the grandmother's house and appearance. The end of the tale reveals nothing regarding the girl's understanding of what has happened to her. Following the mother's instructions in the future cannot take the place of actually acquiring the ability to act, as a result of proper autonomic motives and truly learn from the implications of our actions. As in the analysis of *The Wolf and the Kids*, we see that the tale about Red Riding Hood illustrates, in its own unique way, a specific and very common mental state. It seems that the distortion of the correct parent-child structure lies in the anamnesis of many patients. Therefore, there is no one clinical vignette that represents all the expressions and difficulties of what can be learned from the analysis of the fairy-tale. We chose to present two clinical vignettes; each represents one aspect of the same mental pattern. The first vignette presents a case in which the parent-child structure has been reversed (at least as it perceived from the child's point of view): whereas it is expected that the parent provide the child an unconditional love, in this case the daughter feels that she is required to prove her love to her both parents. The symptoms constitute a precise expression of the way in which the distortion is recorded in her psyche: by reversing some of her physiological mechanisms she is kind of expressing the feeling that something very deep has been reversed/distorted.

Karin - Symptoms of inversion

Karin is a good looking young woman, an only daughter to her parents, with whom she still lives. She is talented, appreciated by her surrounding environment, and has always been loved by the adults around her. As a child, she felt different from other children, although she always had close friends and was never alone. From the age of five, she has suffered from digestive system problems. As a teenager, she also began suffering from nausea and reflux symptoms. Each time she wants to express an opinion that differs from the opinions of others or whenever she does things that might be perceived as unacceptable by others, she blushes, her legs tremble and she bursts into tears. Karin is very self-judgmental and in many cases, she is not sure if she does things for the right reasons or whether she is, in fact, motivated by the need to please others. Her relations with her parents were close, up until a few years ago. Over the past few

years, they have made her feel rather nervous. She feels that they treat her like a little girl, who is expected to share everything with them. She feels guilty about her nervousness and her difficulty to fulfill their need for her to share. Apart from this, her history does not include any irregular or traumatic events. She cannot tell why it is difficult for her to talk about herself or act without feeling embarrassed, threatened or unloved. It is reasonable to believe that her external symptoms are the psyche's way of reporting something which is wrong, but Karin does not know what this might be. There seems to be a deep connection between her somatic and mental symptoms: both somatic and mental mechanisms operate in a reversed way. Karin's defensive pattern (being lovely and charming) operates against itself: it exposes that which it should actually hide. This is the exact pattern that the tale about Red Riding Hood deals with. During the analytic endeavor, the primary issues that penetrated from the outside, and with which the mental system should cope, are gradually revealed.

Discussing these issues is beyond the scope of this article. However, we may say that in Karin's world, these issues were recorded as an ongoing and consistent need to ensure her parents that she loves them. In the language of fairy-tales, this means that the girl must constantly feed them, and love them, so that she can fulfill their needs. During the analytic psychotherapy sessions, Karin repeatedly examined how her psyche recorded the inversion that occurs in the parent-child structure, which expressed itself in various symptoms, both somatic and mental: externalizing the shyness and the inversion in muscle functioning. In a relatively short period of a few months, a noticeable change has occurred - in her symptoms, as well as in her relations with her parents. The therapy ended after ten months, when Karin went abroad for an extended time period. The Red Riding Hood pattern is only one of several clinical patterns that share a common nucleus and deals with the following question: How can we know that we are functioning properly, and for the right reasons? The need to satisfy and please others, to take responsibility for any dissatisfaction, to adapt ourselves to the expectations of others, to be good, etc., all originate from the same question regarding what drives our choices and the difficulty to accurately identify danger. In its concise way, the fairy-tale relates how the very same grandmother who loves her grandchild suddenly needs her support. In other words, the grandmother needs Red to fulfill her needs, but the grandmother's needs are not related to the child's needs. How should an awareness regarding proper motivation be created, if the psyche cannot identify the one whose needs it fulfills? One of the possible distortions that result from the psyche's failure to defend itself, as described in the tale about the wolf and the kids, is the constant uncertainty regarding what is right and wrong in the interaction with everything that exists outside the mental realm (the house). In Red Riding

Hood, this uncertainty attains an additional aspect: How do we know we are motivated by the right reasons, if we cannot establish the identity of the person whose needs we feel compelled to fulfill? These questions are so very archaic and primary, that in many of the cases we meet in the clinic, patients can tell us nothing about their suffering or inner world, in general, because they are unaware. That which penetrates from the outside and is perceived as a lack of awareness is actually the inability to understand the connection between one's own motives and actions, between one's actions and their implications.

Red Riding Hood is a tale about what thousands of books and therapeutic sessions have found very hard to formulate: unawareness means that we fail to correctly identify the reasons that compel us to make the choices we make, and whether or not we choose correctly. A distortion in these basic abilities emerges from restrictions imposed on the baby/child at an early (too early) age, aimed at serving other people's needs, the very people who are expected to take care of the baby. Lacking the ability to identify the people to whom the needs belong, the baby's ability to learn how to identify and act out of his/her own needs is severely challenged.

The clinical experience clearly shows that the mental reality, wherein the child is required to emotionally support the parent, and in this respect act as a parent to his/her own parent, carries with it an additional, and securely hidden, aspect. This kind of child may grow up and become an adult who is highly functional. However, emotionally he is still a baby as regards the parents to whom he provided his support and the world in general.

This is a result of the child's strong need for the parents to recognize and support his autonomy. A parent supported by a child cannot provide this same child with the recognition and support he needs for the proper development of the child's mental autonomy. As a result, this mental level will not develop. In the clinic, this may be expressed in severely dependent relations in couples, crises in cases of separations from a spouse, the inability to leave an unsuitable spouse, the need to be understood without talking, the expectation to be recognized by authorities, the kinds of issues expressed in therapy, and many other forms.

The need to be charming and lovely is only one way by which the psyche tries to protect itself against the uncertainty that operates and activates it from within. In Red Riding Hood, a defensive pattern, which mainly characterizes women, is emphasized. However, familial patterns in which the child is expected to emotionally support the parents are very frequent. The analysis of the fairy-tale reveals that this need is one of the origins of the inability to know whether or not we make our choices for the right reasons. We doubt if there is any mental syndrome in which this very primary distortion of the inability to know, does not play an important role. Lack of awareness characterizes all mental syndromes, and results because the psyche fails to correctly identify why

and for whom it operates. It fails to differentiate between a correct recognition of the object (differentiation of the primary level) and its changing meanings in various contexts. This lack of differentiation is accompanied by constant feelings of vulnerability and mental suffering. The analysis of the tale about the wolf and the kids illustrates the idea that mental difficulties emerge from the baby's inability to prevent the penetration of hostile components, originating in the immediate and intimate environment, which is expected to protect the baby. This untimely penetration forces the baby to isolate and hide the most sensitive and vulnerable mechanisms - those which are meant to teach the baby how to guide and protect the psyche. The analysis of Red Riding Hood teaches us that the next step in coping with these hostile components is the attempt to please and satisfy them. Behavioral patterns exhibited in the external world are the psyche's way of expressing something which is already distorted. The correct order has been distorted, and the psyche had to find ways to cope. According to the proper order of things, in the parent-child relation the parent is not expected to give his /her needs priority over the child's needs. When this order does not prevail, the infantile psyche finds ways to adapt itself to the needs of those who are supposed to care for and protect it. The tale about Red Riding Hood shows that the breaking or warping of the proper parent-child structure is probably the origin of many of mental difficulties. Our previous work, which identified the primary level of mental organization with somatic sensations, may provide a better understanding of this idea (Raufman and Yigael 2010). In this work, we view the psyche as developing similarly to the way in which the body develops, along a fixed series of steps or stages. Like physical development, each step requires a kind of signal in order to take the next step. The difference is that mental development only begins after birth, outside the womb, and its signals are not within the system, but rather within the intimate environment provided by parents or other care-givers. The distortion in the proper parent-child structure; therefore, results in a distortion of the development of the psyche. Just as the first pregnancy period is the most vulnerable and critical for the proper development of the embryo, the same is true in regard to the early period of mental development. Proper signals in early childhood are essential for healthy mental development. A distortion of these signals may influence later functioning and life in general. The analysis of Red Riding Hood clearly emphasizes something we may already know: in the clinic, as well as in life in general, the right order in the parent-child structure tends to be distorted in a way that is far more common than we usually believe. In Red Riding Hood, the girl unconsciously copes with this distortion by attempting to be lovely and pleasing. Analyses of other fairy-tales, each in its own way, teach us different ways of coping with this primary and basic distortion.

Example 2: The case of Shuli - The mother as both "witch" and baby

The next vignette presents a case in which the right order in the parent-child structure has been so deeply distorted and reversed, so that the child has to take care for her mother as if her mother was a baby. Similar to the above presented vignette, here too, the symptoms may be understood as a precise expression of the way in which the distortion is recorded in the psyche: the child is not allowed to go too far away from her "baby mother".

Shuli is a thirty-year-old woman. She has been married for six years, has two daughters, and a full-time job. She turned to therapy due to severe anxieties. She attributed her anxieties to a physical illness from which she had recovered six months prior to turning to therapy. However, it seemed that additional causes were involved, as the anxieties disappeared after two sessions. She

decided to proceed with the therapy in order to explore other issues that might be involved. In many ways, Shuli is happy with her life. She is in love with her husband; she is a good, loving mother and feels happy with her motherhood. She worked for many years in a big shop and eventually became the shop's manager. She is a very kind woman, funny and with a rich sense of humor. However, behind her enchanting personality and her accomplishments, she suffers from stress that has accompanied her since she was a little child. One symptom that has governed her way of life over the years is expressed by the fact that Shuli limits her geographic living space to include only her personal living area. Whenever she goes further than ten miles from her house, she becomes nervous and distressed. In the past, whenever the family went on vacations, trips or visits to more distant places, they often had to return home, as she quickly became anxious, felt sick, etc. In some cases, her husband went with the daughters only, while she stayed at home. She does not view this symptom as being overly limiting, and does not feel the necessity of going far away from home. However, she feels saddened that she cannot spend more quality time with her family away from home. Her husband accepts and understands this situation. However, there are difficult feelings related to the fact that her husband worked in the United States for several years, far from home, and came back only in order to marry Shuli. Yet, he has not given up his dream to take her with him and live abroad. For her, this kind of traveling is the equivalent of moving to Mars.

Anamnesis

Shuli was raised in a poor family in all respects, both economically and emotionally. Her father was a good, diligent person, who worked in simple jobs and did not earn much. He did his best to support his wife and children. Her mother was always at home and appeared

unhappy and needy to her children. The mother's neediness was overt: she expected her children to be considerate and never leave her alone, ever since they were very young. When they grew up and became independent, her needs expanded to include many other areas, such as asking for money, expecting the children to buy things for her, fixing things at her house, spending time with her, and so forth. Early on, Shuli's brother and two sisters became emotionally detached from the mother. They ignored her requests and distress calls, and did their best to live their own lives, as if she did not exist. Shuli was the only one who was empathic, and often preferred staying home with her mother instead of going to school. When she was a teenager and tried to move away, her mother became hostile and ignored her. Shuli remained living with her parents until she got married. For all those years, except for when she went out to work, Shuli stayed home with her mother. On the one hand, she tried to relieve her mother's suffering, while on the other hand, she tried to encourage her (without success) to go out and find a job. At the same time, Shuli was afraid of her mother's moods and unpredictable reactions to every mistake she made. She feared doing something that might anger or irritate her mother; she also felt that she had disappointed her mother, as she did not finish school or complete other important tasks in her life. Her position, in relation to her mother, was a kind of triple trap: she was responsible for her mother, she was also the one who disappointed her mother by not growing up and, at the same time, she was afraid of her mother like a little girl who fears an angry parent. During the analytic session, it soon became clear that Shuli's way to maintain emotional contact with her mother was by transferring her – like a little baby - inside herself. Beyond her concern and consideration, as well as her feelings of guilt and fear towards her mother, which she continues to experience as an adult, any geographical distancing from her mother is experienced as if she has left and abandoned a little baby. Her symptoms in these situations are all expressed by the unbearable feeling of someone who has left a baby alone, with no one to care for its needs. Simultaneously, and in a less conscious way, she also fears that if she disappoints her mother, her mother will ignore her. The analytic endeavor included ongoing attempts to connect Shuli's daily difficulties to the complicated role that her mother plays in her inner world. During the therapy, her family convinced Shuli to join them for a one-week vacation in a distant place. In spite of her fears, she decided to go. In the following analytic session, she told the therapist that on the first day she was anxious and unsure. However, in the days that followed she overcame her anxiety and enjoyed the vacation. She also related that before going on the vacation she had cried a lot and found it difficult to leave her mother. Her thought was: "I'm leaving my mother alone, with nobody to care for her".

A central emphasis in this process was placed on the

level of somatic sensations: the possibility to make a connection between the sensations that relate to her present life, and those that relate to her mother - in both the past and the present. Once her present sensations towards her mother changed, she discovered that other abilities to cope with reality (at work, with her husband, etc.) changed accordingly. She now feels less vulnerable, and that she has more freedom to make choices. Yet, it is still not clear whether Shuli will succeed in enlarging her geographic world in a meaningful way. This symptom most strongly expresses the deep injury of one who had to "become her mother's mother", adopt her mother as her own baby, care for her baby-mother as such and, at the same time, fear her mother's harsh disappointment and the consequent threat of her mother ignoring her.

Summary

The earlier the differentiation abilities are damaged, the more accuracy and clarity on the part of the therapist is needed in order to overcome this obstacle. This is why it is so important for psychoanalysis to enhance and articulate the ability to accurately formulate the entity with which it deals - the psyche. The existing theories pose many important insights regarding the psyche. However, their knowledge is still somewhat fragmented and ambiguous. A more efficient and systematic way to accurately understand and describe the various levels and functions of the psyche has yet to be formulated. We view fairy-tales as a valuable source of knowledge, which describe the ways in which the ability to differentiate between the helpful and the harmful should be developed, as well as the ability to accurately identify our motives and the reasons behind our behavior. We say "should be developed", as fairy-tales relate something that has already gone wrong. Psychoanalysis is expected to offer reparation.

Our analysis of fairy-tales leads to certain conclusions:

- they illustrate common and frequent mental situations originating in early childhood experiences. In many cases, the descriptions of these situations are very detailed and accurate. We doubt if there is any other way to reach these distant, non-verbal past experiences. The central pattern described in Red Riding Hood is the distortion of the parent-child structure. The fairy-tale emphasizes only one way, among many others, in which this pattern may become damaged and distorted,
- Fairy-tales contain "keys", which enable proposing a consistent interpretation that resembles situations common in the analytic endeavor. In addition, these keys may operate in many other contexts (works of art, for example). A further analysis of additional fairy-tales is needed in order to examine our assumption that we are dealing with an internal, subjective language of the psyche, reflected and presented in fairy-tales. The intersubjective communication of this internal language is based

on mapping the mental functions and their development, as well as the recording of situations, experiences and mental processes which are universal and go beyond time and space. It is reasonable to assume that the keys we identify in fairy-tales play a similar role in dreams, psychoses and other non-verbal expressions.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, G (2003). Old Tales for New: Finding the First Fairy Tales. In: A Companion to the Fairy Tale. Eds. Hilda, Ellis Davidson and Anna Chaudhri, Cambridge D.S. Brewer, pp. 85-99.
- Attwood, F (1999). Who's Afraid of Little Red Riding Hood? Male Desire, fantasy and Impersonation in the Telling of a Fairytale. *Mythmaking from Past to Present*, 6:1, pp. 95-105.
- Barzilai, S. (1999). Lacan and the Matter of Origins. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Beckett, S. L. (2005). Recycling Red Riding Hood in the Americas. In: *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature*, 73, eds. Anderson, Mark Cronlund and Blayer, Irene Maria F. New York, NY: Peter Lang, pp. 7-28.
- Bettelheim, B. (1976). The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales. New York: Penguin Books.
- Douglas, M.(1995). Red Riding Hood: An Interpretation from Anthropology. *Folklore*, 106, pp. 1-7.
- Dundes, A. (Ed.)(1989). Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Grimm, J., and Grimm, W.(1891). *Deuthe Sagen*. Berlin, Nicolische Verlags.
- Franz, M. L. (1978). An introduction to the psychology of fairy tales. Irving, TX: Spring Publications.
- Freud, S. (1913). The occurrence in dreams of material from fairy tales, S. E: XII, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Hamersak, M. (2004). History, Literature and Childhood: Encounters and Departures. *Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research*, 41:1, pp. 23-39.
- Johnson, F. R. and Carroll, C. M.(1992). Little Red Riding Hood Then and Now. *Studies in Popular Culture*, 14:2, pp. 71-84.
- Mackintosh, F.(2004). Babes in the Bosque: Woman's Writing Fairy Tales in Twentieth-Century Argentine. In: *Fairy Tales and Feminism Approaches*, ed. Donald Haase, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp. 149-169.
- Neumann, E. (1976). Amor and psyche. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press.
- Orenstein, C.(2002). Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale. New York, Basic Books.
- Raufman, R. and Yigael, Y. The Primary Psyche from the Wonder-Tales' Point of View, *American Journal of*

- Psychoanalysis, in press.
- Raufman, R. (2012). Realizations of Idiomatic-Expressions in Israeli Wonder-Tales: A New Interpretative Method, *Fabula*, 53 (1-2), pp. 20-45.
- Raufman, R. and Yigael, Y. (2011). "Feeling good in your Skin" Part II: Idiomatic Expressions – The Way Language connects to the Primary Levels of Mental Organization, *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 71: 16-36.
- Raufman, R. and Yigael, Y. (2010). "Feeling Good in Your Own Skin", Part I: Primary Levels of Mental Organization. *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 70: 361-385.
- Soriano, M.(1986). *Les contes de Perrault: Culture Savante et Traditions Populaires*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Shavit, Z.(1986) *The Poetics of Children's Literature*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Tinbergen, n. (1951). *The Study of Instinct*. London, Oxford University Press.
- Verdier, Y. (1997). Little Red Riding Hood in Oral Tradition. *Marvels and Tales* 1-2, pp. 101-123.
- Zipes, J. (1993). *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. Routledge, New York and London.