

Anybody Seen Elazar Lately?

Katherine W. Olivetti

In addition to his frank and open remarks about the internal processes of analytical groups, by drawing on the Talmudic text (Berachot 27b-28a), Dr. Henry Abramovitch reminds us that when exploring issues of leadership, power, politics, and transformation in our communities, we must include in our considerations that when conflicts arise, in addition to many charged factors, the archetypal field is awakened—a field that has a life and a dynamism that is autonomous, universal, impersonal, and specific to the particular archetypal configuration of group interaction.

When working with archetypal material, my way of understanding and thinking about it is to consider three levels: the associative, the paradigmatic, and the dynamic. Ideally, the three converge, as they often do, for example, in dreamwork. Dr. Abramovitch approaches the Talmudic text by proposing the drama of the conflict over Evening Prayer as a paradigm for the transformation of leadership in the analytic community. In my view, archetypal amplification at the only paradigmatic level has the liability of oversimplification of similarities, neglect of differences, and does not penetrate deeply enough the psychic dynamism that potentially can be revealed by the archetypal imagery and patterns.

The material Dr. Abramovitch offers is rich and I am grateful to him for sharing the Talmudic text, one many of us would never have chanced upon. The paradigm of the Talmudic House of Study may or may not fit neatly for Jungian training institutes; nonetheless, the dynamism of the story points to the possibility of a rigid, authoritarian leadership undergoing transformation. Whether it is the encrusted leadership of an analytic group, or the rigidified ego position of an out-lived adaptation, or the compulsive tyranny of a complex, this dynamism is surely of interest to us.

I would like to elaborate on two themes that are embedded in the archetypal material: the circumstance of the conflict and what I feel to be a key transformative factor.

The controversy begins with “the search for new forms of worship to replace ritual sacrifice....The controversy, therefore, is entirely theoretical.” I see it differently. The emergence of conflict, as in individual psychology, signals a call for change or transformation. Specifically to this material, the conflict emerges over Evening Prayer, which I understand, as did Dr. Abramovitch, as an indication that the community needs expanded possibilities or forms of ritual. While the question is, as Dr. Abramovitch proposes, a theoretical dispute, at a deeper level my view

Katherine W. Olivetti, M.A., M.S.S.W., is a Jungian analyst in private practice in Manhattan and a member of the New York Association for Analytical Psychology. She is a past president of the C. G. Jung Institute of New York and is currently on its faculty. She is also a member of the faculty of the Child Study Center at Yale University.

is that the controversy over the new ritual is a major destabilizing event, one that reverberates alarm—the community is in spiritual crisis.

Ritual, if you will, is the recipe for evoking or contacting the numinous. Ritual creates the *temenos* of sacred space and guides the acts and attitudes one must assume. Most individuals who become Jungian analysts have experienced profound transformation and have had epiphanies in the context of their Jungian analyses. Depending on the style of the analyst and the analytic practices, my observation is that analysts tend to privilege the analytic rituals that supported their profound experiences. The efficacious rituals, i.e., the practice traditions, clinical styles, theoretical orientation, or specific interventions, become labeled “truly Jungian,” “right,” or “correct.” With intense emotional investments in the processes that brought about transformations, analysts become identified with those processes and keenly yearn to perpetuate them both in analytic practice and also by passing them along, training the next generation of Jungian analysts. Openly or covertly, judgments about “other” modes are made. We may have tried them and found them to be ineffectual; or we assessed them as outside the boundaries of “correct” or “proper” analytical work; or perhaps because they were practiced by a colleague we did not respect, we deemed them inferior.

A recent conversation illuminated the gap between Jung’s ideas and our community practices when an analyst shared that her major disappointment in training was that she felt the training community did not provide a welcoming context for sharing her spiritual journey or her experience of the numinous. She articulated a community problem far greater than her personal experience. As Jungians, both in our communities and also in the wider psychoanalytic community, we do not adequately represent the depth of our work and experience—we are reluctant to portray the psychospiritual dimension of the analytic process. One would expect a Jungian community to be especially poised to welcome Elijah at the table of discussion! How ironic that the transformative experience toward which Jungian clinical theory and practice is oriented should be so hidden.

The truth is that as communities we seldom expose our most profound and transformative experiences. We talk above or around them. The processes that led to transformation, the effective rituals, are homogenized into dry but clinically “acceptable” theoretical formulations. With our transformations kept as such private affairs, the powerful unifying effect that authentic ritual has upon a community eludes us. Instead of communities united and strengthened by the depth of our shared, though uniquely individual, experience, we fall into fundamentalisms based on philosophy, practice, theoretical orientation, or even analytic family of origin. Pluralistic tolerance for a variety of experience is lost, and as communities we suffer a loss of soul.

The archetypal material couldn’t be clearer—the need for ritual and the problematic leadership, autocratic and rigidified, are connected and symptomatic of the spiritual crisis in the community.

The eruption of conflict, though a harbinger of the potential for growth, activates the regressive tendency to shore up the old structure, a familiar phenomena in both individual and group psychologies. Dr. Abramovitch discusses the steps along the way that move toward a resolution of the conflict. To summarize less eloquently than Dr. Abramovitch—the conflict is made manifest, the power bal-

ance is exposed, a new leadership is selected, the old leadership reflects on shadow issues, opposing factions reconcile, and a new leadership model emerges.

Any group with internal problems and conflicts would do well to follow the paradigmatic steps outlined by the Talmudic House of Study. Interestingly though, the newly chosen leader does not take his anticipated place as the leader of the House of Study. Nor is the leadership reconfigured as a composite or coalition of the opposing factions, Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua. Rather, the leadership, having suffered the process of making conflict explicit and becoming conscious, is reshaped. By including a wholly new element, Elazar, a qualitative and structural change is achieved. A monadic authority yields to a pluralism.

Whether or not the steps outlined in the Talmud bring about the qualitative and structural changes depends, in my view, on the "Elazar factor."

Elazar is an extraordinary figure and a key element to transformation. He is the eighteen-year-old son of Azaria, who miraculously sprang eighteen lines of white hair. As an archetypal image, he is senex and puer, old and new, traditional and radical. He relates to a personal, feminine, Eros principle (having consulted with his wife), yet his heritage, wealth, and wisdom connect him to the hierarchical, traditional masculine, Logos principle. He embodies a sensibility for the value of the present, yet appreciates the unpredictable nature of the future. Such a figure, capable of bearing the tension of many opposites, can only be a representative of Mercurius and the emergent transcendent function. The symbology of the number eighteen further underscores the meaning of Elazar as the agent of transformation. Associated both with the youthfulness of his eighteen years and the maturity represented by his eighteen lines of white hair, Jewish symbolic meaning of the number suggests association with life, good luck, and charity. (Donations to charity are often made in multiples of eighteen. Orach Chayim, "Todah Rabbah, D'vorah," 2000-2004.) Transformation occurs when the leadership model can make room for the miraculous life force, the spontaneous, the mercurial spirit.

I would propose the "Elazar factor" as that which enables a qualitative transformation of leadership—a transformation that makes way for a new pattern. The change is not one where the old pattern is reconfigured either by infusing new personnel or new ideas into the familiar structural form. This is a radical change. Where the old leadership pattern was monadic and authoritative, organized by a bivalent dynamism of either/or, the new leadership is inclusive and organized by a polyvalent dynamism that permits both/and. The new leadership is able to achieve a structurally altered pluralism, respectful and reliant on the tried, true, and traditional but also inclusive of the unexpected, inexperienced, and serendipitous. And, perhaps most importantly, the transformation has been accomplished without rupture and fragmentation of the community. The "Elazar factor," the mercurial spirit as a companion to other authority and leadership principles, transforms the community; it is the factor, or lack of which, that must be addressed when rigidified leadership and stagnant spirituality present as symptoms of a community in crisis.

Many communities can relate to the processes that the Talmudic text articulates. Conflicts, disputes, struggles with leadership, splits, fragmentations, burnout, and every nameable emotion are among the sufferings that are experienced. Jung articulated the transformation process so brilliantly—the opposites,

suffering the tension, activation of the transcendent function. Who knows the language better than Jungian analysts? But for all our strife, and all our effort, and all the transmutations of leadership, has anybody seen Elazar lately?