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## **Communal Education in the Closed Kibbutz Community as a Reflection of Narcissistic Parenthood**



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**ABSTRACT:** This article attempts to highlight the existence of mental disorders resulting from narcissistic relationships as reflected in the system of communal education that was practiced in Israeli kibbutzim until the 1980s. The narcissistic disorder is characterized by an emotional short-sightedness, a false self, developed as a defence against feelings of worthlessness, and unique behavioural patterns in interaction with others. Narcissists demand much attention, recognition and closeness on the part of their children and spouses, while they themselves lack empathy and find it difficult to respond to subjectivity in others. The spotlight is shone on victims who are affected by narcissistic parents, as well as similar cases of children raised in the system of communal education on kibbutzim. A parallel is drawn between the narcissistic adult and the communal education system which, in adherence to an ideology, fails to see the differential needs of each child and satisfy them. Such children suffer from emotional disorders as a result of the demand made of them to conform to a specific educational model that was in keeping with the times. Three areas are cited in which children brought up in the system experienced deprivation: nights spent with no adult in attendance; conformity in dress and attitude to religion and tradition; and suppression of personal talents and aptitudes. Recommendations are made for treating victims of narcissistic parents and children reared in the system of communal education.

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### **THE KIBBUTZ AS A CLOSED COMMUNITY**

The term "closed community" refers primarily to a structural, social and cultural construct that characterizes a certain group of people. In operating as a society that differentiates itself from its surroundings based on physical, social and cultural boundaries, the Israeli kibbutz once subscribed to such a definition. Kibbutz members were subjected to normative social delineations that were different to those commonly accepted in society in general.

Life on the kibbutz was typified by a set of codes unique to its members, including an internal system of justice and controlled contact with the outside world.

The kibbutz community always defined itself as one that functioned as an egalitarian cooperative, with the good of all uppermost in mind. It thus channelled its emotional resources into benefiting its members as a whole rather than the individual.

As a closed community the kibbutz employed informal, albeit powerful, supervisory mechanisms in connection with its members, aimed at creating a commitment and solidarity on a level that ensured total loyalty to kibbutz norms and values.

The special structure of the kibbutz, with recreational activities that were common to all and living accommodation restricted to demarcated spaces, resulted in the members' dependency on the community, in which they lived and raised their children, covering a wide range of areas. This dependency bolstered the internal supervisory system significantly, resulting in heightened oversight of his conduct in various spheres of life.

### **COMMUNAL EDUCATION**

Communal education involves an educational approach whose precepts were the guiding light for raising and instructing children from kibbutzim of all ideologies. The approach was adhered to in kibbutzim up to the late 1980s. Its chief ideologist and patron was Shmuel Golan, a member of Kibbutz Mishmar HaEmek and a psychoanalyst by profession, who specialized in his field in Berlin prior to immigrating to Israel.

Communal education covered the entire growth period of the children, from their toddler years to adolescence, and was considered at the time as being a natural outcome of the egalitarian principles that were rooted in the kibbutz movement, with its myriad ideological streams. A close correspondence existed between the aims of the kibbutz as a social structure and the aims of communal education.

In keeping with the principles of communal education, the children's lives revolved around three institutions: the children's house (beit hayeladim), the parents' home, and the kibbutz. All kibbutz children lived in the children's house, slept there, and visited their parents' home once a day, in the afternoons.

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A key principle in communal education was non-selective education. All kibbutz children, without exception, were entitled to 12 years of schooling. Exams were not given, nor were grades assigned. The students were not even expected to sit for the matriculation exams. The intention on the part of the founding fathers of this approach was to create a new "synthesized" man in an exemplary society. The educators, handpicked by the kibbutz members, were generally the most learned among them, even being sent for training and studies for the purpose of their work.

It was believed that the child's dependency on his family should not include his financial needs since such a dependency would warp his development. Responsibility for the economic welfare of kibbutz children was thus transferred from the parents to kibbutz society. The belief was that the family was not the sole or principal focal point with respect to the children's needs. Partnering with the parents in terms of these needs were the educators and the kibbutz as a whole as a just and advanced society. Even the father's roles according to communal education were interpreted differently: he was expected to devote a decent amount of time to his children, thereby forming a closer and more intimate relationship with them than a father would outside the kibbutz, with his preoccupation with making a livelihood.

Classical psychoanalysis played a central and decisive role in establishing the foundations of communal education in the kibbutz movement. This certainly was so, at the inception of this approach. Shmuel Golan, an architect of communal education, acquired his training in psychoanalysis in Berlin. He infused his own enthusiasm for Freud's ideas into educators of communal education by means of seminars, day conferences and training courses. Psychoanalysis, according to Golan, is in total harmony with the principles of the movement. Among other things, he claimed that the new kibbutz society, was based on the annulment of private property. It functioned on unique social, economic and educational models, completely different from those found in capitalistic society. The kibbutz aspires to take responsibility for its members and aspires to provide them with the necessary welfare alongside the advancement of the values of justice, equality, human rights, respect, social equality and free access to culture. He proposed that communal education aspires to create different and new social relations, by annulment of the patriarchal family, the consort of capitalism, that wishes to make neurosis the guarantor of the existence of class differences and the exploitation of the proletariat, which the capitalistic economic system is based upon.

### **NARCISSUS AND NARCISSISM**

A healthy narcissist is a person who cares about himself and develops a positive, loving relationship with himself. As such, he is able to see the positive and estimable in others. The libidinal investment of a person in himself is learned and internalized already in infancy. Emotionally, it matures into a separation of feelings, to the extent of experiencing the "me" and the "other" residing side by side in a state of coexistence. When this process is disrupted, the person finds himself locked in the need to be nourished and contained by others, a phenomenon that is evident especially between spouses or between parents and children. The need is manifested in a demand from those in contact with the person to be the centre of their world. The narcissist manipulates the private space of those close to him as though it were his own, forcing upon them a virtual reality that is a reflection of himself, his needs and his desires. People intimate with him wonder if he/she is at all aware of the way he conducts himself in his relationships. He acts like a stage director, pulling the strings but not participating with others on an equal footing.

The narcissist does not generally seek therapy since he sincerely believes that the difficulties he experiences in relationships stem from the difficulties his partners have. The ones who do feel the need for therapy are his "victims" – his children or spouses.

### **NARCISSUS AND NARCISSISM – THE MYTH AND THE PERSONALITY**

According to Greek mythology, Narcissus spied his face reflected in a river and could not stop contemplating its beauty. Echo, the nymph, fell head over heels in love with him, but he was oblivious to her overtures. Rooted to the spot, Narcissus continued to stare at his reflection; eventually, overcome by hunger and thirst, he fell into the water and drowned.

The above theme strikes at the root of the narcissistic experience. The phenomenon involves an emotional short-sightedness that has a severe effect on its victims (children or spouses) since they are burdened with the obligation of serving as both mirror and sound box for the narcissist, all of it being orchestrated by him and him only.

Alice Miller (1992) tells us that Echo's advances show up his beauty and nobility, but sever him from all his other parts, such as doubt, shame, envy, love of others and sharing with others. This severance, or the dissonance between himself and his self-image on the one hand, and other parts of his mental makeup on the other, implant in him a "false self" which others around him encounter and sense, but which he himself fails to see and feel. These detached parts are "deposited", with the help of projective identification, in the narcissist's partners, who become, whether consciously or unconsciously, responsible for his happiness.

Espesa (2004) refers to the narcissist's projective identification vis-à-vis his partners, and claims it is something that also occurs between the narcissist as patient and his therapist. According to him, in many cases such patients establish a "negative pre-transferrence" vis-à-vis the therapist and, clearly, their children as well. In therapy they find it extremely difficult to recall their childhood in the presence of the therapist, and what is particularly striking is the appearance of this difficulty around painful memories that were experienced in relation to their parents.

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Dissociative narcissism is a key characteristic of parents displaying the above characteristics. It is based in large part on the denial of past conflicts, as also on denial of the possibility that their childhood has any immediate impact on their current parenting or on their relationship with their spouses. Thus the therapist, in Espasa's opinion, must tread very carefully before making premature interpretations in working with this population so as to avoid encountering their opposition. In dealing with narcissistic parents, the therapist must invest much effort in consolidating the therapeutic pact, suggesting long-term interventions in order to help them in their interaction with their children.

Kohut (2007) claims that the fundamental need of a person with a narcissistic personality disorder is for an admired individual beside whom he can be in the capacity of a "favoured child" and aspire to resemble. His approach brings to mind the possibility that the narcissistic drama is in fact a kind of production, involving re-editing of an experience that went bad in childhood, an attempt to return things to their rightful place, or to reverse and correct a distortion that occurred in early relations with the parent. Kristeva ( ) states that Narcissus's fault lies in the fact that he does not realize that his reflection in the river water is only skin deep and mirrors no self-awareness. Thus, in her opinion, Narcissus is "guilty" both of that lack and of blithely accepting a superficial and incomplete conception of who and what he is.

Freud refers to narcissism and narcissistic relationships as part of his extended work on libidinal investment in the self and in the object. According to him, when investment is in the self, others are loved as different representations of oneself. When investment is in an object (e.g. the mother as a longed-for figure), development of object-oriented relationships is made possible.

### **NARCISSISM AND SYMBIOTIC ATTACHMENT**

Freud treats parent-children relations as essentially narcissistic. In his opinion it is a matter of parents projecting the ideal "me" on their children; as such, the parent nourishes his children and helps them grow and develop a sense of identity and belonging. Accordingly, it may be possible to witness narcissistic relations between a parent and his children alongside object relations, in which the child is loved as an entity separate from his parent (Klein, 1975; Kernberg, 1984). The question is, when and why does pathology kick in? The answer is, when the parent needs his child to satisfy his needs, or when he expects his child to fulfil his wishes for him (Solan, 2007).

At times, in expecting a reward in his relationship with his children, the parent stifles their mental development as autonomous individuals. This situation is described by Miller as "narcissistic overinvestment", one in which symbiotic attachment takes place, blocking development and differentiation. This then is the key characteristic in the development of the narcissistic personality disorder, causing unrelenting suffering in individuals involved in a narcissistic relationship.

Symbiotic relations of this type are not indicative of a normal development process and, indeed, serve as fertile ground for the development of the narcissistic personality disorder. Symbiotic attachment signifies an emotional perception of the self merging with an object; it is extremely destructive, principally because it means that only symbiotic attachment can attest to ideal love, and any distancing or detachment from it is experienced as abandonment or injury, leading to a sense of annihilation and overwhelming anxiety. The two entities cannot exist separately.

An encounter with patients who are victims of narcissistic parents thus re-enacts scenarios of the parent as a phantom in the therapy room. Such a "phantom parent" has in effect possession of parts of his victim's mind, and at times does not give the victim permission to live his life without him or be himself. Spanning all ages, such victims are trapped in symbiotic relationships with a narcissistic figure and are under his absolute control.

### **COMMUNAL EDUCATION ON THE KIBBUTZ AS A REFLECTION OF NARCISSISTIC PARENTING**

An attempt is made here to describe the system of communal education once practised throughout the kibbutz movement as possessing the characteristics of a narcissistic parent. Kibbutz intentions were only good – creation of a "new person" who would be far less materialistic, "synthesized" in terms of his abilities, and endowed with an egalitarian view towards all human beings. The attitude of educators and kibbutz members towards the youngsters, however, was loaded with characteristics narcissistic parenting in many and diverse forms. Children in the communal education system often experienced a sense of being invisible within the overall society and within their own children's age group, being assimilated into these entities, led, and managed based on educational concepts that prohibited or quashed manifestations of individuality and personal uniqueness. Pressure was always exerted in favour of social oneness, with individual conspicuousness or differences being eschewed. This gave rise to a deficiency in the basic rules of interpersonal relations – acknowledgment of uniqueness in others, respect for their boundaries, and reciprocal appreciation of individuality, wherever encountered. Kibbutz society in general, and its educators in particular, acted as stage directors, pulling the strings, and driven all the while by the dogma that one size fits all, to the extent of total disregard for the needs and proclivities of the children themselves. The children thus ultimately served the interests of kibbutz society (the narcissistic parent) instead of kibbutz society serving the needs of the children who were growing up and schooling there.

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### **DEPRIVED INDIVIDUALISM IN CHILDREN RAISED IN A COMMUNAL EDUCATION SYSTEM**

A number of areas exist in which the individualism of children raised in a communal education system suffered severe deprivation. Their unique needs were never heard, let alone satisfied, and any attempt on their part at challenging the kibbutz hegemony was met with harsh sanctions by the educators and the kibbutz as a whole.

Examples of these areas are:

#### 1. Nights in the children's houses

All kibbutz children spent nights in the children's houses. Generally three to four children (boys and girls together) slept in a room with no adult to oversee them. A night watchman, an adult member of the kibbutz doing duty in rotation with others, would patrol between the various children's houses and check that all the children were asleep. He would visit each house three times a night at most.

In scenarios that were not at all rare, children would wake up in the middle of the night, trembling with fright, trying to awaken the others in the room, or escaping to their parents' homes. The parents would refuse to let the miscreants spend the rest of the night with them and would return them forthwith to the children's house.

The kibbutz educational system refused to cater to the needs and difficulties of these children and roundly denounced their behaviour. Needless to say, both the children and their parents suffered stigmas, being referred to as "the problematic ones". The children's suffering was thus twofold: fear of spending nights away from their parents, and public censure for being unable to adapt.

#### 2. Pressure to conform to the kibbutz way of life and educational values: uniform attire and attitude to religion and Jewish tradition

One of the fundamental values in communal education was equality, with all kibbutz children receiving the same education. Schooling included a full 12 years of study, with no thought given to individual preferences or talents that might be evident. Mechanical equality of this type also typified the attitude to dress, the idea being to provide exactly the same kind of clothing to all. If the communal store supplied blue coats to the girls, it had to be the same coat for all.

An episode in this context involved one of the girls who asked the clothing store manager to give her the cash equivalent of a coat since she did not like the idea of the same garment being worn by all. The woman's reply was not long in coming: "Under no circumstances! You're no different from the others, just make do like everyone else does! You're not special, you're the same as everyone else!"

Conformity was the operative word even when it came to the colour of the clothes. Red was out; it was a colour that called for attention and broke ranks. The claim was that a person who wore red wanted to stand out. All were equal so there was no justification for choosing that colour.

Conformity to a dress code was not quite as strict throughout the kibbutz movement. In several, however, as in those belonging to the Shomer Hatza'ir stream, it was the rule of law.

Though more conspicuous in the case of dress, social pressure to conform clearly existed in several areas. Conformity was expected in connection with opinions, in commending or denouncing specific values, and in social or political activity. Everyone identified more or less with the same values, and believed wholeheartedly in settlement of the land by a secular, socialist population.

Any disclosure of a traditional or religious bent in any form was condemned and prohibited. No religious ceremonies were allowed, while traditional Jewish festivals were modified to include secular, socialist content. Textbooks and school curricula were also altered in the same vein. Among the kibbutz founders were several who had come from religious homes, and religious tradition was dear to them. One cannot say today what they felt about kibbutz policy on religion since most of them are no longer alive. Clearly, however, the pressure to conform was so great that they might not have dared to express their real feelings even to themselves.

#### 3. Suppression of personal talents and aptitudes

With respect to this particular area, the attitude was mixed, or more accurately, ambivalent. Certain gifts that were detected in a child, such as an ear for music, were strenuously encouraged. Others that were deemed decadent or bourgeois were summarily quashed. Every age group was given the opportunity to learn one musical instrument – the flute or mandolin – and children who were found to be musically inclined were sent for lessons in a instrument suited to their talents, as determined by the music teacher. Sports of all types were supported to the fullest extent. In contrast, girls who wished to learn ballet were rejected outright; the dance form was not felt to be in keeping with the pioneering socialist spirit of the kibbutz and had no place in the life of the "new person" the kibbutz was aspiring to create.

### **POSSIBLE THERAPEUTIC APPROACH TO VICTIMS OF NARCISSISTIC RELATIONS**

My present work as psychotherapist has afforded me several opportunities to meet victims of communal education on the kibbutz. They are only too happy to retell stories about the difficulties they faced in childhood, when individual needs were ignored and all efforts were directed towards the common good. Such patients need a number of remedial experiences in terms of relationships –

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ones that would see them for their uniqueness and their efforts to gain recognition, while conveying an understanding of their reality. They do not seek gratification alone, but rather contact, acknowledgment, self-worth and meaning. In my opinion the approach to such patients is through Kohut's theories on relational psychology and self-psychology.

Freud's traditional approach to psychoanalysis stated that it must address the fantasies of patients rather than the concrete facts that make up their lives. Traditional therapy then is based on the processing and interpretation of transference and counter-transference. Interpretation, reflection and other interventions, widely accepted in dynamic therapy, could cause re-enactment of the patient's life situations, reviving the trauma of the chaotic relationship with the narcissist. In circumstances of anxiety-related and uncertain contact (Bolby, 1988), the therapist dealing with the narcissistic personality disorder cannot merely remain an onlooker or observer. He must be an active partner with respect to the "invisible" zones and the misadventures that occurred in the victims' lives. Work with the victims of narcissistic relationships requires the therapist to refer to a number of key issues, including reframing of perceptions and templates that were consolidated by the victims in the course of their interaction with a narcissistic partner, alongside diagnosis and underscoring of the reality principle in the mental life of the patient, as part of the process of rehabilitative separation and renewal of self.

The key issues are:

1. The ability to pinpoint the absence of boundaries between the patient and the narcissist (approach by educators in the communal education system and related kibbutz concepts)  
An ability is required to set boundaries to the narcissistic personality, alongside boundaries to the self of the victim. This is done through intensified awareness of the victim's real need from the narcissistic figure. It will thus be possible to release the patient from the symbiotic vice that characterizes the relationship with the narcissist (the kibbutz educational approach) or, in short, from the experience of "if I do not belong to him, I am his enemy".  
It should be borne in mind that the patient will be able to set boundaries for the symbiotic narcissist as well as for himself – such a change taking place only if he is aware of the problem posed by the absence of such boundaries. In parallel, the therapist must provide support and encouragement, enabling the patient to demonstrate initiative and creativity in his attempts at cultivating his true inner self. If successful, his sense of achievement and self-confidence will be boosted and his stature grow once separated from his symbiotic connections.
2. Remediation of guilt and dissatisfaction in victims of relationships with narcissistic personalities  
Victims of relationships with narcissists frequently ask themselves a question that remains typically latent: "Who was wrong in the relationship that failed? I? He?" However, instead of dwelling on questions of this type, a better course would be to ask: "What was wrong in the relationship?" In pursuing such an inquiry, the feeling on the part of the patient that he is "deficient" will lose its potency, while he will at the same time realize that it was only a consequence of the relationship in which he was entangled.
3. Assistance to the patient in developing feelings towards himself as well as towards others who have not been in a relationship with him  
An additional aim in working with victims of interaction with narcissists is inculcation of the ability to "see myself and my needs". The sensation experienced by these victims is invariably about being "invisible", one that tends to be internalized and egosyntonic. New identity and self-image templates can be formed in the framework of therapy, which are separate and allow the victim to both detach himself from an injurious relationship and open up to new relations, whether social or intimate.

Communal education, the brainchild of the kibbutz movement – identical education for all, devoid of any unique intimacy – is an example of warped narcissistic behaviour (Gonen, 2009). Kibbutz educators were guided by a slew of good intentions; they believed that the ideology of joint effort would produce moral human beings, willing to give of themselves for the benefit of all members of the young society taking shape in Israel. They were, however, so fired up with putting their ideology into practice that they totally ignored the individual needs of the children and their parents, including a need for intimacy within the nuclear family. The result was a large number of children suffering from mental problems. It was clearly a case of overinvestment on the part of the educators alongside blind adherence to ideology. With its deficient nurturing and lack of attention to individual needs, the phenomenon rings of a mechanism that was typically narcissistic.

In the course of their therapeutic sessions, people who had left the kibbutz as adults speak of an experience that amounted to serious betrayal and abandonment on the part of the kibbutz. In contrast, they themselves feel like traitors and are viewed as such by an appreciable number of present-day kibbutz members. They refer to the dread of visiting their parents who have remained on the kibbutz because of the censorious atmosphere that greets them there.

### IN SUMMATION

An attempt is made here to highlight the existence of mental disorders resulting from narcissistic relationships as reflected in the system of communal education that was practiced in kibbutzim until the 1980s. The disorders are manifested typically in symbiotic

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attachment in which the narcissistic personality manipulates the private space of those close to him as though it were his own. The victims feel invisible and trapped in the relationship. They experience mental abuse, with no means of defending themselves owing to the lack of legitimacy for effecting a separation of lives.

These phenomena are referred to herein as narcissistic disorders, being caused by over- or under-investment by the narcissist in others, or by strictness, albeit well-intentioned, that is severely lacking in empathy with and sensitivity to others' needs.

The narcissist has an inherent difficulty in accepting otherness and is unwilling to acknowledge this as the source of suffering in interpersonal relations. The implications of this psychological disorder are clearly evident even in his social world view, causing outright rejection of others.

My personal and clinical experience has taught me that investigating the phenomenon with the help of individual, spousal and familial therapy through the "narcissistic disorder" lens can enable the problems aired in the therapy room to be pinpointed and diagnosed, greatly helping the therapy administered to victims of the disorder.

The narcissistic structure described herein comprises a psychological system in which the narcissistic personality serves as a stage director in managing relationships. Narcissistic overinvestment in the other person, or using the other person as a representative or extension of certain social concepts, consigns separate existence to obscurity. It is possible that the "invisible" zones in parts of the self in the object is universal in human nature – a myopia of sorts with respect to accepting otherness – and are thus a source of ongoing suffering by individuals in a society that imposes uncompromising rules.

Narcissism as a psychological phenomenon is also reflected in social structures, the case in point being the kibbutz and the educational style practiced there. Many typical narcissistic disorders may be seen in communal education, such as the unyielding pressure to conform, the necessity of thinking and acting "like everyone else", and the refusal to recognize individual talents or aptitudes lest they be considered deviations from the straight and narrow.

The kibbutz in the new millennium is decidedly different in terms of the education given the next generation. Nights in the children's houses have been abolished and youngsters now sleep at home with their parents. Absent is the requirement to conform, whether in dress or in thought. Particularly conspicuous is the diversity of opinions, political leanings and outward appearance. The overall trend is increasingly towards individual expression and satisfaction of individual needs.

All of the above changes have taken place in a social framework that still advocates high mutual commitment. They have transformed the kibbutz into a healthy social setup that offers each individual far greater opportunities than before for grow

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