

**"PRISONERS OF LEADERSHIP"**

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## ABSTRACT

Taking a psychoanalytic perspective, this paper investigates the mysterious bond between leaders and followers. Using such concepts as charisma, projection, transference, defense mechanisms and the psychology of groups, regressive processes between leaders and followers are explored. In the context of leadership attention is also given both to the psychological consequences of the faulty management of aggression and the fear of success.

## PRISONERS OF LEADERSHIP

During the night in Muensterberg I had a strange dream - I don't know why, but I have the same dream very often. Anyway I dreamed my father came into my room at night with six soldiers and ordered them to tie me up and bring me to Magdeburg. "But why?" I asked my sister who lives in Bayreuth. "Because you have not loved your father enough." And I awoke dripping with sweat as if someone had dipped me in the river. (Koser, 1900, p.45)

This dream, dreamt on January 19, 1760 by Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, when he was 48 years old, sheds a rare light on the inner world of a leader. The dream, a recurrent one and of nightmarish quality, must have been of particular intensity and significance. Perhaps this was one of those dreams meant to be repeatedly experienced and interpreted by the dreamer. And a dream which occupies such a central position in the dreamer's inner world is very likely to affect the individual's waking behavior. In a condensed form, this dream of Frederick the Great signals those conflicts that were critical in molding his personality, and which contributed to his later way of behaving and acting.

As dream interpretation has demonstrated, dreams have a tendency to telescope events in time (Freud, 1900), and this is what seems to have happened here. Although it is the quality of sustained

relationships which will eventually determine an individual's personality make-up, important scenes in a person's "inner theatre" can often be discerned from the way they handle specific key events; such events become important indicators in the decoding of behavior and action. It is very likely that the dream described above contained memories of a keystone event which occurred in Frederick's life thirty years earlier when, as a young prince, he seems to have gone through some kind of inner metamorphosis.

The key event in Frederick's life came after his attempt to escape from his father's tyranny and flee Prussia. This act was the culmination of a rebellious attitude towards his father, who, albeit well meaningly, had been oppressive in his attempts to mold his son exactly in his own image. The regimentation to which Frederick had been subjected had been intense. The responsibilities of his tutors were laid out in the minutest detail, with the threat of capital punishment as a deterrent to any deviation from them. Nothing was left to chance; the slightest breach of the rules had to be reported. Frederick's father wanted, at all costs, to make a soldier out of his son, and moreover to make him love soldiering. He considered Frederick's interests in the fine arts - which had been generated by his mother and an older sister - to be effeminate, and forbade him to pursue them. Frederick's subtle sabotage of his father's stifling demands were met by violent changes of mood which would range from

attacks of rage coupled with mental and physical abuse, to paranoid fears of being assassinated, to states of deep depression.

In his father's eyes, Frederick's attempt to flee the country was part and parcel of a malicious plot. As to be expected, his son's clumsy escape efforts during a nightly stopover led to his arrest by his father's soldiers. He was incarcerated by his father and kept incommunicado in a small fortress not far from Berlin. Only then did it dawn on the young crown prince how seriously his father looked at his rather impulsive, innocent act. This was made quite clear when he was exposed to a brutal, horrifying scene. Frederick was forced by his guards, instructed by his father, to watch, in front of his window, the beheading of his "accomplice", an intimate friend. The deprivation caused by the incarceration and the shock of watching this execution seriously affected his mental state and made this a turning point in his relationship with his father. From then on a remarkable transformation took place in his behavior (Lewy, 1967).

Rebelliousness seemed to have given way to submission and partial identification with his father. Frederick's resort to various defense mechanisms can be seen in the way he later rationalized this probation period as being invaluable for his training as king. His outbursts of great grief when his father died can be taken as another indicator of defense mechanisms at work. Soon after he became king, however, he seemed ready to prove himself to

the world, craving prestige and glory after having been kept in bondage by his father for so long. And his early actions as monarch quite clearly signalled the qualities of leadership and decision that would characterize his later reign.

When Frederick rose to power, he turned his army from an unruly group of soldiers into a well-oiled war machine. His behavior showed quite clearly his ability to externalize his private life conflicts so as to act them out on the public stage. Just as he had been drilled as a child, now it was his turn to drill his soldiers. And just as his father had done, he left no detail ignored. Standardization of equipment and specialization of tasks became the means to accomplish ultimate control over his men. To make his troops obey, Frederick was convinced that the men must fear their officers more than the enemy - a concept which must have been very dear to him, given the kind of relationship he had had with his father. And this theory seemed to work as his invasion of Silesia and his success in vastly expanding the limits of Prussia demonstrated. Without any doubt Frederick's military tactics exerted a great influence on the art of warfare at the time.

In sharp contrast with the brutal discipline he imposed on his army, in his role of "enlightened despot" he instituted important legal and penal reforms, set up new industries and encouraged educational innovations. He corresponded with Voltaire, wrote

poetry, and completed prose work on history, politics, military service and philosophy. He played the flute and composed marches and concertos. His love of music and literature, however, may be said to have been somewhat one-sided. For example, it did not extend to composers like Mozart or writers such as Shakespeare or Goethe.

Although we will never know the exact dynamics of Frederick's sudden transformation after his incarceration, he was somehow able in a very creative way, to combine soldiering with these so-called "effeminate" interests. His particular resolution of his inner conflicts made him a truly effective leader. Under his charismatic leadership Prussia transformed dramatically. A great king, an imaginative statesman and a charismatic general, he eventually earned the title "Frederick The Great" - a turn of events which would possibly have surprised his father.

#### THE MANY FACES OF CHARISMA

In the study of leadership we don't usually have access to such rich material as dreams or such specific anchor events. The developmental and motivational role of fear, anxiety, rivalry, guilt, and envy is rarely shown as clearly as in the above example. The same is true for the particular relationship between leader and followers. The management of aggressive feelings and affectionate bonds thus becomes harder to interpret, and the

linkages between early life experiences and later adult behavior tend to be much more tenuous. The various objects of identification are not usually presented as transparently, and similarly the ideals which the person pursues throughout life are less obvious. In most instances, the inner world of a leader remains largely an enigma, making it more difficult to thematically engage in the analysis of behavior and the isolation of patterns. It is usually hard to identify internalized, habitual rules of conduct with recurrent role demands, to find what has been called "the operational code" (Leites, 1953; George, 1969; Barber, 1974). We can only make informed guesses at how the various psychological forces which affect a leader are acted out on a public stage as we saw in the case of Frederick the Great. And that is unfortunate given the importance of these early life experiences as predictors of later action. One of the reasons for the mystical quality of leadership may be exactly our lack of understanding of its psychodynamics and its origin.

Historians, political and social scientists and the like have tried to explain the mystique of leadership from different angles. But in most instances their attempts at explanation have not led to greater insight. There have, however, been some exceptions. One avenue which has showed some promise has been taken by researchers interested in the concept of charisma. Charisma has often been used as an explanatory variable to describe this mysterious, almost mystical bond between leader and led.

The church historian Rudolf Sohm (1892-1923) was the first person to use this term, and he used it in the context of religious transformations. To him charisma was the gift of divine grace. The sociologist Max Weber later popularized the concept, describing it as:

"A certain quality of an individual's personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader." (1947, pp. 358-359)

"It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a 'sign' or proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader ..." (p. 359)

Unfortunately, in introducing the concept of charisma, Weber does not really solve the mystery of the strange bond between leader and led. His analysis remains largely at a descriptive level, with charisma something of an afterthought. Charisma is something

he cannot explain and so he glosses over it, relying rather on his other categories such as traditional and rational or legal authority.

To Weber charismatic individuals differ in that they have the capacity to inspire loyalty personally, apart from the authority derived from office or status. Charismatic leadership is extraordinary; it is a gift of grace possessed mainly by prophets or religiously inspired reformers who appear at historical moments of distress. Such leaders are regarded with a sense of awe and mystery and are expected to perform heroic deeds. Thus charismatic leadership has a salvationistic or messianic quality. Charisma becomes "the quality which is imputed to persons, actions, roles, institutions, symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with 'ultimate', 'fundamental', 'vital', order determining powers" (Shils, 1968, p.386).

From all descriptions it appears that charismatic leadership seems to emerge particularly at periods of uncertainty and unpredictability, in short at crisis points in history. Great leaders seem to be very much the product of their times. At the same time, they in turn succeed in influencing the events that have helped them rise to power. According to Weber, charismatic leaders will become prominent when there is psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious or political distress. In stable,

well functioning societies there is less of a need for the services of such individuals.

To some extent charismatic leadership seems to be a function of the need for order. Paradoxically enough, however, in providing "deliverance", truly charismatic leadership tends to be revolutionary in that it may conflict with the established order. But charismatic leaders solve this dilemma by creating order out of disorder: they provide their followers with new systems of coherence, continuity and justice. It appears that charismatic leaders are very skilled in channelling grievances and diverging interests into a common goal; they provide a focus for others. And by behaving in this way they become creators of meaning. Thus charismatic leaders "offer salvation in the form of safety, or identity, or rituals, or some combination of these" (Tucker, 1968, p.740). But this search for renewal has limits since "the pure charismatic hero bases his prophecy on values that have been central to the past, those values in order to be radical or revolutionary must be deviant or, at least not central to ongoing established institutions" (Bensman & Givant, 1975, p.584)

When we study the life histories of truly heroic charismatic leaders we find that they seem to have gone through a difficult period of gestation before coming to power. During this period - which may be a real or an imaginatively reconstructed portrait of their personal history - the themes of ordeal and adversity, so

common in myths, come to the fore. It appears that such leaders may create a "family romance", a kind of fairy tale, which narrates in great detail how after many adversities the real origin of the pure, poor persecuted prospective leader is finally discovered. As with a mythical hero, the prospective charismatic leader may paint a picture of having been subjected to certain rites of passage - trials - to prepare him or her for the formidable tasks at hand. Thus, in the behavior and actions of mythical heroes and charismatic leaders we can find many parallels (Rank, 1914).

Unfortunately, Weber's introduction of the concept of charisma, while useful in alerting us to this special phenomenon, did not solve the problem of what exactly these mysterious forces which bind leader and led are. Although Weber may have been aware that certain - not necessarily conscious forces - are at play, he did not have the advantage of psychoanalytic insights to help understand the deeper structures which influence behavior and action (Geertz, 1973, 1983; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1987). Furthermore, his view on what charisma really is and when it applies may have been too limited.

The exact nature of the complex interaction process between leader and followers has been further developed, however, by Willner (1984) who has suggested that the leader-follower relationship possesses the following properties: 1) the leader is perceived by

the followers as somehow superhuman; 2) the followers blindly believe the leader's statements; 3) the followers unconditionally comply with the leader's directives for action; 4) the followers give the leader unqualified emotional support (p.8). But although Willner enriches our understanding of charisma, like Weber she does not really explain why this psychological exchange occurs, or which psychodynamic processes take place to make such a relationship possible. A deeper level of analysis is therefore required.

In fact, what is called charisma can be considered part of a more widely spread phenomenon. Even quite ordinary people who find themselves in a position of leadership cannot escape it. Thus journalists have a point using a rather loose definition of charisma, applying it to any leader with popular appeal. Charismatic elements are present in all forms of leadership and find their source in the psychology of groups and the psychodynamics of leader-follower behavior. Using the insight of students of charismatic leadership, the objective of this paper is to explore and identify some of the psychological forces which affect both leaders and followers.

#### PRIVATE VICES, PUBLIC VIRTUES

For leaders to be effective some kind of congruence is needed between their own and societal concerns. What gives truly

effective leaders such conviction and power is their ability to articulate the underlying issues of a society. In trying to solve their own personal struggles they manage to project them onto their involvement in and solution of the problems of society at large. What seems to happen is that a leader's vision becomes the concern of all. According to Erikson (1958, 1969) using such dramatic examples as Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi, such leaders lift individual patienthood to the level of a universal one, trying to solve for all what they originally could not solve for themselves: internal, private dialogues are transformed into external public concerns.

This identification of the connection between a public and a private crisis was already taken by the political scientist Harold Lasswell in his seminal work Psychopathology and Politics (1960). According to Lasswell the distinctive mark of the homo politicus is the displacement of private motives onto public objects, and at the same time, the rationalization of these motives in terms of the public interest. Intrapsychic conflicts are acted out on the public stage. The effectiveness of this process of externalization depends, however, on "the leader's ability to draw upon and manipulate the body of myth in a given culture and the actions and values associated with these myths to legitimize his claims by associating with himself the sacred symbols of the culture" (Willner & Willner, 1965, p. 77). Thus collective symbols are made proxy for self symbols (Lasswell, 1960, p.186).

Part of the leadership phenomenon therefore seems to be a myth - making process whereby the leader's role in the myth is to make sense by creating continuity between past, present and future. Charismatic leaders facilitate the transformation of an historical or mythical ideal from a remote abstraction into an immediate psychological reality.

Thus one aspect of leadership seems to be "'cultural management', in part conscious and deliberate, in part probably unconscious and intuitive" (Willner & Willner, 1965, p.83). Speeches, ceremonials and rituals are some of the vehicles to make this a successful process. To quote Marshall McLuhan, "the medium becomes the message".

Because of the effects of the mass media on contemporary leadership the term "pseudo charisma" has been introduced (Bensman & Givant, 1975, p.602). What once may have been a concept only applicable to the truly unusual has been watered down in contemporary society to an all too common level. Thus we can observe how nowadays the manipulation of propaganda techniques and the use of opinion polls have become critical to leaders, and "the procedures employed are no different from those used in the creation of movie, theatrical, or television plays" (p.606). And, when the polls don't oblige and do not support the leaders' ideas, they can always resort to such rationalization devices as "the silent majority", to give their actions credibility and create

support, even if imaginary.

### The Importance of Projection

What plays an important role in making people so susceptible to manipulation, contributing thereby to the presence of charisma, is the process of projection. A leader is legitimized by the perceptions of his/her followers. Projective processes seem to play a major role in the mythmaking and symbolic action which form these perceptions. Propelled by the ambiguity and complexity of the events around us we choose leaders to make order out of chaos. Leaders become the ideal outlets for assuming responsibility for otherwise inexplicable phenomena. Thus, it seems that even if there was no-one with leadership abilities available we would have to create such a person. The mere presence of individuals willing to take on the leadership role facilitates the organization of experience, and in doing so helps us acquire a sense of control over our environment - even if this is only illusionary (Meindl, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985).

Through these attributional, projective processes leaders become the recipients ("containers") of other people's ideals, wishes, desires, and fantasies (Bion, 1959). They become imbued with mystical, charismatic qualities, whether they possess them or not. And in accepting this role they may turn into master illusionists, keeping those fantasies alive and conjuring up images of hope and

salvation which may replace reality. Naturally, in this attributional process of projecting themes of one's own inner world onto the leader, role expectations by the followers of appropriate leader behavior - or what can be called the rules of the game - will have a boundary effect as to what is permissible. In one way or another leaders are expected to recognize these boundaries, making them an essential factor in guiding their behavior.

As I mentioned before these attributional-projective mechanisms occur particularly in times of distress. Anomy, upheaval and crisis make for a sense of helplessness and may give rise to forms of collective regression. We should remember, however, that leaders not only induce regression in others but they can also fall victim to it themselves.

When followers fall victim to regression they may revert to primitive patterns of behavior, demonstrating quite clearly how easily very archaic psychological processes can emerge and affect action. Freud described what can happen when people get together in groups in this way: "all their individual inhibitions fall away and all the cruel, brutal and destructive instincts which lie dormant in individuals as relics of a more primitive epoch, are stirred up to find gratification" (Freud, 1921, p.70).

According to Freud (1921), the appeal of leaders is that at a more symbolic unconscious level they represent the return of the primal father. What seems to happen psychologically is that, in fantasy, the followers replace their own ego ideal - the vehicle by which they measure themselves - with their unconscious version of the leader's ego ideal. When this occurs the leader will facilitate a reconciliation between the two agencies of the mind, the ego - the mental structure that mediates between the person and reality - and the ego ideal. Reconciliation between these two agencies reduces tension and thus can lead to a sense of euphoria. When this happens, all the followers' exaggerated wishes will be projected onto the leader. With their own demands and prohibitions dissipated and transferred to the leader, they feel a sense of community. The leader turns into the conscience of the group. The followers no longer feel harassed by prohibitions; they have no more pangs of conscience. A group ego ideal comes into being which serves all and with that comes an abdication of personal responsibility. Followers now identify not only with the leader but also with each other in that they share a common outlet of identification. Freud noted:

"We know that in the mass of mankind there is a powerful need for an authority who can be admired, before whom one bows down, by whom one is ruled and perhaps even ill-treated ... that all the characteristics with which we equipped the great man are paternal characteristics ... The decisiveness of thought, the

strength of will, the energy of action are part of the picture of a father ... but above all the autonomy and independence of the great man, his divine unconcern which may grow into ruthlessness. One must admire him, one must trust him, but one cannot avoid being afraid of him too." (Freud, 1939, pp.109-110)

Freud compared the bond between leader and followers to the act of falling in love or to the state of trance between hypnotist and subject. When this identification process occurs followers will indulge in an "orgy" of simple and strong emotions and may be swept along by the leader's appeal. Although Freud does not discuss this explicitly, at the heart of this psychological process is a dynamic called transference. Leaders facilitate transference reactions. They are ideal outlets for the crystallization of primitive and unstable identifications.

Transference is a universal phenomenon. It can be described as some kind of "false connection" (Breuer & Freud, 1893-1895), a confusion in time and place. A person perceives and responds to someone else as if that person were mother, father, sibling, or another important figure from the past. Thus, transference can be viewed as a modified version of an old relationship (Greenson 1967; Langs, 1976). We don't really act toward other people as a tabula rasa. As we could see in the case of Frederick the Great, all our reactions are coloured by previous ones. Transferential

characteristics are present in all meaningful relationships: all human interactions consist of a mixture of realistic and transference reactions. Intrapsychic, unconscious fantasies based on early experiences will distort an individual's perceptions and interactions. When this happens the boundaries between past and present disappear. It is easy to see that the attitudes, fantasies and feelings which were appropriate in the conditions that prevailed in a person's early relationships can become inappropriate and anachronistic when they resurface in the context of the present.

As authority figures, leaders are prime outlets for these types of emotional reactions. Leaders easily revive previously unresolved conflicts with significant figures from the past. In these situations regressive behavior may occur: followers may endow their leaders with the same magic powers and omniscience which in childhood they attributed to parents or other significant figures. Moreover, transference reactions can be acted out in different ways and affect both leaders and followers. Conceptually, we can distinguish between three types: idealizing, mirror and persecutory reactions (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984a).

In the case of the idealizing transference reaction the subordinate makes the leader the recipient of his or her own desire for grandiosity through vicarious identification. At the heart of this process is a lingering striving to recover a state

of lost perfection. This belief in "Paradise Lost" stems from the time when the early childhood illusion of absolute self-sufficiency and contentment gave way to the recognition of dependence and feelings of inferiority. As a way of combating feelings of helplessness the need reemerges to imagine a state of "merger" with an apparently omnipotent and perfect other person (Kohut, 1971; Kohut & Wolf, 1978). And this childhood illusion is not easily given up. Fantasies linger on about the powers of the early caretakers. Although at one level of consciousness they know that it can't be, some people like to pursue this make-belief throughout life. Doing so helps maintain the fantasy that some of the qualities of the admired person will rub off. To have a relationship with others whom they can admire makes those who behave in this way feel much better. To project one's own opinions and values on to others and identify with them becomes a way of affirming one's own existence and will enhance one's self-esteem.

Leaders, as authority figures, reactivate lingering dependency needs and often act in such a way as to help create and maintain these illusions. Thus one facet of the leadership function is the leader as the magician, the master illusionist. In a magical way, the leader seems to become the go-between, the one person able to reinstate the illusion of absolute self-sufficiency and lost perfection. And when drawn in, the followers may seem intoxicated, behaving like sleepwalkers.

Particularly during periods of upheaval this search for "Paradise Lost" will come to the fore. At such times, followers experience increased dependency needs. They may feel lost, torn in different directions and may even have a sense of loss of identity. Leaders, however, can reverse this process of identity confusion by providing a focus. And to have leaders respond to and accommodate to these needs for identity, security and protection, followers will do anything in the form of appeal, support or ingratiation. They will please and charm the leader; they will give in to any whim or fancy. This type of behavior puts a lot of pressure on the leader to come through, however. And unfortunately whatever he or she does the leader will never be able to satisfy the followers completely.

In the case of mirror transference we are dealing with the other side of the coin. This involves man's love of self-display, his desire to get attention from others. And, although this inclination tends to be universal, leaders are more susceptible to it than most people. It is very hard to imagine, unless one has had the experience, what it means to be the object of excessive admiration by followers - even in those instances where some of it may be warranted. The leader's display of narcissism reverberates in the followers; followers recognize themselves in the leader.

Some leaders, in being exposed to a great deal of attention, may eventually find it hard to maintain a firm grasp on reality and

thus distinguish fact from fantasy. Too much admiration can have dire consequences for the leader's mind: he or she may eventually believe it all to be true - that they really are perfect, as intelligent or as powerful as others think is the case - and act accordingly. Moreover, what may intensify this belief is the fact that leaders have something going for them that ordinary mortals don't have: they frequently have the power to turn some of their fantasies into reality. If this happens, we may see the beginning of a self - propelled cycle of grandiosity.

Of course, what also brings such wishes to the fore is the fact that at the base of mirror transference is an archaic memory of grandiose omnipotence - a remembrance of a time when the individual as a child wanted to display his or her evolving capabilities and be admired for them. For the leader to experience this "grandiose sense of self", he needs others to provide "nourishment" through confirming and admiring responses (Kohut, 1971; Kohut & Wolf, 1978). Thus the idealizing and mirror transference reactions mutually reinforce each other, enhancing the leader's narcissism.

Mirror transferences, then, become complementary to idealizing transference reactions - the former being the desire to be applauded, admired and revered, the latter the propensity to comply with that desire. Of course, the distinction between mirror and idealizing reactions is only a conceptual one. In

practice, these processes will occur simultaneously.

If leaders fall victim to these regressive forces they may become overly preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success and power. They will be constantly on the lookout for attention, and may want to demonstrate their mastery and brilliance. Encouraged by their subordinates, they may take on overly ambitious projects and engage in unrealistic action. Because of their desire for grandiosity, they will tend to gravitate towards subordinates with high dependency needs, people in search of an all knowledgeable, all powerful and care-giving leader. But the followers may be in for a shock. Preoccupied by grandiosity, and having become intolerant of criticism, such leaders can become very callous about the needs of their subordinates. They may exploit them and then drop them when they no longer serve their purposes.

Given the likely enhancement of narcissistic tendencies in leaders, blaming them for callous behavior may be a realistic complaint. It is another matter altogether however, for the followers to blame the leader for failing to live up to their own exaggerated expectations. Yet, this, unfortunately, is what tends to happen. No leader can really sustain the primitive idealization of the followers: no one can be a perfect gratifying object. There are always going to be frustrating experiences. The outcome of not meeting the "tacit promise" is predictable. We should not forget that rebellious hatred is the counterpart of

idealization. Angry about the frustration of their dependency needs, and perhaps aggravated by callous, exploitative behavior, subordinates may eventually react by vengefully devaluating their leaders. Highly dissatisfied, they may engage in hostile, rebellious acts. Thus, not only is the leader the recipient of praise and admiration but it is also very likely that he or she will be the target of a considerable dose of overt and covert aggression.

The probability that aggressive feelings will emerge is facilitated by early developmental experiences. Even in the early years, a child's parents or caretakers cannot always be completely satisfying. At times, they may not be available and consequently cause frustration. This results in anger directed at the caretakers. For fear, however, of losing those who after all are the main source of satisfaction (we should not forget that in the mythical world of the young child angry feelings can kill), a switch occurs: these feelings are split off and directed toward others. The child's reasons that the "good object" didn't do it, "others" are to blame; they are the ones responsible, causing it to happen (Klein, 1948; Kernberg, 1976, 1985; Mahler et al, 1975).

Studies of human development indicate that this primitive way of dealing with the stresses and strains of life is not limited to childhood. Some people easily revive this way of behaving in adulthood. People who are so inclined will divide, in an overly

simplified way, all experiences, perceptions and feelings into unambiguously "good" and "bad" categories. Of course, in doing so they ignore the complexity and ambiguity inherent in all human relationships; instead they rely on simple, strong, emotional reactions. If this happens, relationships may become polarized between unbridled hatred, fear, and aggression on one hand, and feelings of overidealization on the other. Such people refuse to accept that the same person can have both "good" and "bad" qualities.

When this psychological process occurs, we can see how attitudes of idealization quickly change into devaluation when people feel that their needs are not met. Followers are fickle; they will easily change their minds. There seems to be no middle road. Thus subordinates will unload their anger onto their leaders, who for their part, may not be able to "contain" this anger, and therefore counterreact. Hence, given the pressures placed upon them, leaders may feel persecuted. Unable to control their aggressive feelings, they look for victims and retaliate. They themselves will "split" the world into those who are with them and those who are against them. If they take this route it will make for a delusionary world filled with saints, heroes, victims and scapegoats. No wonder that paranoia is considered to be one of the major "diseases" of leadership.

Projection and projective identification are defense mechanisms

which accompany splitting (Ogden, 1982). These defense mechanisms help to ward off persecution by "bad" objects. What seems to happen is that unwanted aspects of the self are externalized and attributed to (projected onto) others. People who act in this way never experience a sense of personal responsibility but always blame someone or something else.

In the context of these three interdependent transference reactions it is interesting to note a not uncommon defense called "identification with the aggressor" (Freud, 1936; Kets de Vries, 1980). This defense mechanism explains why followers continue to be attracted to leaders in spite of their abhorrence, at another level, of the leaders' violent acts. At the core of it all is the followers' illusion - which they cling to as a way of overcoming their own fears - that through identification they can incorporate aspects of the perceived omnipotence of the leader.

The followers' unconscious wish, behind this "merger" is that they will become as powerful as "the aggressor". Hence an illusory transformation occurs whereby instead of being the helpless victim the follower convinces him or herself that he or she is in control. Thus followers may behave as insensitively toward "outsiders" as their leaders do, having appropriated the latter's particular symbols of power. Meanwhile, their feelings toward their leaders will alternate between love, affection, and fear. Naturally, followers who adopt this defense mechanism share the

outlooks of their leaders and support them even if they engage in unrealistic, grandiose schemes or imagine the existence of malicious plots, sabotage and enemies.

#### OTHER REGRESSIVE FORCES

##### Primitive Group Processes

To go from these transference patterns and defensive processes to group situations is only a small step. In group situations, the dyadic exchange will be further expanded. As has been indicated earlier, groups are prone to revert to very primitive behavior. To quote Freud:

"A group is extraordinary credulous and open to influence, it has no critical faculty, and the improbable does not exist for it. It thinks in images, which call one another up by association (just as they arise within individuals in states of free imagination), and whose agreement with reality is never checked by any reasonable agency. The feelings of a group are always very simple and very exaggerated. So that a group knows neither doubt nor uncertainty" (1921, p.78).

Abse and Jessner (1961) held a similar view: "intensification of emotion, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation and delay, and the tendency to rapid action, together

with a collective inhibition of intelligence form an ensemble characteristic of rudimentarily organized groups" (p. 698).

It has been the research of Wilfred Bion (1959), however, which has shed most light on the regressive potential of groups. From his observations he arrived at two common aspects of group behavior. First he noted that groups have an overt, specific task to perform that necessitates cooperation and effort from their members, a task that requires contact with reality. Here leaders fulfil a function by providing the group members with a focus and a set of values with which to work. But apart from this, all groups are also subjected to another tendency - namely "basic assumptions". These "basic assumptions" operate at a more primitive level and are of a regressive nature. Basic assumptions like transference reactions are derivatives of an individual's way of coping with the various forms of anxiety generated by different life situations. Whereas the work aspect of the group is more oriented toward reality, the basic assumption aspect operates at a far more primitive level. Bion divided these basic assumption characteristics of groups into three categories: pairing, dependency and fight/flight.

Interestingly enough, there seems to be a considerable amount of similarity between the previously discussed transference patterns and these basic assumptions (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984b). Basic assumptions are in fact probably derived from

transference reactions. For example, pairing has elements in common with mirror transference. A utopian, grandiose idea is kept alive that somewhere there exists a person who will deliver the group from hatred, destructiveness and despair. There is a desire to recapture a state of unio mystica. The individuals chosen as part of the "pair" turn into the go-betweens, being assigned the mission to deliver this state of bliss to the group. They become the alter egos, the bearers of the group's feelings of grandiose omnipotence (Kohut & Wolf, 1978), and they will reflect what is desired. In contrast, the dependency assumption is related to the idealizing transference reaction. Because of being in a group, the individual experiences a sense of loss of identity and irrational feelings of fragmentation. When this occurs a sense of helplessness may follow. The desire may emerge to be "nourished" and protected by a leader, the followers having illusory wishes about his or her power. Finally, the fight/flight assumption and the persecutory transference reaction go together in that the fantasy emerges that there is an enemy somewhere, making defense or escape a necessity. The perceived imperfections of the leader may set such a reaction off. Thus, when the leader does not live up to the followers' unrealistic, excessive demands, anger follows. Of course, with each of these group reactions come related defensive patterns. (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984b).

A movement can be observed in these three basic assumptions from dependency to fight/flight to pairing. When a leader does not

live up to the excessive expectations of the group members a revolt may occur. We should not forget that the emotional state of the followers is very changeable. Consequently, the group members may fall back into a fight/flight mode. Eventually, given the anxiety aroused by this particular culture, the group members may seek refuge in pairing as a defense against the fight/flight environment they have created.

These distortive reaction patterns and regressive group behavior are in fact major contributing factors to the strange, irrational behavior we sometimes find among leaders. Such reaction patterns are semi-dormant tendencies which revive easily in situations of leadership. Some leaders find it very hard to withstand their pressures.

### Distance and Aggression

To be a leader implies a certain amount of loneliness - or, better, - aloneness on the job. The nature of authority makes this state of affairs inevitable. Paradoxically, it is the kind of loneliness that can be experienced when surrounded by a sea of people. A major reason for this is that leaders have to make decisions that cannot always be pleasing: they sometimes have to hurt people. Therefore, to facilitate "neutrality" in decision making, they find it easier to keep their distance. Naturally, this adds to the atmosphere of mystery surrounding leaders. And

leaders enhance the process by creating the illusion that they need no-one.

But the desire for distance does not come without a price. While leaders may be able to temporarily satisfy the dependency needs of their followers, they have to contend with the frustration of their own dependency needs (Kernberg, 1978). For some leaders, coping with these feelings is not easy. The need for affectionate bonds and attachment is a universal human characteristic (Harlow & Harlow, 1965; Bowlby, 1969). When this need is frustrated, separation anxiety may be reactivated. To ward off this anxiety and the subsequent anger or rage at finding oneself in this unfortunate position, another strong regressive pull will be placed on leaders. Irrational behavior may be the price to be paid in the management of anxiety. Consequently, leaders may resort to one of the more primitive defense mechanisms mentioned earlier. Moreover, their frustration is often be acted out on a public stage. A common way of doing this is to resort to splitting: to succumb to simplified ways of looking at the world, searching for scapegoats. The ever-present potential to act out aggression on the public stage is facilitated by the persecutory transference reaction of their followers for whom they are the "container", the recipient of emotion and cognition (Bion, 1959). Leaders become the logical outlets for the aggressive wishes of those followers who have become dissatisfied, resentful, and hostile about the fact that the leader, after all, is not a

totally gratifying object. We should remember that rebellious hatred is the counterpart of idealization.

When leaders become the outlet for aggression they may retaliate. The likelihood of retaliation is moreover increased if leaders become angry because they feel that their followers are not responding to their leadership with the appropriate nurturing responses. When they lose control, anger and rage may be expressed in the form of purges and excommunication.

### The Icarus Dilemma

Like the mythological figure Daedalus, the builder of the Minoan labyrinth, who managed to escape Crete by fabricating wings of feather and wax, effective leaders have to steer a middle course between sun and sea. Excess is fraught with danger. But not all leaders have the strength of personality to behave accordingly. The typical leader is more like Daedalus' son Icarus, exulting in flight and not heeding the warning of his father "neither soar too high, lest the sun melt the wax, nor swoop too low, lest the feathers be wetted by the sea".

This moral tale about taking a middle course is very much related to what may be called the fear of failure and the fear of success. (Zaleznik & Kets de Vries, 1985). While the first kind of fear is very understandable given its effects on self-esteem, the second form of anxiety is much more of a mystery. What happens to some leaders is that in an unconscious, symbolic way, being successful

is equated with the notion of Oedipal victory - succeeding where one's parents didn't (Freud, 1933). This success will be a pyrrhic victory fraught with ambivalence. The price of reaching the top is anxiety, a result of the fear of standing out, of becoming the object of envy and resentment. At a more unconscious level of functioning, retaliation will be feared. For some, this feeling may lead to paralysis of action and depression, for others it will result in persecutory fears and paranoid anxiety.

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Our discussion of some of the regressive pulls to which leaders are subjected may have shed some light on the mystery as to why individuals who seem quite well adjusted before attaining a leadership position, suddenly change and exhibit highly irrational and even pathological behavior when in power. The psychological pressures described above may just have become too great for such people. Given the strains of the situation, there may have been inadequate checks and balances in place to modify the actions of the leader. Alternatively, the leader may have had a personality make-up highly susceptible to regression in the first place.

Paradoxically enough, although these regressive forces which will affect leaders more than others may give rise to irrational, pathological behavior and in normal circumstances would be the cause of disqualification, in specific situations they may be exactly the qualities needed for leadership. The leader's vision of reality, the unrestrained abandonment to a certain aim,

distorted as it may be - his or her way of acting out aggression - may be very functional. Paranoid reactions, the notion of a threatening menace which warrants struggle and sacrifice, will feed very well in this type of situation.

In general, however, it is to be hoped that particularly large bureaucratic organizations will have a number of built-in safeguards against the possibility of regressive behavior. For example, key policy decisions may be often distributed over a number of persons and a variety of departments. Moreover, organizations serve an important function in helping individuals manage anxiety and regression (Jaques, 1955; Menzies, 1960). Moreover, organizational processes have a way of finding their own momentum, and are resistant to quick change (Allison, 1971). Countervailing influences such as external directors, bankers or outside consultants may also have some effect. Top executive training programs can meanwhile provide a non-threatening environment where senior executives can discuss their experiences. Such sessions may also enhance reality testing. But in spite of these countervailing forces and tendencies to inertia we should not underestimate the regressive pulls described above. We should remember that leaders can wield enormous power and their decisions can have a fateful effect on the destiny of many. Thus if we do not pay heed to these psychological forces, we may become prisoners of leadership.

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