

Between mission and profession - the question of value in training in group-analytical psychotherapy.

What does Chrysalis feel?

The moment I started thinking about what to write in this essay, I realized it would need to be a personal story. I hope however that others will be able to recognize themselves and their stories in it. First thing that came to my mind when I read "profession" was "disappointment". The association may seem weird for non-polish language speakers, but in the polish language we sometimes use the same word to describe different things. The polish word for profession is *zawód*, which also means disappointment. When I introduced this perspective to one of the supervisors, I heard: "So you're talking about the realness?" The comment has opened up new possibilities for me. Earlier I was always focusing on the lack of training, but it turns out that it is more important for me to discover the answers to the questions "what kind of student I want to be?" or "what do I want to take for myself from what is offered?". Do I want to be an "ideal" pupil, or do I want to take up the effort of shaping myself as an autonomous group analyst, which is not always praiseworthy in terms of image?

Before I start writing any paper, I walk and think for a long time, I gather various associations, which slowly form a whole. And in this way I came to the metaphor of the "chrysalis" (an insect in the inactive stage of development intermediate between larva and adult). The process of coming to that metaphor started with me being confronted with my own fatigue with failures, prolapses of patients, writing down clinical material again and again, supervising my work and regularly falling into states of "non-understanding" of many issues. A chrysalis stood in front of my eyes. Usually, we do not think about a chrysalis much. If we do, we just focus on the fact that one day it will become a butterfly. We assume that it sits in its cocoon and matures, but we don't really know what it is experiencing? Maybe it is hurting? After all, during this phase it is going through such intensive processes that it is difficult for us to imagine how it feels. The larva collects supplies from the environment before it transforms into a chrysalis. Larva also prepares a place suitable for this period and only then the time of change begins. The persistence in this stage in various individuals depends on the amount of food accumulated by the larva (the chrysalis uses these stocks) and the ambient temperature at which it resides. When it's ready, it emerges outward in the form of an imago, the mature representative of its species.

The phase in which I am now is such a time of transformation. And I wonder what kind of imago it will bring? Who will I become in the phase of mature individual in the field of professional work? This vision evokes not only hope and satisfaction, but also fear. The question arises - what does it depend on?

I would like to refer here to Franz Kafka's 1915 short story "Metamorphosis". The main character Gregor Samsa - the traveling salesman, is known to us at the moment when we can say that he has just reached the imago stage. One day he wakes up and finds that he has turned into a vermin of human size with rigid armor and many legs. Until then, he had worked in commerce, not tolerating his occupation, having a boss who did not accept any indisposition of the employee. He was doing his job in order to save his family from the financial troubles they had fallen into after his father's company had gone bankrupt. The mother, father and 17-year-old sister were proud of him in the beginning, which was the force driving his professional duties. Quite quickly it became the norm for them, so they stopped noticing his efforts, which caused him to become more and more stagnant and discouraged.



That morning, Gregor aroused strong concerns among his loved ones and his colleagues, when he did not wake up as usual on a train to set off his daily tasks. As long as they had not seen what had happened to him, they seemed to show anxiety and concern about his health. However the moment they noticed his “metamorphosis”, their feelings changed into horror, disgust and hateful rage leading to the desire to destroy. His proxy, appearing in the house just a moment after the main character was supposed to be at the station, runs away in panic, which is tantamount to loss of employment. The family decide to isolate their son and brother from the outside world by locking him in his room. For a long time his sister is the only one to enter the room. She provides food for Gregor but yet she is disgusted and afraid, so for the time of her visits Gregor hides under the bed, with great effort, so as not to expose sister to his sight. He does not think about his own state or the reasons for what happened. He listens through the closed door, what his loved ones are going through, what their plans and moods are. One day he is spotted by his mother, which is resulting in her fainting and an angry attack from his father. This attack leads Gregor to disability. He becomes more and more apathetic, completely losing his appetite. For the family his very existence becomes so burdensome that they condemn him to death in complete isolation and without the possibility of any movement. Gregor Samsa dies of starvation on the night when his loved ones sentence him. The family is relieved and visualizes their bright future anew.

Let this story become a counterpoint to the question about finding one's own professional identity. I would like that for two reasons. Firstly, Gregor underwent a transformation that ended dramatically. In my understanding, it was due to the lack of basic values, which he did not acquire during his life, so he couldn't benefit from them. And secondly, the main character of Kafka's story never found true professional satisfaction because he was guided by the needs of others and the desire for his family to be proud of him, instead of searching for an internal compass leading towards passion and development. I see the experience of the group - analytical training, in which I decided to take part differently.

THE ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT. WHO SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE?

Earlier, it was stated that the chrysalis is not feeding directly, but only uses what it gathered at the stage of larva. Depending on the care we receive, we will be able to start the process of using accumulated resources.

Gregor died of starvation, to which he actually led himself. That's how his loved ones saw it: *"Just look how thin he was. He didn't eat anything for so long. The food came out again just the same as when it went in"*¹. However, nobody thought about the cause of this phenomenon. The main character of "Metamorphosis" grew up in a totalitarian world, where you mean as much as the profits you bring, where there is no room for diversity nor originality. Curiosity and the search for meaning are experienced as a deadly threat. Under such conditions, man cannot feel his own subjectivity, he is in total dependence on the one who has power - it is exchangeable trade.

At the other end, there is an idealized teacher who designs the helpless and needy part of himself and takes on the motherly role in order to avoid the feeling of helplessness. When the environment tries to spare "the children" pain and suffering, it deprives them of the opportunity to grow up and learn from their own failures. Psychologist Edith Eger, who survived Auschwitz, said that the first to die in the concentration camp were spoiled, coddled children. They waited for others to save them, but when that wasn't happening, they simply gave up. They were not taught how to take care of themselves².

¹ Kafka, F. (1915/2016) Metamorphosis. p.51

² Dalai Lama, Tutu, Abrams, 2017, p.150



Now I am at the stage of development, where I take responsibility for who I will become as an analyst. This leads me to the conclusion that the main value that I received from my training in Raszów is the strive for autonomy in the process of discovering my own professional identity. Lack of rigor, clear boundaries, acceptance of diversity, but also motivation to take on new challenges and space for independent decisions and mistakes, and in this all, the place for exchange of ideas - these are the elements that support this process.

TO FIND YOURSELF. MENTAL WORK ON ONESELF.

Gregor did not take the trouble to look at himself in an honest and deep way. His eyes were directed towards his loved ones to the very end:

“He soon made the discovery that he could no longer move at all. This was no surprise to him, it seemed rather that being able to actually move around on those spindly little legs until then was unnatural. He also felt relatively comfortable. It is true that his entire body was aching, but the pain seemed to be slowly getting weaker and weaker and would finally disappear altogether. (...)He thought back of his family with emotion and love. If it was possible, he felt that he must go away even more strongly than his sister. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful rumination until he heard the clock tower strike three in the morning. He watched as it slowly began to get light everywhere outside the window too. Then, without his willing it, his head sank down completely, and his last breath flowed weakly from his nostrils”³.

That is how the identity dies. Gregor Samsa in his human form was imprisoned too. Actually, both states of his existence were not that different. One could even risk to claim when being a worm, Gregor is more aware of his life than when he was still a human.

It is impossible to develop one's own existence in constant dependence on the Other, reflecting in other's eyes. You have to find yourself. The training gives you that opportunity. The way to finding yourself leads through supervises, peer interviews and above all through your own analysis in the group. Investigating one's own inner world requires courage and humility, because learning the truth about oneself involves seeing different sides of our personality, as well as the need to acknowledge psychological and social reality, including mutual interdependence, which is not the same as devastating dependence from the Other.

In our profession, this is particularly important. Due to the fact that the suffering person is also our client, thanks to whom we make a living, there is a risk that we may lose our focus on who is for whom in the office? Narcissistic help rarely brings good results because it ignores the real needs of the other person. In this way, the profession of psychotherapist is stopped, and its place is taken by "suffering tourism". Therefore, continuous work on ourselves through the tools offered to us, gives us hope that we will protect psychotherapy profession against this.

I will summarize this part with the words of Bion⁴: *"The analyst to whom you will become is you and only you. You must appreciate the uniqueness of your personality - you use it, not all of those interpretations [i.e. the theories you use to combat the feeling that you are not really an analyst and you do not know how to become one]."*

ISOLATION OR CONFRONTING RELATIONAL REALITY?

Development is not possible in isolation. Evolutionary sciences prove that cooperation and emotions associated with it - empathy, compassion and generosity - are the foundations of

³ Kafka, F. (1915/2016) *Metamorphosis*. p.50

⁴ Bion, W. (1987, in: Ogden, 2018) p.109



the survival of our species⁵. Human is a social animal, so for an individual and the whole group, breaking ties with others is a trauma. In isolation, a person becomes dehumanized. It can be understood on a social and a personal level. Kafka's story clearly addresses this issue. The breakdown of contacts led all main characters to complete overpowerment in relations. At one point, it seems that Gregor is experiencing **the insight**: *"I'd like to eat something", said Gregor anxiously, "but not anything like they're eating. They do feed themselves. And here I am, dying!"*⁶.

However, due to the fact that it took place in total loneliness, without the possibility of being reflected by another human being, the thought passed into nothingness unnoticed.

I would like now to come back to the reaction of the supervisor, which I mentioned at the beginning of my talk. The question my supervisor asked ("do you talk about the realness?") represents a clear example of reflection, which my supervisor showed me reality instead of being stuck in dependent defenses, where always one side has to bear the burden of guilt. By asking the question rather than making a statement, she acknowledged my experience and invited me to develop my ideas further. One question has ensured the continuity of the process of weaving thoughts in place of the coercion of repetition. It always happens in a dialogue, it does not always have to be a supervisor or an analyst. What is needed is mutual acceptance and attention.

I have to admit that when writing about the chrysalis, I sometimes felt anxiety, how is a comparison to the worm going to be perceived? At such moments I thought about Buddhism, where every being is priceless. Similarly, I understand the place of a person in a group, not only an analytical one. And that thought calmed me down.

It is important for me to emphasize another aspect of isolation. We also alienate when we are closed in one theory, approach or association. Some kind of flexibility is necessary. Of course, inspiration, growth and development require that you have a goal, but at the same time you must not cling to it or become attached to your own aspirations. In order to achieve one's goal, one has to get rid of well-known assumptions about how to achieve it⁷ - this way, one moves away from "dead" theories towards experiencing life. The change is the result of internal work, which leads us to check the nature of our objects through experience, not only in fantasy. Knowledge is to use it, not to hide behind it from oneself and others. When that is how knowledge is used, the "armour" in the imago stage will not be so hard and rigid that it will not be able to transmit various new contents.

LEARN HOW TO SPEAK A HUMAN and OWN VOICE

During the training speaking in every-day human language turned out to be an extremely difficult task for me. Especially since it is impossible to learn meaningful narratives and interpretations in an artificial way. This is a part strictly assigned to practice and relation. When you read masterpieces, specialist literature, talk to lecturers and colleagues, speaking about concepts is not so complicated – we all know the jargon and feel comfortable speaking it. But it is different when we are in our psychotherapy room, with a person or a group of people who are suffering. They are often not interested in our analytic or psychological concepts, but they want empathy and relief. And you keep on thinking about the word of Bion, Foulks, Klein, McDougall and many others, those who are gone and those who are alive. And you do not know "how to say it in human terms?" and often you notice that what you just said did not sound human, did not have human voice. Or you can't even notice that,

⁵ Dalai Lama, Tutu, Abrams, 2017, p.259

⁶ Kafka, F. (1915/2016) *Metamorphosis*. p 44

⁷ Dalai Lama, Tutu, Abrams, 2017, p.231



only the supervisor and colleagues in supervision make this clear to you. So next time you will try again and again. A very arduous task. However, it is necessary to be able to discover or build your own workshop. I will refer to the words of Thomas H. Ogden⁸: *"In the process of becoming an analyst, we must" dream "our own true way of speaking, and part of this task is to free ourselves from the influence of our analyst (or analysts), supervisors, teachers and admired authors - while taking into account everything we have learned from them. [...] The "original" one can feel only as a result of the arduous effort to free oneself from the chains of orthodoxy, tradition and one's own unconscious irrational internal prohibitions (Gabbard, 2007 for Ogden, 2017). The struggle to go beyond the position of your theory or her servant is an inseparable element of these efforts."*

A person faces a challenge to develop from a perception of a training institute and teachers as those who know how to be a group analyst to the placement of this knowledge within oneself. The training enables this task. This invitation to speak at this year's conference is a good example for that. This process of me trying to capture my experiences with words and then putting them on paper is extremely valuable lesson in discovering my own, human language.

PROVIDED VALUES AS OPPORTUNITY

The values I have received, but also those which I contributed in the training process, I see as follows:

First of all: the need for a good enough environment. It cannot be sterile and raw, neither can it be perfect or idealized, because such environment leads to devastating dependence.

Secondly: openness to expressing one's own needs. Let's not try to be perfect students, because then we will not be able to truly "eat" and "store food" that we need to develop. We need the ability to question authorities, so that we can protect our profession from excessive rigidity.

Thirdly: group spirit and the courage to create in relations with others.

Fourth: autonomy in the process of shaping one's professional identity - learning to use one's own personal instrument of work.

And fifthly: humility and patience.

I have received a lot of lessons and many more are ahead of me. At this stage, I am growing so that in some time I can rise to an independent flight.

The words of Rainer Maria Rilke, which he addressed to Franz Xawery Kappus (1902 - 1908), help me in times of crisis. Maybe they will also become a support for other trainees surviving moments of confusion when there are no answers:

"I beg you, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. (...) Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." (Rilke, Letters to a young poet)

You may experience some pain and toil in my essay, but when we realize that this is an element of a larger whole, which is the development of a human - the honest joy of this fact tastes much better.

Thank you.

⁸ Ogden, T.H. (2018) p.115, p.128



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