

"COURAGE--THE GOAL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY"

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Tonight's topic, "Courage," was not given to me by a committee nor thought out by me through long years of study. The word "Courage" came to me suddenly and forced me to think about it.

It was on a Sunday in November when some of us were invited to Mrs. Eisen's house to plan for the birthday dinner of the Theodor Reik Clinic. The spirit of the party was optimistic and jubilant. We finally had a Clinic--a goal we had had in mind for so many years.

But something unexpected had happened. A shadow fell on the party's happy spirit. The Israelian Army had stepped over the border of its long suffering and attacked little country trying to gain peace for itself. The Hungarians had taken to arms to fight for their liberty. Most of the guests at the party felt that these actions had to be taken by the endangered or suppressed peoples and reacted with hope. I could not feel hope or joy. I was sad and afraid. It seemed to me that I had lived through hopes of world solutions of this kind before, but that solutions never came this way. The danger of World War III overshadowed my mind. Yet, while these thoughts and images took hold of me, John Henry Faulk's jubilant voice started to recite the story of David and Goliath underscoring little Israel's brave attack against the giant enemy.

The little one against the big one--or the big one against the big one--all wars leaving the soil fertile for the next war and maybe the next war will be final destruction. My mind went away from the recital.

World War III--how would I take it? How have the courage to bear it? Maybe the bomb would fall into Manhattan--so fast that we would not have to make any decisions. But maybe we would know of the danger a few days ahead. What

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would I do? Would I stay because I was needed here, or would I try to get away with my family? What would I tell my patients? Where would one take the courage from to make decisions of this kind: To die? To be tortured by fire or gas? To walk towards starvation and illness?

From that moment on, the word "Courage" haunted me. What was it "to have courage?" Was I courageous at the time when I left Germany still in my teens, alone, to go to a foreign country? What I felt then certainly was not courage. I wanted to escape, escape from the horrible and intranslatable words, "Juda verrecke," (which is not expressed when you say "Go Jews and perish"). I had seen the bleeding heads of Jewish students at the curbstones of Berlin's University. I had seen the signs of Jewish stores torn down and trampled upon.--It was not courage when I left Germany. I wanted to live, and I believed that Hitler would exterminate the Jews. Maybe I had the courage to believe what the older people did not believe because I happened to be young. And it is easier to believe for a young person that she has to leave her country than for an older one, because she does not have to give up a job and a home and a set way of life.

Courage--the word haunted me until I decided to rather haunt the word than be haunted by it. And so, two days later, I called Ruth Berkeley and told her that I wanted to talk about courage.

I was out to collect stories of courage. David and Goliath was one. And there was another famous one-- that of William Tell--the man known for the courage of shooting the apple off his boy's head. I re-read the story in Schiller's version and recognized that Tell actually was facing a dire choice: to die with his boy, or to try to save both lives by submitting to the gruesome task which the overseer demanded of him. What was his courage? Maybe the fact that he could control his hand from trembling while his heart was in fear?--But my attention was drawn away from him to little Walter Tell. He was impatient with his father and friends who pleaded with the tyrant to refrain from his request. In my own--maybe inadequate translation--Walter's words read like this:

"Don't kneel before this evil man,  
Tell me where to stand. I'm not scared.  
My father aims unflinchingly at flying birds.  
He will not fail now and pierce his own child's heart."

And when, in desperation, the group around Tell asks to tie the boy to the tree, little Walter Tell shouts:

"You tie me? No--I won't be tied--  
I'll hold still like a lamb and won't breathe.  
But if you tie me--no--I can't do it--  
I'll rage against the ropes."

Was this courage? More courage maybe than the father's and the adult friends' who showed fear while the boy was unafraid?

I thought I could get more insight into what courage was if I questioned people when they had felt courageous. And so I asked maybe more than 20 people the same question: "Do you remember some incident, some experience, where you felt you had courage?" I'll cite a few of their answers.

A high school girl: "I think I had courage when I went back to school after my brother had been put in jail for robbery. All night I thought I wouldn't be able to stand it, the kids would stare at me, or laugh, and maybe think 'she is a rotten egg too.'"

And I asked her, "And how did you get yourself to go to school anyway?" And she said: "I thought, I want to be a nurse and I can't be if I don't finish high school. And then I thought, my best friends won't laugh. And then I thought, when I go back into the classroom I'll think: 'Keep your head up. I am myself, I'm not my brother.'"

Boy, 12: "I was real courageous when I went back to play football when the doctor let me again after I had broken my leg. I was in a cast a long time and it was awful. And when I was back on the field, I thought: 'no, not again.'" And when I asked him how he managed to stay on the team, the answer came in the boy's youthful simplicity: "I said to myself: it only happens once in a million. it won't happen to me again."

A former Sargeant, a college graduate: "We were approaching England on a troop ship, a freighter, shortly before the invasion of the continent. I was cold and sick to my stomach, and nervous about the submarines around us. I was down in the bunk, when one of the officers came and ordered me to come on deck to give a pep speech to the paratroopers who would leave our ship first. "You are the one with the

mind," he said. I felt I would faint before I ever got up on deck. I never had been a speaker in my life. I was sure my mind would go blank. I wanted to say I was too sick. But then I felt they would think I was "chicken" and I would feel they were right. And then, also, those boys who would bear the brunt of the invasion--I wanted to help them. And when I stood before them I knew I could do it, and I did."

And then, of course, I also asked myself for an example of courage in my own life. And the incident that came to my mind was my departure from Germany towards Switzerland, the day before the first organized action against the German Jews had been announced. The train was crowded with refugees. We did not know whether the whole train would be stopped from crossing the border. We expected a complete search for so-called "criminals," documents, and valuables. It was forbidden to take money along. Friends of mine were in the same train. They were political refugees. The Nazis had them on their list. My friends took along some money which they felt they needed in order not to be returned to Germany. I took this money because I was not a political refugee but only a Jewish student permitted to study in Switzerland. I was in lesser danger than they were. All the way through Southern Germany I figured all kinds of ways to hide the money. None of them seemed good enough to escape Nazi examination. Suddenly I saw through the compartment window the friendly face of an exotic-looking young man. He signaled flirtatiously to come out to see him. I went. He pleaded with me in broken German, "Fraulein, tell me why such sad eyes-- I want to make sad eyes happy--can do anything for Fraulein-- have money, do anything, I am the attache' of .....country." He showed me a purse full of money and foreign papers. It flashed through my mind: "If he is an attache', they can't search him--but is he? Or is he a Nazi spy?" For more than an hour I talked with him searchingly and became convinced that he did not lie. Shortly before the border I handed him the envelope with the money. I said that it contained a letter from my deceased father. I did not want it to get into the hands of the authorities. Would he carry it to Switzerland for me?--The hours of examination at the border were agony.--In Switzerland, the attache' handed me the envelope in great happiness. I never saw him again. He must have been afraid of me as much as I had been afraid of him.

After I had collected many stories which people told me as their stories of courage, I tried to analyze them. And some common elements seemed to emerge:

- 1) Each story, with the exception of David's, spoke of fear which the hero overcame. (And the story of David is written as a tale told by an onlooker, disregarding the quality of inner experience.)
- 2) In all stories, the hero is compelled to make a choice. The choice invariably contains a risk, some kind of gamble of which the outcome is unknown.
- 3) There seems to be an undertone of feeling "I can do it,"--a pushing oneself toward action.
- 4) And this "I can do it" appears to be related to concrete reality awareness; the hero is not blind toward his own capacity and the factual situation in which he makes the choice.
- 5) And last but not least, a common element in all stories of courage is the hero's faith in some purpose or value which inspires or justifies his action.

Let's look together at the story of David. We said that fear is not mentioned in this legend. But there is the element of choice, a choice which no outside power but David's own desire dictated to him. The choice was to fight Goliath and risk his life, or see the Israelian Army subdued to the Philistine attack. The undertone of "I can do it" is strongly expressed. And David argues his ability to win over Goliath with the reality awareness that he was able to kill a bear and a lion when he wanted to save the sheep; why should he not be able to outsmart a fierce man when he had outsmarted the fierce animals? His faith in higher values is unsophisticated and religious: the Lord is with Israel.

William Tell does not show David's youthful self-confidence. He fears the risk and would avoid it if he could. But he has to make this choice in spite of the fear because of the values involved. And as if to underline the necessity that self-confidence and reality awareness are present, Schiller puts the words of unbroken trust in the son, Walter's words: Father cannot fail; he shoots unflinchingly a flying bird for no good cause. Why should he not from closer distance shoot an apple when his child's life is at stake?

Our courageous girl went back to school after her brother had been put in jail for robbery. Her choice was to flee from social ostracism and give up her future career, or to stand up for herself and suffer possible malice and ridicule. Her courageous decision was possible when she came to the reality awareness that she was not responsible for her brother's crime and that she could keep her head up with self-esteem.

The little boy's fear after the fractured leg incident in the football game was the fear of possible repetition. His choice was based on his value judgment of what <sup>any</sup> boy should be like and the reality awareness that it happens "only once in a million;" it would not happen to him again.

The Sergeant overcame his fear to speak before an audience, sick and unprepared, because he did not choose to feel guilty and ashamed about failure. There also was the reality awareness that his mind would tell him what to say at the given moment; the feeling "I can" and his value of social obligation carried him through the task.

When I look back to the incident which I quoted as a courageous event of my own life, I can clearly remember the element of fear. Was this man who offered his services in the train to me a God-sent person or a Nazi spy? In retrospect it seems that my intuition was based on reality factors: the exotic-looking young man was not a spy. In my system of values I could not afford to desert my friends and to lose self-respect by not helping them.

Outstanding in all these stories appears to be the element of fear. And there seem to be two kinds of fear: the fear of physical danger - deaths or mutilation, - and the fear of social danger, of guilt or shame. Fear of guilt and shame does not seem to be less threatening than fear of physical danger. This certainly accounts for the possibility of wars--soldiers risk their lives rather than lose self-esteem and respect. To desert one's values or to be looked down upon appears often to be more threatening than death.

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If we think of "courageous people," we certainly do not connect this concept with people who experience a great deal of fear. The opposite is true. We usually think of courageous people as people who can speak their minds even

to their boss to ask for a raise or to their in-laws to make wishes clear. We find a man courageous who dares to take out a big loan if he thinks that his new business idea will carry through. A courageous girl finds it easy to make a decision to marry the man she loves, while another one may worry about such a decision for months or years. There are many women who go through extreme feelings of fear for minor decisions such as buying a dress, or men who tremble when they have to tell their mothers that they cannot come for next Sunday dinner. The fear involved in such trivial decisions may, in no way, be experienced as less painful than fears the heroes of our stories had to endure.

It is obvious that fear is not consciously experienced in every decision. We may postulate that the more courageous a person is, the less often he experiences fear in making decisions. Courage - the ability to make choices under risk - appears to function silently when we are not under too much stress. We will, however, experience courage consciously when we are invaded by fear. This may explain why courageous people are hardly aware of their virtue except in those rare moments of fear, while fearful people need to step up their courage all the time.

No person, however, as courageous as he may be, can go through life without the conscious experience of courage which entails fear. Fear is the normal reaction to danger, and life is dangerous. People who do not experience fear in dangerous moments, such as some children who climb up scaffolds far beyond their skills, or people who cut with knives into their own bodies (taking an ear off like Van Gogh), do not have the reality awareness necessary to claim courage. Such people are rightly called "out of their minds." They do not choose, they are being driven.

The courageous person is aware of dangers and therefore knows fears. He is, however, relatively free of anxiety. Anxiety is not fear of immediate danger but a "hang-over fear" of previous - real or imaginary - dangers.

Anxiety is like a bag of fears dragged along from earlier years. Anxiety is the everlasting chip on one's shoulder, the ifs and maybes of threatening disasters which had their roots in early feelings of unprotectedness, guilt, and shame. These hang-over fears can be triggered off by otherwise harmless or mildly dangerous events and burst the balloon of anxieties.

Let's look at an example to understand what anxiety may mean and why a person with such hang-over fears needs so much more energy to be courageous than the person with less anxieties. Examination fear is pretty universal. To fail at an examination entails sacrifice in time - having to repeat it - loss of money, unpleasant discussions with the examiners or parents or friends, and may even be a danger to one's career. However, most people are able to function sufficiently to work on their tests in spite of the fear with almost normal ability. But then there are people at least as gifted, industrious, and well-prepared, who become so panic-stricken in the examination that their minds stay blank or their bodies collapse. Such reactions are based on anxiety. There may be many reasons. Maybe there was a family where the child could only receive love through achievement. Each failure then meant for the child to be unloved. To be unloved is unbearable for a child; it threatens the roots of its existence.--Or maybe the child felt burning jealousy against brother or sister and his spirit of competition was out to "kill." For children a desire to kill may be experienced as if he had really killed a brother or sister, and the guilt about it may slip into any examination which then unconsciously has the meaning of killing.--The forbidding "thou shalt not kill" may then prevent the student from succeeding with the examination.

We cannot see from the outside whether a person is courageous or not in a certain situation unless we know the values in which he believes. I have, for instance, known two women who were criminally raped, both being equally courageous, but acting diametrically opposed. Both were young, married, and had children. One of them was sophisticated in matters of sex and felt that when she was threatened with the gun, her only task was to save her life for her own and her family's sake. Her feelings were disgust, the desire to scream, and to run away. Her courageous answer to these feelings was, "No, I must take it." Her values were life and health. The other woman, religious and traditional, felt that she and her husband "would never be the same" unless she tried the utmost to defend herself. Her value was sexual virtue. Both women were courageous.

We have defined courage as our ability to decide under risk. We must now ask: are all our activities based on decisions? And are all our decisions basically risky?



We may decide to go upstairs. This is a decision. But once we walk up the staircase, our activity does not seem to be chosen any further. The walking seems to be mechanical action.--We learn to drive a car. But after a while we do not seem to choose which side of the road we drive on. How unchosen such activity is we may experience when we try to drive in England on the left side and automatically are drawn over to the right. These examples may show both the usefulness as well as the danger of mechanical activities. We save an energy by not having to choose every action and can learn to shortcut mechanically, but the danger of such mechanical actions is their rigidity, the difficulty to leave the learned tracks when new reality factors demand it.

Another form of non-chosen activity are those performed under force. This force may be violent - a whip - like in the death marches of World War II. This force may be subtle - the form of powerful suggestion - mostly effective in childhood. The biological and psychological dependency of the young child makes a firm demand of the parent imperative. The child experiences in absolutes. The threat behind non-compliance is basically the fear of abandonment and unprotectedness. The more a child feels threatened the more he will conform not only with his actions, but also with his thoughts, fantasies, and wishes, to be sure not to lose his parent's love and protection. If it is not only bad to hit another child, but also bad to want to hit, spontaneity is threatened; and if God can read all our thoughts, and "bad thoughts" are as bad as bad actions, the child's inner life may dry up in anxieties. By the time such child has reached school age, its mental spontaneity can be restricted to that of common-place triteness.

The suppression of new thoughts, together with a surplus of mechanically channeled associations, appears to be the cause of intellectual lack of courage. The anxiety to think new thoughts and to form new concepts may be one of the roots of our present world crisis. We may all remember Orson Welles' nightmarish "World of 1984" where the victim has learned to believe that  $2 \times 2$  equals 5. The whip of continued loud-speakers and torture can bear the same results as early restricting parental demands. The human mind's ability to repress dangerous thoughts is universal although especially open to the child. Repression may prevent immediate danger, but also prevents the development of courage--the ability to decide in freedom.

A few months later the baby recognizes that achievement is not all his own, that the magic is connected to a mother or other person who responds to the crying and motions. The baby, who experiences that the adult comes to his help most of the time, learns to trust. This trust is the basis of a feeling which we may translate into "I am accepted, I am being loved". This, in return, creates the basis of the ability to love.

From the very beginning, but increasingly so, some frustration must be endured by any child in order to sustain the feeling of "I can." At first it may be a few minutes waiting for relief. Later on, it may be the endurance of minor failures. If a friendly grandmother proops the baby's toy right into his hand at all times, the child is being deprived of learning how to reach out to get what he needs. Courage based on self-confidence and trust can only be formed when skills develop which are necessary to deal with reality, and when failures and frustrating situations are used in constructive ways.

Discouragement occurs when the child is either over-protected and cannot learn to use his abilities, or under-protected and cannot learn to feel safe. The baby needs to be taken away from a hot stove until it can understand generalizations such as "hot." It can learn self-control only when it understands the word "hot," trusts the meaning of the spoken word, and can discipline itself to obey. Obedience makes sense earliest where the child can see that disobedience is painful, such as "don't touch the hot stove". Obedience to social commands such as "don't spit into somebody's face," are harder to understand because nobody is hurt by being spat at. Therefore, obedience to social rules can only be expected somewhat later. Obedience is a protective device and therefore basic for the development of courage. If, however, the adult abuses this protective device so that the child cannot learn to use his ability to reason out problems, courage will be undermined. If a child cannot walk freely, see clearly, think independently, it cannot learn to make choices; it becomes a marionette hanging on strings of channeled commands.

All through childhood, the encouraging parent will help the child to make choices. Sometimes this help may be demanding obedience when the child cannot as yet judge a situation. Encouragement may be given by helping the child see a problem clearly or boosting his self-confidence. Sometimes encouragement may be given by the parent's silent withdrawal from a conflict situation helping the child to function alone by the implied trust.

The child invariably meets with society's demand for adjustment. In school he often reacts to this with total compliance. Values then mean nothing to the child but to be like everybody else. At this time, children tend to see the world in black and white. They know exactly what is "right" and what is "wrong." We, as adults, may understand this need for adjustment and conformity without having to support it to the extent that it will turn a courageous child into a drab conformist. We may respond to our children's absolutes with questions: "Is any religion right? Must Jimmy's be wrong if yours is right? Maybe there is no right and wrong. Maybe Jimmy loves his religion best as you love yours. As you like your family best, he prefers his" --or "maybe pink shirts seem to be most beautiful to all of you kids. I remember times when pink for boys was regarded as sissyish." "Maybe things have different aspects, are seen differently from wherever we stand. Have you ever looked at a table, lying under it or standing on top of it? It sure looks different, but it's the same table."

This way we can instill in children values beyond conformity and adjustment. We all need courage to work toward a society which will adjust to reality rather than to adjust ourselves and our children to an unrealistic society.

if we see how much love, knowledge, and intelligence is necessary to help children to grow up to be courageous people, we must also recognize how many children do not receive this care. And how many people have therefore lost their courage on the way.

Anxiety, rigidity, narrowmindedness are signs of loss of courage. Psychotherapy is the means to rediscover or develop courage which has been lost or suppressed on the way.

We look at our patient with the therapist's time--telescopic eyes. As a baby he may have cried too much and too long to find the magic trust in himself or others; or he may never have had the chance to experience frustration and not have found the strength which lies in overcoming difficulties. As a child he may not have been allowed to decide for himself, or he may not have been taught to recognize real dangers or sensible standards. The young person's physical safety may have been threatened by violence, or his spiritual integrity been hurt by ridicule or dishonesty or lack of adequate stimulation.

Wherever there has been too much educational failure, therapy may help to undo the damage. It may be visualized as the untying of ropes around the branches of a tree; it does not, however, create the tree.

The lack of time prevents me from giving you many examples of people's cases as they are seen in a therapist's office. I will just mention two to illustrate the point.

Carol came to me for help because she felt continually afraid. She worked as a bookkeeper in an office and could not change jobs because she did not dare to meet a new boss or new office companions. She was also afraid of her present boss and her colleagues. She thought they felt her to be inadequate and to secretly ridicule her. In the evening she quickly left the office and hid behind a newspaper in the subway. Although she was very attractive, she never accepted dates because she did not know how to talk to a man. The thought of marriage or motherhood appeared threatening as well as repelling to her.

On the surface there appeared to be little courage left in this girl. Yet there was a tremendous will-power which helped her to stay on the job and to go by subway in spite of her fears. She did not want to give up; and this will to live helped her find the way into psychotherapy.

This was her childhood: There was poverty and illness in the family during the girl's infancy. One older brother died. Two other older brothers demanded the sick mother's attention. The baby was too much of a burden to the harrassed mother; she was insufficiently and sporadically taken care of. There was not enough food to go around for many years. The child experienced herself as inferior and less loved than her brothers. The brothers pushed her around. The father was out of work most of the time and apparently psychotic. He preferred the girl to the boys and expressed his liking by sexual play with her. In her school years, the girl escaped from the father's advances to the younger of her two older brothers and had a sexual affair with him throughout grade school--refraining from nothing but intercourse. The mother, after recovering from her illness, appeared to be the stable support of the family, economically as well as emotionally. The girl, however, could not come close to her because of her guilt feelings about her sexual relations.

The therapist expects the patient to react to him with all the variously shaded feelings the patient experienced as a child toward the different important people in his life. In this case, I could expect that the patient would transfer to me the feelings she had had toward her mother--a longing for love and stable support, but also the early resentment of not being given enough and the later fear of being discovered. I could also expect that the patient would transfer to me the feelings of disgust, violent hatred, and terror which she had experienced toward her father, together with the earliest positive excitement of being wanted by him. And I had to expect the transference of the calculating submissiveness toward the brother by whom she felt used and not loved, but got some measure of safety in return. The reliving and understanding of these transference feelings - transferred from early emotional patterns to the person of the therapist - helped this young woman to establish normal relationships with people, to marry and, in general, to have sufficient courage to enjoy life.

The other case I want to mention was that of a little boy whom I never saw. I had treated his mother before she married. She called me over the telephone after the birth of her second baby, when the first one was four years old. When she returned from the hospital, she found her little boy continually playing "dog" to the extent that he would not listen to his own name, nor speak in his own language, but just bark and walk on all fours. Nobody could take him out on the street because, as soon as he saw a real dog, he trembled and screamed with fear.

Over the phone, I got some pertinent data: The grandfather had died some months ago. His death had never been mentioned to the child. The old man had been brought to the hospital and as far as the child was concerned, he had disappeared since. Shortly before the mother went to the hospital to give birth to the new baby, a practical nurse had taken Bobby out for a walk. A dog had barked at him and slightly scratched his hand.

The dynamics on a superficial level appeared to be simple. The grandfather's mysterious disappearance in the hospital aroused fear in the boy's mind when the mother went to the same place. She had told him about the baby to come. He certainly would have chosen to have the baby disappear rather than his mother. In his fear and anxiety about the mother in the hospital, the snapping dog may have expressed his own aggression against fate, symbolized by the baby;

When his mother returned alive from the hospital she found an anxious child hiding his fear behind wordless aggression.

At my suggestion, the mother explained the fact of the grandfather's death to Bobby, reassured him of her own safety, acknowledged the fact that Bobby did not like the baby yet, and would rather have things as they were before. Bobby felt loved, understood, and important, and stopped barking; soon he resumed the normal life of a 4-year-old boy.

Rarely are psychotherapeutic solutions as simple and quick as this. Good therapy needs time. Our clinic will help some people who could not otherwise afford it to find courage to live and create. A lot of courageous people will be needed to help society adjust to reality.

Courageous people may find solutions to many problems which cannot be found if we are anxiously and rigidly stuck in old concepts and patterns.

Courageous people will find ways to abandon jails as houses of revenge and create institutions where criminals may find their way to health or will have to remain to protect society from crime.

Courageous people will create schools where children will not sit still for many years to learn little more than the three "R's" and to conform to thought patterns of prejudice which have kept society from progress; schools will be places where children are inspired to use their imagination, thoughtfulness, and creativity--so they will be eager to improve our world rather than to stagnate.

Courageous people will plan for a world in which people older than 40 or 60 or 80 will be equal citizens with a right to use their abilities as well as their right for relaxation.

Courageous people will find ways for the cities' young mothers to neither be imprisoned in their apartment routines with one or two little children nor to be guilt-ridden career-women neglecting their families; but to find ways to help young mothers to enjoy their children and to help them grow up and yet to remain in contact with their own contemporary adult world.

Courageous people will procure the means for good schools, preventive medical and mental health care, rather than spend many times more for primitive institutions, general and mental hospitals.

Courageous people will place highly educated people in Government and political careers, selected on the basis of skill, wisdom, and courage, rather than on business success and money hierarchy. Such people will be able to envision the world as the homestead of all peoples each desiring to live well and peacefully and not label one people as good, the other as evil.

May I conclude expressing my hope and trust that the Theodor Reik Clinic will, in its own way, help bring about the growth of courage in many people. They, in turn, will want to promote a world of less anxiety, prejudice, and stagnation--a world which we envision as promoting the courage of creativity, reasonable judgment, and freedom to enjoy life within the limits of reality.