

Abstract

Title “Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge- The Freedom to Think and face Reality”

Presenter- David Simpson British Psychoanalytic Association& Society

In some people, standing in the way of their freedom to think and know reality is a superego figure, which Hannah Segal(1986)has likened to God in the myth of Adam and Eve and the Tree of Knowledge, and which is against curiosity and learning. The origin of this figure, which is both idealised and threatening, lies in the infant's omnipotent wishes to maintain the pleasure principle and resist the reality principle. It is essentially against the reality of human existence, with all feelings including the essential pain, that being alive can entail, and which Adam and Eve faced on leaving Paradise.

I suggest an important factor promoting the formation of this anti-thinking superego is a deficiency in a mother's capacity to tolerate passionate expression of its infant's needs and desires. Of particular importance is the mother's intolerance of the child's feelings of hostility resulting from its frustration. This can lead to a lifelong fear of catastrophe following passionate expression, including of thoughts and ideas, and as a consequence inhibition. I suggest this follows the child's projected phantasy of a damaged violent parental coupling. This phantasy is a core feature of this superego system

I illustrate this with woman patient who was inhibited in expressing her thoughts and feelings, fearing any signs of passion in these.

Segal, H. (1981) 'Psychoanalysis and Freedom of Thought,' in *The Work of Hanna Segal* (collected papers), New York :Jason Aronson.