

Greetings and welcome.

For those of you who have not met me, my name is Suzie Shoshani, and I share the Institute's Management Committee Chair with Miriam Berger. It is my pleasure to open this year's second day study of the Israel Institute of Group Analysis on the topic

Belonging: Between a choice and an Inevitability

At our first conference in October, Dr. Eliot Zeisel spoke, and at our third conference in April, we will be privileged to have Dr. Frosh from England, Dr. Hana Ohlman from the Tel Aviv Institute of Modern Psychoanalysis, and the Druze poet Prof. Naim Ariedi. We are deeply grateful to Dr. Pharhad Dalal for agreeing to participate in this series of conferences celebrating the Institute's 10th anniversary. Dr. Einav Karniel will introduce our lecturer lately

During those three study days we are studying and evaluating the subject of belonging from various angles.

I would like to open the conference by quoting the same passage from FOULKES that Miriam brought to our attention at the opening of the previous conference. As an Institute of Group Analysis, it is fitting us begin with this passage, which needs no introduction as it speaks for itself:

"The first and foremost aspect with which group psychotherapists are usually concerned and according to which they form their concepts is that of belonging, of participation. Being a respected and effective member of the group, being accepted, being able to share, to participate, to belong to the community is a basic constructive experience in human life. No health is conceivable without this. This happens throughout life, but the need for psychotherapy arises when this participation and sharing are disturbed."

A brief review of the dictionary shows that the words belong has many meanings:

To be the property of, an asset of, a part of, a component of, connected to, related to, associated or affiliated with, attached to, appended to, annexed to, committed to, owe allegiance to, be a member or participant of, play a role or have a task in, be

appropriate to or suitable for, be accepted into and by a particular group, be native to a particular place, or an inhabitant, resident or citizen of by birth or legal decree

Note that all these definitions are associated in some way with the relationships and network of ties between an individual and others, with all their significance and implications.

From this simple dictionary review it becomes apparent that “belonging” is a word masking many layers of complex meaning, such as questions of identity, citizenship, roles, commitment and allegiance. These are profound issues that have occupied a wide variety of disciplines concerned with human knowledge.

NORBERT ELIAS, the sociologist from whom Foulkes borrowed many ideas, declared that **"humansare made by nature/or culture and society [and]....human society is a level of nature."**

Humans are social creatures in all 248 parts of the body: The individual's existence as member of a group is a combined biological, emotional, and cultural fact. The group and the nature of one's association with it are determining factors in a person's life. Emotional survival and, according to FOULKES, mental health and the ability to be unique are based on our relations with the other. We aspire to live, love and work in connection with other human beings who are familiar and acceptable to us and who recognize and want us. In other words, we identify the basic human need to be part of the group and the deep yearning to form various communities and a social network.

The desire to belong is universal although the way this desire is expressed may differ from culture to culture. I will not pursue this subject at the moment, except to point out that for each of us here, the need for positive interaction with others and the need to be embraced by the world around us are important factors in defining our self-identity, developing the Self, and determining our inner nature.

Moreover, history has proven that this attachment to family, groups, a tribe and nation contributed greatly to human development, progress, and prosperity. **In fact, belonging to the group has always been an existential necessity for every individual, essential for safety and subsistence, and as an obstacle to annihilation, crucial for**

preserving the human species and preventing its extinction. Throughout history, rejection by the tribe has often proven to be equivalent to a death sentence. Today the need to belong is one of the most important factors contributing to our WELLBEING.

Thus it comes as no surprise that on MASLOW's HIERARCHY OF NEEDS belonging is not only considered basic, but also ranked higher than many other important needs. BOWLBY's theory of ATTACHMENT also claims that belonging is one of the strongest and most fundamental of human needs. It is possible that developments in science, technology, and communication that have created a global community were meant to satisfy our need to belong to ever larger groups. Apparently even the earth is too small a community for us, as we search for new communities in the solar system and throughout the universe.

**No road shows the way,
Kotaro said in a poem, the road
follows behind.**

**When Su Tung-p'o was
an old man, his house burned down.
He laughed, "Now I can see the stars!"**

**This world is only process, a single
monumental motion
without beginning, without end.**

**We like to think this world is ours,
but we belong to it,
to a world just being born.**

SAM HAMILL

Tribal life requires adopting rules and following laws that limit individual freedom for the general good. These regulations are thus simultaneously perceived as necessary and negative. The individual must often surrender the fulfillment of personal needs and goals for the benefit of the group, on the one hand, as well as to ensure his continued existence in the group, on the other.

Ironically, the desire to stand out from the group, to be different, special and unique, and the need to discover and form an individual self-identity runs parallel, or is the anti thesis to our desire to belong. This is the paradox of belonging with which we struggle throughout life.

World development, modernization, globalization, scientific and technological innovation, and advances in the fields of communication have all contributed to increasing our need and opportunities to be affiliated with a wide variety of different kinds of groups. This situation has created difficulties deriving from belonging to groups that are sometimes mutually exclusive or in conflict with each other. These conflicts often create power struggles between communities with one group developing destructive behavioral patterns toward another.

How are these conflicts expressed in the world of the individual? And In the world of the network of social communities that together make up the larger society?

From these questions arise many others: Is there room for so many different kinds of communities on the face of the earth? Must differences between the other and me always be threatening to myself and my group? Does the definition mine/ours have to be at the cost of the definition his/hers/theirs? Must the designation “group” always be based on contrast, or may we speak also of reconciliation of differences, complementariness and even interdependence? Will our security and identity profit from the destruction of his/her/their group? Or will this destruction also harm me/us and destroy many qualities within ourselves?

The Crusader massacres, the oppression of the Native Americans and the destruction of the Inca civilization, colonization, the power struggle between black slaves and their white owners, the Holocaust, Jihad and worldwide terrorism as conquest and control over many communities for many years – these are just a few of the numerous examples of attempts to eliminate one group, and as a consequence damage both.

In conclusion, I would like to raise yet another aspect of this complex topic: Is our attachment to a particular group primarily a matter of birth in a particular place and to a particular people – hereditary, pre-determined and not open to change? Are the characteristics typical of or attributed to different groups the result of external factors,

such as place of birth, or biological factors, such as race and gender? Will I always be Romanian because I was born in Romania? What is the greatest determining factor of the nature of one's connection to the basic group – innate traits typical of this group or traits acquired during the course of a lifetime within this group?

I believe and many of us agree that belonging to a particular community is not simply a consequence of birth and is certainly not passive or pre-determined. **Authentic attachment to a group, a society, a nation, and a culture is an active reciprocal process, continuous and learned. Our interaction with these various communities regularly constructs and reconstructs our Self and our identity.**

I am certain that DR. PHARHAD DALAL will elaborate further in his lecture.

I would like to take this opportunity to quote JOHN O'DONOHUE [o'danahyu] who stated that "In contrast to how a child belongs in the world, adult belonging is never as natural, innocent, or playful. Adult belonging has to be chosen, received, and renewed. It is a lifetime's work. [Source: *Eterna*]

I will close, appropriately, with another quote from FOULKES:

"The group, the community is the ultimate primary unit of consideration, and so-called inner processes in the individual are internalizations of the forces operating in the group to which he belongs."