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Let's Talk: The Relationship Newsletter,

1987-1998

“Let's Talk: The Relationship Newsletter”, was developed at the same time as InnerResources 8 ideas, and Aura's Galleria “a place in the mind”. These three modes, -the rational, the intuitive, and 8 points of focus and navigation- together formed a miniature ecosystem, a mindset, a way of being in the world.

The InnerResources 8 ideas was and continues to be a work in progress. The 8 Ideas are my attempt to “map,” summarize and further develop how the theories and the work of others influenced my life, work and experience.

Let's Talk: The Relationship Newsletter became a vehicle for me to meet people and conduct interviews (rational), while Aura's Galleria (intuitive) allowed me to take photographs, create computer art and design and layout the newsletter, all centered around the psychological content of the InnerResources 8 ideas, and in contexts that were often far removed from the private practice office.

The theme of the Fall, 1990 edition of Let's Talk: The Relationship Newsletter, was Idea # 6: Alcoholism and the Addictions. It was in that context, as well as the fact that I was at this phase of my journey a modern psychoanalyst in training, that the interview with Dr.. Spotnitz took place. This reprint of the 1990 edition contains only the Interview with Dr. Spotnitz and the photographs that appeared at that time.

This was one of my first inquiries into the area of alcoholism and addiction. In a later edition of the Newsletter, The Story of Ann and Bob was published, along with “The Odysseus Complex’. The latter postulated a mythological model of addiction which viewed stimulation seeking and the “warrior mode” as a root cause to addiction (separate from the notion of addiction as defense or disease).

Photography

The photographs you see in this article were taken in Central Park, at the Delacorte Theater, (Romeo and Juliet, front cover) <http://www.centralparknyc.org/virtualpark/thegreatlawn/tempest-romeo-juliet> and from artwork on the walls of the buildings in the east-east village, (the art of Chico). The photographs of Chico’s art shown here are taken from the Newsletter and therefore, unlike the originals, are overlayed with information about the InnerRESOURCES 8 Ideas.

The front cover contrasts the mythology and tradition of romantic love with the views of relationship addiction theory and psychoanalysis (see also the video poem, Romantic Love As Resistance, <http://www.innerresources.org/RomanticLove/RomanticLoveAsResistance.html>, and, We Are Lovers, <http://www.innerresources.org/WeAreLovers/WeAreLovers.html>. Text only versions can be found at <http://www.authorsden.com/> For some recent photography see Visual Poems, Flowers, <http://www.innerresources.org/PhotoGalleries/Flowers/flowers.html>

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Let's Talk

A bronze sculpture of a couple in a close embrace. The man's head is tilted back, and the woman's head is resting against his. The sculpture is highly detailed, showing the texture of the bronze and the contours of the figures' bodies.

The Relationship Newsletter

Vol 3 No. 1

-Fall-

Is This Love or Just Another Addiction?

A Letter To Dr. Spotnitz¹



Dr. Hyman Spotnitz

May 5, 1988

Dear Dr. Spotnitz:

Some time has passed since I last spoke to you about writing an article for the Newsletter. Now seems the right time to ask again. The main theme for the next edition is love and addiction. There is an idea around these days that what many people call "love" is no different from "addiction, addiction in the same sense as physical, emotional and spiritual dependency on drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. In the case of love the "chemical" is not obvious since it is an interpersonal condition that

generates the addictive patterns.

THE ADDICTION MODEL

The addiction model of love is thought to be a challenge to classical psychoanalytic theories, drive-transference theories of the nature of love. The addiction model of love developed by Norwood is an analog to the disease model of alcoholism. It says that certain forms of relationship are choices made from progressive disease, that there is a pattern to these choices and to what happens to people in such relationships. Finally, that there is with the proper social interventions progressive recovery in a form analogous to that identified for recovery in alcoholism.

¹ This is one of several requests to interview Dr. Spotnitz for the Alcoholism and Addiction edition of Let's Talk: The Relationship Newsletter. However, it's not until February, 23, 1989, that I actually get to conduct the interview in a phone meeting I've arranged. See below, Let's Talk Interviews Dr.. Spotnitz

DRIVE THEORY

Drive theory seems to say- at the extreme - that our first patterns are established arbitrarily, with the first object that happens to be there at the needed time- with our mother or caretaker, or possibly even wolves, and that depending on deprivation and over gratification patterns (over stimulation) in the caretaking environment, normal and pathological relations are established, interact a bit and are elaborated with pre-dispositions at birth and stage of genetic psycho-sexual development and are then repeated as the blueprint in all relationships.

OBJECT RELATIONS THEORY

Object relations theory is similar to drive theory except that it seems to adamantly exclude genetic pre-dispositions to "good and evil", to distance itself from any doors to the transpersonal dimensions that drive theory opens, and along with the radical behaviorists and systems theorists, to object to any inherent maturational trend or predisposition in human life which could be called altruism. Instead object relations emphasizes what seems to be predispositions on the part of the newborn to want, to look for, and to do better with its real mother than with any arbitrary object or animal. Other than that it is the real life of the developing child in relation to the objects in its world that are deemed crucial in the development of normal and pathological patterns of relating.

With respect to these various points of view would you please write about how you understand the nature of love in its healthy and not so healthy aspects? Are there forms of relationship, which are best thought of as addictive, or compulsive? What form would recovery take?

And of course what is the crucial role of the aggressive drive in fostering healthy relations between the forces that unite and those, which destroy. What are your thoughts on the role of the aggressive drive on the development and maintenance of compulsive and /or addictive love patterns?

You seem frequently to suggest in your groups that if one wants to get married you should get to know 10 people and then pick one and marry them. According to addiction theory (in some way all theories) some people would be doomed to picking the wrong people and to repeating their destructive patterns, and should be refrained from picking any body. What do you mean when you make such a suggestion? That with respect to marriage, it's all the same? It doesn't matter who you are with?

Finally, and most importantly, how does all of this mesh with your own personal experience in your life, with your experience in love and in loving, in marriage, with friends, with your family and children. I always look forward to talking and being with you. I hope you are well and in good spirits.

Sincerely,

Jeff S. Landau, PhD

Schizophrenia, Alcoholism and Addiction

Let's Talk Interviews Dr. Spotnitz

I have been working with Dr. Hyman Spotnitz for the past 10 years. He is known for his significant contributions to the treatment and understanding of Schizophrenia, while at the same time attempting to remain within the historical and technological framework of psychoanalysis. He was my control analyst when I was a fellow at the Center for Modern Psychoanalytic Studies. He has advised me in my private practice and is, at the present time, my general advisor, supervisor and analyst. At the moment, we are having a phone meeting. Dr. Spotnitz is on winter vacation in Florida. I am taping the conversation. It's 11a.m.,



Wednesday morning. I discuss the weather in Florida, some personal matters, and mention that the theme of the next edition of the Newsletter is alcoholism and addiction. I then ask Dr. Spotnitz if he would comment on any or all of these matters and I ask again whether he would write an article for the next edition. (Jeff Landau, February 23, 1989)

ADDICTION AS DEFENSE

Spotnitz- I'll be glad to give you the comments right now. You've got it on tape. You can type them out and use them.

Landau- O.K.

Spotnitz- What is it you would like me to comment on?

Landau- I'd like you to comment on how you think of addiction these days?

Spotnitz- My experience consistently with addiction is what you read about. That it's a defense against some feeling. There is an unbearable feeling the person has and the addiction relieves the feeling. They don't want to feel something. Usually it's anxiety they don't

want to feel. But they use the addiction so they won't feel something.

Landau- So then it's basically a defense. Whatever the addiction would be - a defense-against a feeling

Spotnitz- Against *experiencing* the feeling. Right.

SEX ADDICTION

Landau- You report - the case of Mr. Glen, - someone from advertising- an advertising man. He was interested in becoming an artist and that his sexual addiction interfered with that accomplishment. You also report about him that he was happy to report at one point he had gone for two weeks with no women and no masturbating. And as he continued on this path of no women and no masturbating he was beginning to produce some art work and began to create prints and lithographs which made him very happy. And then about nine months down the line he met a woman and his life began to take off in the direction he wanted. And after 2 years of treatment he asked if he could stop and he did. I'm wondering if you ever had any follow up with this case?

Spotnitz- No I haven't followed up because in my experience if I follow-up I get another patient and I usually don't have any time for additional patient's So I don't usually follow-up. If my practice dropped off and wanted some new patient's I would call up my old patient's and find out how they're doing. I'm afraid to call them up.

Landau- Oh . . . I meant was there any information on him that was not reported....

DISEASE MODEL

Landau- The theory of alcoholism and addiction would suggest that this man would subsequently have a problem because the disease is progressive and since he hadn't stopped drinking, that it wouldn't be long before he would be back to all of his old patterns and in even to a degree greater than before.

Spotnitz- No, not if the woman he took up with was satisfactory and he could accept her feelings and his feelings. When people feel all of their feelings and can tolerate them all, they don't have any addictions to alcohol.

Landau- You sound pretty clear that the primary disorder is the toleration of feelings.

Spotnitz- That's my experience. Right. If you can tolerate all of your feelings and not have to act on them, you don't have to be an addict. It's really a matter of ego strength. If you're strong enough you can tolerate all of your impulses, all of your thoughts, all your feelings, what everybody else is doing to you. You go ahead single-mindedly and accomplish what you want.

Landau- So then a treatment program which helped people to stop drinking or stop the sexual addiction or whatever the addiction was, or to stop the behavior-whatever the behavior is . . .

Spotnitz- . . . or stopping smoking cigarettes or cocaine- or all of those things.

Landau- any method that helped stop that for awhile would bring recovery if - in and of itself because if you just stop the behavior

EGO-STRENGTH

Spotnitz- You need the ego-strength first. You need... ego-strength...then, addictive behavior doesn't occur any more.

Landau -Well, sometimes even with very little ego strength support groups help people enormously.

SUPPORT GROUPS INCREASE EGO STRENGTH

Spotnitz- Well support groups increase ego strength. That's how support groups work. The ego of the individual in a support group feels much stronger than when it's alone. That's the advantage of support groups. That your ego feels much stronger. Then you can tolerate all of the impulses that you would ordinarily have difficulty tolerating, and all of the feelings you would have trouble tolerating. That's a big value of support groups.

Landau- So a support group is in some way like an external ego.

Spotnitz-That's right. The support group becomes an accessory external ego.

Landau- Which in some way modulates the overpowering feelings and impulses during the time that they would ordinarily produce action. The person then doesn't have to act.

Spotnitz- We agree on that.

Landau- O.K. So then that must get introjected after a awhile so the person now is at a slightly different level of ego strength so that they on their own can continue to say no.

Spotnitz- We agree on that.

Landau- O.K. So, basically any teachings, those which go on in the AA rooms . . . at that time when the person is a little stronger and they start showing up on their own, anything that they learn or any ways of thinking that permit them to keep saying no to any of these forms of behaviors or stimuli, -are going to continue to build ego strength. That's basically the idea.

Spotnitz- We agree on that.

Landau- Then if in addition to that they lie down on the couch and deal with analytic issues, they'll be dealing with the kinds of conflicts that you and . . .

VERBALIZATION ON THE COUCH INCREASES EGO STRENGTH

Spotnitz- Yes. Verbalization on the couch increases ego strength.

Landau- So, the more they put everything into words instead of action . . .

Spotnitz - . . . the more solid the ego gets. There are a lot of different methods for increasing ego strength. The analytic method is to get the patient to lie on the couch and

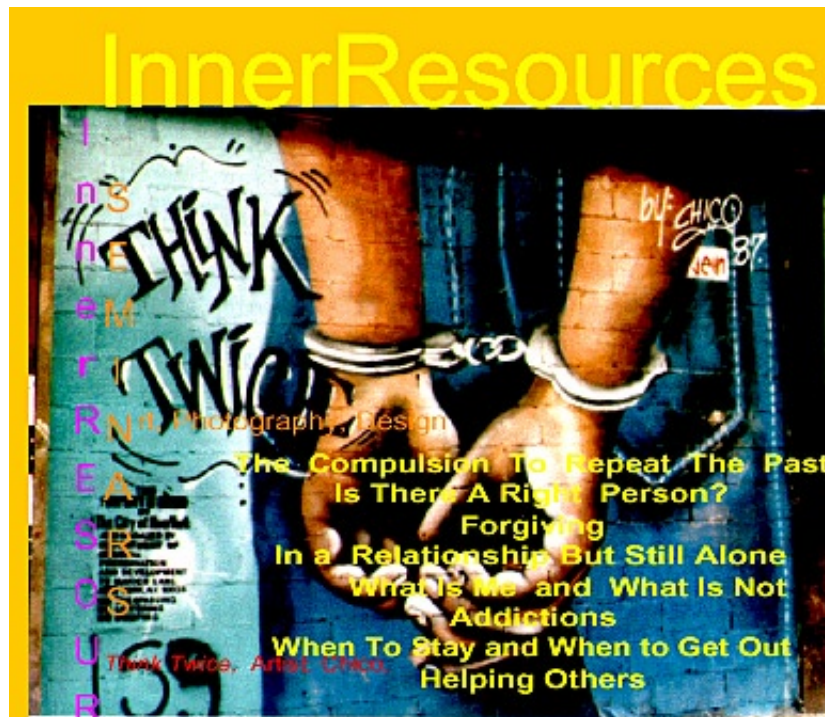
say everything. But the group method is to have therapeutic groups. And then there's the social method which belongs in social clubs. Then there is the churches and synagogues and temples. People go there and their ego strength is increased. Belonging to a nation, belonging to a country, being a citizen, all those things give you additional ego strength.

Landau- So if you're one of the downtrodden in a particular culture or society and your rights are constantly being challenged and your identity is challenged, your going to..

Spotnitz-Your ego strength is in trouble. Your losing your ego strength.

Landau-You're going to be in trouble.

Spotnitz- Yeaup.



Landau- So then, you say that these things contribute to ego strength till the person can single-mindedly and on their own accomplish things--without the group? the group is . .

Spotnitz- . . . the more group support you have the stronger your ego. The less group support you have the weaker your ego.. It's very important to have as much ego strength as possible. That's the big advantage of operating within the law. You have the whole country on your side. If you do things legally you have great ego support from everybody. The whole country is behind you

ALCOHOLISM IS A PROGRESSIVE DISEASE

Landau- One of the ideas in the recovery method- the recovery concept of alcoholism is that even when you stop drinking and even if it's for a long period of time- the disease is still progressive. So that if you stop let's say for 2 years or three years and then you start drinking or drugging or smoking or whatever [the addiction] you will within a very short time, be not only back to where you were before but where you would have been if you would have kept it up for another two or three years.

Spotnitz- That's right! Once you've started an addiction you become vulnerable to that addiction. ...For the rest of your life.

Landau- When you say that's right, then ... don't even take one drink



Spotnitz- We agree on that. No drinks at all. Don't take the first cigarette. Don't take the first drink. Once you've started an addiction you become vulnerable to that addiction for the rest of your life.

Landau- How is your thinking about that. They say because it's a progressive disorder, and

Spotnitz- I say it's because ego-strength gets knocked out by the alcohol.

Landau- They say don't get too hungry, angry, lonely or tired [HALT] because you'll tend to want to drink under these circumstances

Spotnitz- All these things tend to weaken your ego strength. You have to behave in such a way that your ego strength is maintained at maximum.

Landau- So you can't get too tired, too lonely, too isolated, too angry, you can't drink, you can't smoke, you should stay part of a group that you identify with and maintain your strength or else you can go down the tubes- quick.

Spotnitz- You said it.

Landau- So you don't think this is an addiction issue, you think it's a general problem.

SUCCESS IN LIFE REQUIRES A LOT OF EGO STRENGTH

Spotnitz- I think it's a universal problem. Right. Addiction is just one manifestation of a general problem. Success in life requires a lot of ego strength and there are a lot of things that damage ego strength and then people use other things to bolster their ego. And in the process they get into worse trouble than they were when they started.

Landau- So don't even take the first cigarette, the first drink, whatever because you'll go down more quickly- so your saying it doesn't necessarily have to be progressive but it could be pretty quick.

Spotnitz- That's right. Once you've become an alcoholic or once you've been taking cigarettes, you become vulnerable. Once you've started an addiction you become vulnerable to that addiction. For the rest of your life. Your ego then is quickly dissolved by this addiction. The smartest thing to do is to not in any way threaten your ego by misbehaving in any way.

Landau- Do you have any ideas from your work over the years as to what leads to this vulnerability once you've been drinking for awhile or smoking, whatever?

Spotnitz- Oh, my impression is that the brain cells are damaged.

Landau- That there has been some type of permanent, physical . . .

Spotnitz- . . . damage to the brain cells.

Landau- Any idea about how that would function?

Spotnitz- Well, my impression is that the brain cells get overexcitable. When the brain cells get over excitable then it's very difficult for the person to maintain their ego strength.

YOU CAN BE BORN WITH A PRE-ADDICTIVE PERSONALITY

Landau- You give the impression that it's not a bad idea - that it's quite a plausible idea to think that in the area of, for example Schizophrenia, that there's a predisposition for some people.

Spotnitz- Everybody has predispositions. Same way some people are taller, some people are shorter, some people are blonde, some brunette, have different colors. Everybody has different dispositions. And these dispositions make them more vulnerable toward certain excesses.

Landau- Then in your thinking would it be plausible to be pre-disposed toward addiction in particular instead of Schizophrenia in particular.

Spotnitz- That's right. Sure. I agree with that. Absolutely. . . .you can be born with a

pre-addictive personality.

Landau-So, then a pre-addictive personality may be what AA calls the disease of alcoholism.

Spotnitz- Right.

DISEASE OR DEFENSE?

Landau- If you have a pre-disposition to an addiction, would that then be a model for a disease which “bottoms out” and has a recovery instead of just a defensive idea about addiction. Would that make it more primary as a possible . .

Spotnitz-Well, you see, everybody has the impulses, and everybody tries to defend themselves against the impulses. So the problem is that the impulses are very strong in the pre-addictive personality and they’re relatively weak in the non-addictive personality. So therefore the -experience will have an influence on the individual. In an environment that doesn’t stimulate the addiction tendency the person will have no problem. But if they get into an environment which does stimulate the addictive personality then they’ll have a lot of problems. Environment contributes to the development of the pre-addictive personality.

Landau-The strong impulses are -would be the bottom line even in Schizophrenia, wouldn’t it?

IMPULSES ARE THE BOTTOM LINE IN ALL CONDITIONS

Spotnitz-They’re the bottom line -impulses are the bottom line in all conditions.

Landau-In all conditions?

Spotnitz- When you see a newborn baby, what kind of impulses it has depends on how it was to be handled. The human infant is primarily an impulsive individual. His behavior is ruled by impulses.

DESTRUCTIVE IMPULSIVITY

In my experience destructive impulsivity is what people are born with and which is increased or decreased by their life experience.

Landau-So, this is more active than Freud’s death instinct which is more subtractive?

Spotnitz- Well, the death instinct is something that Freud hypothesized. Impulsivity may be the product of a death instinct. I’ve never seen an instinct but I’ve seen impulsivity. So I like to talk in terms of impulsivity. Something I’ve seen and I’ve experienced rather than the instinct which I don’t experience. I have no objection to thinking it’s there but you don’t see an instinct all you see is a [someone tries to cut in on the line]...

Landau-So, when you say you’ve seen a self destructive impulse, could you give an example?

Spotnitz- Oh, you’ll see babies banging their head against the crib, they’ll scratch

their faces, they'll scratch their arms, they'll scratch their eyes, they'll injure themselves in all kinds of ways. They'll scream and yell till they're knocked out. They knock themselves out with screaming and rage. Put a baby in a room and leave it there two or three days when you come back you'll find the baby dead. It destroys itself.

Landau- Is this an accident or intentional?

A NEGLECTED BABY DESTROYS ITSELF

Spotnitz- Oh, I think its in the nature of the animal. It's natural. A baby- a *neglected* baby destroys itself.

Landau- As a way to stop the pain?

Spotnitz-Right.

Landau-So, you're saying there may be a motivational direction?

Spotnitz- Well, I don't know if a baby has anthropomorphic ideas. But from the point of view of the observer, if you and I were looking at it we would assume from our orientation that the baby is protecting itself against being damaged, to being hurt. It *prefers death to suffering neglect*. We could interpret it that way. Because the baby can't talk, we don't know what it's doing. We could interpret it that way if we want to.

Landau-So it's more than just - it's possibly more than just an accident that the baby would end up dead.

Spotnitz-Oh no. I don't think it's an accident. I think it's a natural force. It's a natural thing.

Landau- It's a natural direction of some kind . . .

Spotnitz-You'll find that in many animals. Every now and then they engage in suicidal behavior. It's an impulse. It's an urge.

SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR IS A NATURAL PHENOMENON

Landau-So, suicidal behavior is a natural - in your observation and experience a natural . . .

Spotnitz-A natural phenomenon. Eventually every body destroys themselves. Living things all die eventually. They all destroy themselves in one way or another. If they're not destroyed by other organisms, they destroy themselves . . . the human organism is not organized to live longer than 150 years.

DEATH TRIP

Landau-Many people report, after their recovery, that they were on a "death trip". That they were trying to kill themselves, when they were drinking and drugging.

Spotnitz-Yeah, that's a retrospective interpretation of the situation.

Landau- At the time they don't experience that.

Spotnitz- I don't know whether they do or not. They don't tell you then. They tell you

later.

Landau-Right. They say they didn't know it at the time.

Spotnitz-That's right. But in retrospect they realize that's what it was.



SCHIZOPHRENIA- THERAPEUTIC METHOD

Landau-Your method for working with Schizophrenia is, of course to not be too comforting or loving, but to focus on the core issue which you've identified as rage and the self destructive impulse.

Spotnitz-My experience with Schizophrenia is that the primary problem is that there is too much rage -too much destructive impulsivity. And with alcohol, it's that destructive impulsivity gets unleashed by the alcohol. Alcohol releases it. With the Schizophrenic, they don't need anything to release it. Except, what increases it is neglect. With the alcoholic personality, alcohol increases the destructive impulsivity.

CONSTIPATED RAGE

Spotnitz-Well you know it's the same idea. If a baby is constipated and has a lot of stool inside his system and you give it love and affection you're not going to help the baby move its bowels. What the baby needs is a good bowel movement. Right? The same with schizophrenia. If they're suffering from constipated rage and you give them a lot of affection and care and so on, that's not going to help them move they're bowels. The primary thing

is that you have to do whatever is necessary to move their bowels. They need relief from constipated rage.

GROUP HAS TO HELP THE INDIVIDUAL RELEASE HIS FEELINGS

Landau- In the very initial stages of someone being in a support group-to help them to stop some addictive pattern of drinking or drugging or eating or whatever- the group is very nurturing or supportive. As time goes on, they seem to be increasingly loving and "*tough-minded*". If they weren't tough-minded about issues that kept coming up they probably wouldn't have any success at all. If they were just "sort of supportive." Is that what you're suggesting?

Spotnitz- I think that if they were doing what some mothers do with their babies when their babies want to move its bowels, they just stick a bottle in their mouth and enrage the baby- I mean, that's not going to help the baby. What the baby needs is help in moving his bowels. And the same thing here- the group has to help the individual release his feelings. See if they just talk to the guy and don't help him release his feelings, he's in trouble. But if they help him- talk to him in such away that he does release his feelings in language, then they're helping him. In other words verbal release is important - for the addict and for the Schizophrenic.

Landau-So, the focus is on release of feelings, support, ego strength and whatever helps to release those feelings and turn them eventually into language and not action.

Spotnitz- That's the idea. What the group says and what the group does, if it helps the person eventually talk and release all their feelings in language, that cures the person. It'll develop strong ego strength and make him function.

FAITH IN A HIGHER POWER

Landau- One of the crucial beliefs in AA is that a spiritual life of some kind is crucial to maintaining recovery over a long period of time. That there are various stages of attachment. That at first in recovery, there's an attachment to just getting to the meeting, then there's an attachment to the group itself as being more powerful than the individual. And then they have to get involved with what they call a higher power, in some way.

This I think was rooted in one of the earlier experiences by the founder of AA, Bill W. He discovered in hospitals, that no matter how much punishment, no matter how much negativity alcoholics got, that punishment never produced recovery.

But some of the people reported having spiritual experiences. And they were the ones who seemed to recover, Bill W. himself reported having had an experience which at some point was unexplainable. And which seemed to help him to change, to make it the last time he did it. The last time he took the drink. Not that he wasn't vulnerable, as you point out, but without this other idea or feeling, coming to him, without some notion of faith, that *recovery would not have occurred* or be maintained over a long period of time. The group

itself was not strong enough. And ideas alone were not strong enough. But that faith in a higher power was needed.

SUPER-EGO

Spotnitz-Well Freud called that the super-ego. In other words the super-ego is a part of your self which you identify with God. And that you need this god-like spirit, feeling from your personality to be able to function at your most effective level. You need a strong ego, you need a strong super-ego, you need a strong id. All aspects of your personality need to be functioning very well to be at your maximum efficiency. And what this man described as the spirit, Freud called the super-ego.

Landau- So, there would be some restructuring of the superego-id relationship in the mental life, mental structure.

Spotnitz- that's right.

Landau-....that would have to go on in order for there to be a different sense of right and wrong and a different, a shift in how the mental structure was managing energy throughout the whole system.

Spotnitz- Yea. See that's the big danger from alcohol. It dissolves the individuals feeling that he's part of the human spirit- of the god-like world. A world where god exists. Alcohol dissolves that. And in order to be a well functioning person you have to recapture that. So this person [Bill W] is very good when he said that you have to get in touch with the spirit. That's true. Alcohol does the opposite. It destroys being in touch with the spirit.

Landau-That's what people report. That they are spiritually and emotionally totally depleted when they hit bottom.

Spotnitz-That's right. Alcohol does that. Addictions do that. They all deplete the personality. They don't integrate the personality. They don't increase the ego strength. Eventually they diminish and dissolve the ego strength so the person has to act on impulse. He has to be a killer or he has to be a murderer or he could be a robber. He has to do all kinds of destructive activities. His ego cannot point him in a constructive direction.

Landau- Well, you certainly have given me a lot to think about.

Spotnitz- I'm glad I was in someway positive for you.

Landau- It's very positive.

Spotnitz- Good.

Landau- I'm assuming I have your O.K. to type up this tape and to show it to you and to put it in the newsletter.

Spotnitz- Certainly. Certainly.