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Chapter 8: Religious fundamentalism and violence

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This chapter describes what is meant by religious fundamentalism and the kinds of unconscious motivations that make some individuals cling to exaggerated religiosity. It also focuses on religious fundamentalism as a shared group process as it occurs in religious cults. An examination of the characteristics of an extreme religious cult provides a necessary platform from which we can take a closer look at global violent fundamentalist religious movements like al-Qaeda.

Definition

The English term “fundamentalism” as it relates to religious self-definition was coined in the late 1920s in the United States. Two Union Oil tycoons in California, Lyman and Milton Stewart, financed the publication of a series of pamphlets called *The Fundamentals*, which enumerated five points essential for Christian orthodoxy: biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, Christ’s atonement and resurrection, the authenticity of miracles, and dispensationalism. At that time “fundamentalists” were simply defenders of these five doctrines (Balmer, 1989). Even though the term “fundamentalism” in relation

to religion was first used in the 1920s, earlier in history and on countless occasions, individuals or groups from many parts of the world and from practically every faith turned to exaggerated religiosity.

The term fundamentalism in any religion is associated with the believers' list of unchangeable doctrines and is defined "in terms of its disciplined opposition to non-believers and 'lukewarm' believers alike" (Marty and Appleby, 1995, p.1). Individuals and small or large groups who are involved in extreme religious fundamentalism believe they have a special relationship with divine power. Accordingly, they differentiate themselves from "others" in a strict fashion. The omnipotence associated with the belief in their special relationship with a divine power combined with a determination to stand apart from non-believers or lukewarm believers may lead to violence when "others" are perceived as threatening. However, religious fundamentalist movements, even the extreme ones, are not always violent. For example, "Old Believers" of Russian origin who are very strict fundamentalist religious individuals and who came to Estonia's Lake Peipsi region over four hundred years ago are peaceful people. Violence belonged to their distant ancestors but not to them (Volkan, 1997).

There are fundamentalist religious groups within practically every faith tradition—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Confucianism. Since September 11, 2001, however, at least in the United States and the so-called Western world, the label fundamentalism has evolved as a pejorative word mainly associated with Islam. Meanwhile, Christian or Judaic fundamentalists are described by the terms "conservative" or "religious right."

Can psychoanalysis offer a theory to understand religious fundamentalism and its extreme forms? Prior to answering this question a brief review of the psychoanalytic understanding of religion is warranted.

Psychoanalysis on Religion

After noticing a close similarity between obsessive acts and religious practices, Freud viewed obsessional neurosis as a distorted private religion, and religion as a kind of universal obsessional neurosis. According to him, any individual's religious commitment is an expression of unresolved psychological issues from childhood. The terrifying impressions of helplessness in childhood arouse the need for protection, which can be provided through the love of a father. The duration of one's sense of helplessness—overt or covert—throughout life, Freud concluded, makes it necessary to seek an omnipotent father, an image of God, to assuage the feeling of vulnerability; thus, religion is related to shared illusion (Freud, 1901, 1927). Accordingly, there has been spoken, and sometimes unspoken, “animosity” between religion and psychoanalysis. Some psychoanalysts questioned Freud's assumptions. For example, Waelder (1960) concludes that Freud's ideas “may well be correct for the father religions, the latecomers in religious history, but [they] do not offer a complete elucidation of this psychogenesis” (p.59). Nevertheless, as Leowald wrote in 1978, “under the weight of [Freud's] authority religion in psychoanalysis has been largely considered a sign of man's mental immaturity” (p.57), an illusion “to be given up as we are able to overcome our childish needs for all-powerful parents” (p.57). Leowald associated religion with the primary process. But he also stated that the secondary process is nourished by the former.

Thus, Leowald opened a way for psychoanalysts to discuss the topic of religion, question Freud's assumptions, and add their own views (Sokolowski, 1990).

Winnicott's (1953) paper on transitional objects and transitional phenomena gave psychoanalysts a new way of understanding religion and its universality. During the first years of life, the transitional object becomes the first item that clearly represents "not-me" in the child's mind. Though this first "not-me" image corresponds to a thing that actually exists in the world, the transitional object is not entirely "not me" because it is also a substitute for the child's mother, whom the child's mind does not yet fully understand is a separate individual in her own right and whom the toddler perceives to be under his or her absolute control (an illusion, of course). Through a teddy bear or a melody that is utilized as a transitional object or phenomenon, the child begins to know the surrounding world. It is not part of the child, so it signifies the reality "out there" beyond the child's internal world, the "not-me" that the child slowly discovers and "creates." What is "created" at first does not respond to reality as perceived by an adult through logical thinking. The child's "reality," while playing with a transitional object or phenomenon, is a combination of reality and illusion. Winnicott (1953) wrote: "Transitional objects and phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is the basis of initiation of all experience... This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work" (p. 16). Long ago Freud, in a letter to Ludwig Binswanger, describes himself as dwelling in a basement while distinguished

aristocratic guests such as art and religion visit an upper floor. He added, “If I had another working life ahead of me, I should undertake to find a place in my low hamlet for these aristocrats” (Binswanger, 1956, p.115). It can be said that Winnicott brought these distinguished guests to Freud’s basement.

Meissner (1984) reminds us that just as a transitional object can degenerate into a (pathological) fetish, “transitional religious experience can be distorted into less authentic, relatively fetishistic directions that tend to contaminate and distort the more profoundly meaningful aspects of the religious experience” (p.107). Making peace between psychoanalysis and religion in the psychoanalytic literature continues; Blass (2004) provides a more recent example.

A metapsychology of religious fundamentalism

We can formulate a metapsychology of religious fundamentalism by accepting Winnicott’s (1953) description of transitional object and transitional phenomenon, as well as Greenacre’s (1970), Modell’s (1970) and my (Volkan, 1976) expansion of these concepts as examined from an object-relations point of view. Elaborations on transitional objects and transitional phenomena allowed us to see more clearly the progressive, healing, and creative aspects of religious beliefs and feelings, as well as their regressive, destructive and restrictive aspects. In order to focus on both aspects, I use the analogy of an imaginary lantern with one transparent side and one opaque side situated between infants or toddlers and their actual environment (Volkan, 2004; Volkan and Kayatekin, 2006). When toddlers feel comfortable, fed, well-rested, and loved, they turn the transparent side toward the real things which surround them, illuminating these things, which they now begin to perceive as entities separate from themselves.

When infants feel uncomfortable, hungry or sleepy, they turn the opaque side of the lantern toward the frustrating outside world. At such times, we imagine that their minds experience a sense of cosmic omnipotence.

In "normal" development, toddlers play with their "lanterns" hundreds and hundreds of times, getting to know reality in one direction and succumbing, for practical purposes, to a lonely, omnipotent and narcissistic existence in the other direction, until their minds begin to retain unchangeable external realities, such as having a mother separate from themselves who is sometimes gratifying and at other times frustrating. During such repeated "play" toddlers' minds learn both to differentiate and to fuse illusion and reality, omnipotence and restricted ability, and suspension of disbelief and the impact of the real world. If their development is normal, they eventually develop an acceptance of the "not-me" world and adjust to logical thinking.

I suggest that humans have what I call "moments of rest" during which there is no need to differentiate between what is real and what is illusion, times when logical thinking need not be maintained. It is during these moments that the relation to the transitional object or phenomenon and playing with it echoes throughout a lifetime. During "moments of rest" a Christian might simultaneously know that it is biologically impossible for a woman to have a baby without the semen of a man but also believe in the virgin birth. Rationally, people might know that no one really sees angels, but they may behave as if angels exist. In other words, the *function* of the transitional object and phenomenon remains available to humans for the rest of their lives. The need for "moments of rest" varies from individual to individual and from social group to group. Some people declare that they do not require such religious

“moments of rest,” but perhaps they refer to the same function by different names. For example, they may "play" the game of linking magical and real in astrology, or paint abstract paintings that represent a mixture of illusion and reality, or write poetry or become very good psychoanalysts who can easily travel between primary process and secondary process thinking with their associated affects and become models for their patients to do the same without much anxiety until they modify their psychic realities.

Metapsychologically we can say that religious fundamentalists are preoccupied with keeping the opaque side of the lantern turned against the real world that is perceived as threatening and frustrating. They refuse to travel between illusion and reality and attempt to keep illusion as their own special reality. Unlike infants who can probably block out the external world more thoroughly, adult fundamentalists are more aware of an environment that they perceive as threatening. This is a key reason why an extreme form of religious fundamentalism has the potential to strike out against threatening objects.

The imaginary lantern refers to the existence of a phase of life when illusions are “normal.” It does not, however, offer ideas as to why children belonging to different large-groups choose various religious beliefs and why some internalize fundamentalist religious ideas from childhood on and why some others, later in life, are attracted to exaggerated and sometimes violent specific religious doctrines.

When we are born we do not know what religion is, nor do we comprehend ethnicity or nationality. Erikson (1966) called children *generalists*; they do not belong to a large-group identity. As they grow up children begin to possess a mixture of large-group identities, such as religion and ethnicity. They have no choice. Ownership in a large-

group identity, such as a religious, ethnic, or national shared one, primarily depends on who children identify with in their early environment and what these people “deposit” in the children’s developing self-representations. *Identification* is a well-known psychoanalytic concept that explains how children actively internalize and assimilate object images and functions associated with them. *Depositing* is a related concept in which an adult is more active than the child in putting certain self- and object images of their own into the child’s developing self-representation (a form of *stable* projective identification) and then, mostly unconsciously and chronically, manipulating the child to perform certain tasks in order to maintain the deposited images within (Volkan, 1997). Parents and religious mentors such as priests or *imams* who are sanctioned by parents deposit images of prophets and other religious figures into the developing self-representations of children. The most organized and socially-sanctioned “propaganda” for a better way of life comes from religious organizations (Volkan and Kayatekin, 2006). Due to experiences with environment, identifications, and elements that are “deposited” into them as children, some people grow up as fundamentalist religious individuals. Others, for personal reasons, will turn to an exaggerated religiosity later in life.

Two cases

Serpil, a 25-year-old Turkish political science student was barred from attending a prominent university in Turkey because she insisted on covering her head in the Moslem style. Women who cover their heads are not allowed to attend classes at Turkish universities, so instead of removing her headscarf while in the classroom in order to

continue her education in Turkey, Serpil chose to migrate to Austria where there are no rules concerning female university students' head attire.

Serpil comes from a modern educated Turkish family. No one on either her father's or her mother's side of the family was religious and no woman wore a headscarf. When Serpil was a prepubescent child, her father moved the family to a rather isolated location in Anatolia, the heartland of Turkey, for professional reasons. She had one younger sister and a happy home. While she was going through her adolescent passage (Blos, 1979) and searching for idealized objects, she idealized her father and felt very close to him. During a national holiday, youngsters from different schools participated in a parade and public dancing in a nearby city. Serpil prepared hard for this event and went to this city occasionally to rehearse for the parade and the dancing, wearing a costume with a rather short skirt. One day her father who had accompanied her to this city, noted a young man's interest in his daughter, and when they returned home he gave her a stern lecture and asked her to be more careful about showing her legs to male teenagers. Serpil, who was at the peak of idealization of her father, was shocked. She thought that she had lost her father's unconditional love and her identity as her father's favorite "other," and she felt rage toward him. The next day Serpil's father was called for a work emergency in the countryside, and while driving there very fast he had an accident and died instantly. Serpil was filled with guilt feelings for having hated her father the day before. As years passed she could not mourn her father's death. She became very religious and was convinced that she would meet her father again in heaven when she died. Eventually, she covered her head since she believed that that is what a good Moslem woman should do. For Serpil, external danger came from relatives and friends who, using logical thinking

and references to science, tried to interfere with her belief that one day she would meet her father. Thus, she escaped to Austria, a Christian country that, paradoxically, was safer since most people there would not question her extreme religious beliefs.

Serpil spoke very fast. When she consulted me she was intellectually aware that she had not mourned her loss, so when I likened her peculiar speech pattern to a speeding car, she easily realized that her “symptom” was in the service of keeping her father alive: His mental representation that Serpil kept within her internal world was still speeding in his car, and the outcome of his reckless driving was not yet determined. In spite of her intellectual understanding of the link between her inability to mourn and her turning to religion, Serpil continued to declare: “My religion says that I will meet my father in heaven. Can anyone give me a guarantee that this is not so? Since there is no proof against my belief, I will follow all the fundamentals of my Moslem religion.” Serpil’s case illustrates an individual’s wish and illusion to fulfill a desire in another life through the utilization of a religion that exists within her society. One wonders if Serpil might have found another avenue for dealing with her guilt feelings and complicated mourning had not religious preoccupations in her cultural/societal environment already been stirred up.

At the time Serpil was going through the process of deciding to wear a headscarf, a religious political party had come to power in Turkey, and the various types of Moslem religious *tarikats* (cults), which would have been suppressed in the past, began to spread. The wives of prominent ruling political party figures such as the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs, were (and still are) covering their heads. Thus, for a young woman looking for a magical solution to ease her guilt feelings for “killing” her father by

her rage and to deal with a complicated mourning, there were “identification figures” to follow that eased her internal tension. The government was unsuccessfully fighting the legal and educational authorities to allow women who were covering their heads to attend classes at the Turkish universities, and Serpil took the government’s side in this fight. The psychology of her behavior, of course, is more complicated. A person in perennial mourning (Volkan, 1981) not only wishes to bring the dead person back—even in the next world as the religion promises—but also to “kill” the dead person in order to complete the mourning process once and for all. Serpil’s taking the side of the religious people and fighting her university (whose president once told me how the university was a bastion of modernity against religious assaults), was also Serpil’s way of “killing” her “modern” father.

I also analyzed Paterson, who was in his mid thirties when he became my analysand and who fit the description of a fundamentalist Christian very well. When he was at the oedipal age, one day his alcoholic father died while little Paterson was lying next to him. Paterson’s mother moved to her parents’ home with her son and began to share her bed with him, thereby encouraging his fantasy of oedipal triumph and his unconscious “belief” that he was his father’s killer. One year later little Paterson’s life turned upside down. One day, without any preparation, he was taken to a farm, the home of his new stepfather whom he had not met until that day. His mother began to share her bed with this new husband, and Paterson was, in a sense, exiled to a lonely second-class place in the attic while his new stepsiblings had their own nice bedrooms. He felt that on the farm he was used like a slave. As could be expected, he turned his murderous rage toward his stepfather and his stepsiblings. One day during puberty he

saw a dog delivering and then feeding her puppies. For Paterson, the newborn puppies unconsciously represented his stepsiblings, so he found a gun and shot the puppies to death. After this event, his vision of himself as a “murderer” crystallized in his mind. He had “sinned.”

Besides his identifications with religious others in his community and besides the religious “propaganda” that he was exposed to while growing up, his “sinfulness” was his main motivation for turning to fundamentalist religion as an adult in order to be saved by Jesus. He developed extremely narcissistic social and sexual masochism and lived under a metaphorical “glass bubble” (Volkan, 1979), which covered his lonely but omnipotent kingdom. The rather large silver cross Paterson wore around his neck created a border between his glass bubble and the nonbelievers. As we worked together Paterson induced a great deal of countertransference feelings in me. I was able, I believe, to handle them therapeutically and help Paterson escape his “glass bubble” and stop being so omnipotent yet masochistic.

Religiousness has been shown to be highly prevalent among psychiatric patients, especially among those with schizophrenia who exhibit religious delusions and hallucinations (Kirov, Kemp, et al., 1998; Pieper, 2004). Paterson and Serpil were not psychotic and used religion to cope with their internal mental conflicts. I am sure that neither will turn to violence, but others who are also not psychotic and who cling to fundamentalist religion may. I will mention two well-known cases. The first one is Dr. Benjamin Goldstein (later known as Baruch Goldstein). On February 25, 1994 Baruch Goldstein killed 29 and wounded over 100 Muslims worshiping in the Ibrahimi Mosque at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Israel. The second one is Muhammed Bouyeri, the Dutch-

born son of Muslim Moroccan immigrants. In the name of religion he killed Theo Van Gogh, the great-great cousin of the renowned Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh, as Van Gogh was riding his bicycle to work in Amsterdam on November 2, 2004 (Volkan and Kayatekin, 2006). I have no in-depth information about the personal psychological motivations that turned these two individuals into murderers.

When threats from the outside world become magnified, persons with religious fundamentalism may seek the company of others who also keep the opaque sides of their lanterns turned against the real world. Serpil received support from the growing religious fundamentalist movements in Turkey, and Paterson belonged to a fundamentalist church in Virginia that was actively using religion to influence social and political processes. Others seek comfort by joining cults or *tarikats* in the hope that the leaders of such religious organizations will make their uncomfortable “moments of rest” comfortable. Alas, such radical fundamentalist leaders also possess a lantern with an opaque side facing the outside world, magnifying the dangers that exist “out there.” While there are peaceful cults and *tarikats*, others may carry out sociopolitical abuse that goes well beyond generating excessive propaganda or using religion to elect politicians or damage the reputation of others. They may also turn violent acts against themselves.

Encapsulated fundamentalism

In late 1995 I accepted an invitation to chair a Select Advisory Commission to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Critical Incident Response Group charged with examining insights gleaned from the behavioral sciences that might enhance the agency’s ability to respond to crises such as the one in 1993 when the FBI attacked and burned the

Waco cult compound in Texas. When the Waco tragedy took place, David Koresh was the compound's resident "prophet" who died when the tragedy took place. My chairmanship allowed me to study various Christian, Moslem and Jewish religious cults in addition to the Waco tragedy (Volkan, 2004), but I have no in-depth information of similar movements in other religions.

Besides David Koresh's Branch Davidians in Waco, some other cults and fundamentalist religious organizations can be considered *encapsulated* fundamentalist religious movements: Islamic *tarikats*, Jim Jones's Temple in Jonestown, Shoko Asahara's Japanese Aum Shinrikyo, Joseph's DiMambro's Order of Solar Temple, Gush Emunim in Israel and even, in their initial stages, Hamas in Lebanon and Molla Omer's Taliban in Afghanistan to name a few (Mayer, 1998; Weber, 1999; Wessinger, 1999; Moses-Hrushovski, 2000; Volkan, 2004; and Volkan and Kayatekin, 2006). By the term "encapsulated" I am referring to movements which remain isolated within one large group and which often induce negative feelings and/or fear in those outside of the movement within the same large group. Psychological processes that we see in individuals such as Serpil and Paterson echo the psychology of religious cult leaders and, in turn, ten characteristics of extreme religious cults or *tarikats*. The common characteristics of encapsulated *extreme* fundamentalist religious cults or *tarikats* are as follows:

1- A divine text: Each encapsulated cult or *tarikats* has its own "divine text," whether it is written on paper or passed along verbally. For example, the text may be a specific version of the Bible, or an interpretation of certain verses of the Koran. The "divine text" is irrefutable, non-negotiable.

2- An absolute leader who is the interpreter of the divine text: The leader of an encapsulated extreme religious fundamentalist movement is the sole interpreter of the group's divine text. No other interpretations are acceptable. The leader usually is a man; only rarely is the leader a woman.

3- Total loyalty: Membership in a cult or *tarikats* provides a sense of belonging for its followers. The members' total loyalty to the leader and to the divine text "removes" anxiety they might have due to intrapsychic and interpersonal conflicts, especially those that threaten individuals' identities.

4- Tangible incentives: Cults and *tarikats* create tangible incentives and economic dependence to ensure that members do not leave the group. The putative divine rule infiltrates members' everyday existence and intimate personal relationships, fundamentally changing them.

5- Feeling omnipotent yet victimized: Restricted extreme fundamentalist religious groups are pessimistic movements (Sivan, 1985). Pessimism exists because the members perceive their specific religious "fundamentals" to be continually under attack by non-believers or even lukewarm believers, Darwinists, Freudians, scientists, and rival religious fundamentalist groups that cite other texts as truly divine. Paradoxically, because they believe that their text is the true divine guide and their leader is the only true spiritual leader, a sense of omnipotence exists among the members of such groups.

6- Extreme sadistic and/or masochistic acts: The contamination of a shared sense of pessimism with a shared sense of omnipotence creates a special condition that allows extreme sadism or masochism to become tolerable. When a restricted extreme religious fundamentalist group perceives a threat to the divine authority of the leader and to the

survival of the group and its identity, the protection of the group and its identity becomes its primary preoccupation. The group feels entitled to destroy “others” who are seen as threatening to the group’s survival. For example, in 1980, in Kano, Nigeria, sect leader Alhaji Mohammodu (Maitatsine) Marva, who had proclaimed a new era of anti-materialist reformed Islam, led his followers to the central mosque in Kano where “non-believers” or “lukewarm believers” of his ideas were gathered. This event led to the killing of an estimated 8,000 persons. The cult can also express its omnipotence with a grand masochistic gesture such as a massive suicide such as the one that took place at Jim Jones’s Temple in Jonestown. Those who kill themselves believe that through death they will merge with the divine leader and/or God, the omnipotent object, and thus crystallize their omnipotence and continue their existence in heaven.

7- Alteration of the shared “morality”: What we observe in an extremely violent restricted religious fundamentalist group is the existence of an altered shared “morality” (altered shared superego) that accepts mass suicides or mass killings in the service of maintaining a tie to a divine power.

8- Creation of borders: Even during “safe times” when there is no imminent threat to the group’s security, an encapsulated extreme religious fundamentalist organization builds physical borders like walls or barricades. But more importantly, they also build psychological borders around themselves, such as by wearing a specific color or style of dress, a turban or a fur hat that separates them from others.

9- Changing of family, gender, and sexual norms within the “borders”: As the leader of an extreme and restricted religious fundamentalist movement becomes more divine and omnipotent, he or she may become “the father,” “the mother” and “the lover” for all

the followers. Routine family systems become disturbed and child-rearing practices drastically change. So-called “family values” are replaced by the leader’s interpretation of the “divine text.” The role of women is usually reduced to giving sex (pleasure) and food (milk) to the leader or other men belonging to the same group. Sometimes the cult leader “owns” all the women and children in the group, just as David Koresh did at the Waco compound. In most *tarikats* women are forced to cover their faces or their bodies.

10- Negative feelings and fear among outsiders: Because an encapsulated extreme fundamentalist religious group feels special, divine, secretive, magical, omnipotent, masochistic or sadistic, and because they erect borders around themselves, they induce negative feelings and fear among people who live outside their borders. Outsiders perceive encapsulated extreme religious cults or similar organizations as a threat to their own religious or other belief systems.

Globalized Fundamentalism

An encapsulated extreme fundamentalist religious movement starts to become generalized when the majority of “bystanders” within the large group, instead of having and maintaining negative feelings and fear about the movement, begin to support it directly or indirectly. There are numerous causes that spread the influence of an encapsulated extreme fundamentalist religious organization. If the people in a society have gone through a massive trauma and felt humiliated and helpless, the idea of a savior becomes attractive to them. Such circumstances create an atmosphere which supports the emergence of a narcissistic political leader who believes in his or her own superior skills and who in the long run, may either become very destructive or may raise the followers’ shared self-esteem (Volkan, 1980). Under similar societal circumstances, a cult or *tarikats*

with extreme fundamentalist religious beliefs contaminated with its leader's omnipotence can also be attractive for the society as an answer to their existing misery. Traumatized societies, like traumatized children, tend to identify with feared objects (Šebek, 1994), and this leads members of such a society to gather under a shared superego that allows violence. Along with the appearance of shared psychological tendencies in traumatized societies, one should consider sociopolitical manipulations, coercions, propaganda, and economic incentives when examining the expansion of the influence of an extreme fundamentalist religious organization. The Taliban rose to power in Afghanistan's post-Soviet wretchedness and its members were originally recruited mostly from among young Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group. The Taliban, whose name means "religious students," first came to notice in late 1994 when it was hired to drive local bandit groups away from a 30-truck convoy that was trying to open a trade route between Pakistan and Central Asia. Eventually, it grew from that original core group of about 100 into a cohort of 35,000 men from 43 countries. The generalization and later globalization of Taliban occurred after it presented itself to bystanders as an antidote to corruption and after its leader Mullah Omer publicly put his arms into the sleeves of a cloak that was believed to belong to Prophet Mohammed. In a sense, Mulla Omer illustrated a "concrete" connection to the prophet. The symbolism connected with this event, I believe, significantly and psychologically motivated the spread of Taliban's influence in Afghanistan (Volkan, 2004).

It goes without saying that today the best-known global fundamentalist religious movement is known as the al-Qaeda movement. Its leader Osama bin Laden is not the only recent figure to inflame what historian Bernard Lewis (1990) called "Muslim

rage.” Long before September 11, 2001 it was clear that Islamic religious fundamentalism and even its extreme forms, would find emotional support among Islamic large groups, especially in the Arab world, and that it could easily become globalized. Bernard Lewis noted: “Islamic fundamentalism has given an aim and a form to the otherwise aimless and formless resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and loyalties and, in the final analysis, robbed them of their beliefs, their aspirations, their dignity, and to an increasing extent even their livelihood” (Lewis, 1990, p. 59). Volkan and Kayatekin (2006) focused on the role modern Turkey’s removal of the Caliphate played in inducing a shared trauma in many parts of the so-called Islamic world.

On the surface, the characteristics of a global extreme fundamentalist religious movement seem different than those of encapsulated extreme religious groups. For example, al-Qaeda resembles a giant global commercial corporation, with secret funds and representatives in various countries and with a shared ideology contaminated with strict religious doctrines. It strives to become a world power by using any means, from engaging in effective political and religious propaganda, to making financial deals. But it also performs horrendous acts of violence. Al-Qaeda complains about the Western commercial/technical/cultural/religious organizations which have infiltrated the Islamic world through “globalization,” and which are humiliating Muslims. While the technological and economic gains through globalization may be acceptable, a shared feeling of humiliation associated with globalization remains alive. As a response to this, al-Qaeda has become, in a sense, a more drastic and more sadistic mirror image of the Western globalization movement.

The characteristics that we can see more clearly in encapsulated extreme fundamentalist religious movements are present within the al-Qaeda movement as well. It contains a “divine” ideology (Salafism) and Osama bin Laden is its interpreter. (Elsewhere [Volkan, 2004; Volkan and Kayatekin, 2006] we attempted to understand his internal motivations for turning to extreme religious fundamentalism). Osama bin Laden has declared the United States and the West in general as the enemy and “received permission” from Koranic passages such as Surah 8, verse 17 to strike at the “enemy.” Followers blindly idealize Osama bin Laden (and the leaders of the local cells). They feel victimized but omnipotent, and experience an altered “morality.” They have built “borders” around themselves in order to maintain their large-group identity and therefore we seldom know where they are and where they are hiding. “Divine” ideology replaces family values and many old traditional and religious beliefs.

Al-Qaeda induces extreme negative feelings and fear in “outsiders” in faraway locations, but many people in the locations populated by Moslems where al-Qaeda’s influence is present, although not terrorist themselves, most likely have direct or hidden sentiments supporting the movement. This last characteristic basically differentiates this global extreme religious fundamentalist movement from an encapsulated one. What is most important is that when an extreme and violent religious fundamentalist movement such as al-Qaeda becomes globalized, it becomes intertwined with the psychology of large-group identity issues.

One can visualize Freud’s (1921) theory about large groups and their leaders as a gathering of people around a large Maypole, which represents the group’s leader, joined as if in a May Day dance of identification with each other and of idealization and support

of the leader. We can build upon this metaphor by imagining a large cloth over these people, a “tent canvas” of large-group identity. Following Erikson’s (1956) description of individual identity, we can describe the large-group identity of tens of thousands, or even millions, of people—most of whom will never meet each other in their lifetimes—who share a persistent sense of sameness (we-ness). While people under a large-group tent are divided into subgroups (clans, occupations), they wear the tent canvas as a shared garment. At different times in history and at different locations in the world a child becomes the “reservoir” for deposited elements of one type of large-group identity more than elements of another kind of large-group identity, and so identifies with such elements. In some areas of the world large-group identity primarily is defined by religion and in other places the large-group identity primarily is defined by ethnicity. Usually various types of large-group identities are intertwined. In our routine lives, we are not necessarily aware of our connections with our large-group processes; we do not wake up each morning feeling intensely Catholic or Sunni Moslem or Italian or Uzbek. In our routine lives we are more concerned with subgroups under the tent: families or professional organizations, for example. Our relationship with our large-group identity, in ordinary times, is like breathing. While we breathe constantly, we do not usually notice it unless our ability to breathe is threatened, such as if we are caught in a smoke-filled house on fire. When the large-group identity is threatened, people under the metaphorical tent become like the people who are caught in a smoke-filled room. They become constantly aware of their large-group identities and become preoccupied with its protection and maintenance, even if this preoccupation leads to destructive acts (Volkan, 1997, 2004, 2006).

When a global extreme fundamentalist religious movement weaves new religious symbols into the cloth of the metaphorical large-group, that large group can be abused or manipulated in the name of one god or another. In conflicts between large groups where gods are present, gods cannot be questioned and gods do not negotiate; they give followers permission to kill the nonbelievers and even the “lukewarm” believers in order to protect and maintain the “new” shared identity and/or die in order to find omnipotence in eternity, an illusion.

Last remarks

Leaders’ exploitation of people through religion, I suspect, has been occurring since the beginning of human history. I am reminded of cynical remarks made by Napoleon long ago: “When one man is dying of hunger while his neighbor has too much to eat, he cannot accept this difference unless there is an authority which tells him: It is the will of God; there must be poor people and the rich people in the world; but later on, and throughout eternity, the distribution will be done in a different way” (Duverger, 1968, p. 174). Some manipulations are mild, while others initiate most destructive acts.

Psychoanalysts who are interested in contributing to the understanding of extreme fundamentalist religious movements, encapsulated or globalized, should not simply focus on affected individuals’ personal perceptions of gods representing loving fathers and images of large groups representing nurturing mothers. Rather, they should focus on the psychology of large-group identity and how this identity can be manipulated to make people ready to do anything, including massive sadistic and masochistic deeds, with the illusion they are protecting the large-group identity or bringing attention to it so that its continuing existence can be witnessed (Volkan, 1997, 2006). Those psychoanalysts who

are willing to work in this area should also be prepared to join in interdisciplinary work, since I believe that no scientific discipline alone can explain the horrific sociopolitical abuse of religion we have been watching lately on television and reading about in our newspapers.

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