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Understanding Abandonment

In the throes of the abandonment depression, a person will feel that a part of his very self is lost or cut off from the supplies necessary to sustain life. Many patients describe this in graphic physical terms, such as losing an arm or leg, being deprived of oxygen, or being drained of blood. As one patient put it : "I felt as though my legs would not work so I couldn't possibly leave the house, and when I went to fix lunch I just knew that I wouldn't be able to swallow. And if I did I would probably throw it back up."

At the darkest level of this depression, a person can despair of ever recovering her real self, and thoughts of suicide are not uncommon. When one is brought low enough repeatedly, or for an extended period of time, it becomes increasingly harder to imagine oneself happy again or able to push through life with the strength and confidence with which the reasonably healthy go about their daily living.

(this is well beyond an acute episode of the 'blahs')... The roots of depression push farther into the past than seems apparent. In time, true sources, eating away inside, make themselves known. But initially they are well defended by the false self.

It is the nature of the false self to save us from knowing the truth about our real selves, from penetrating the deeper causes of our unhappiness, from seeing ourselves as we really are – vulnerable, afraid, terrified, and unable to let our real selves emerge. Nevertheless, when the defenses are down and the real self is thrown into situations calling for strong self-assertion, situations that trigger the repressed





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memories of earlier separation anxieties and feelings of abandonment by the mother, the serious nature of the depression is glimpsed and felt. At this point it is not uncommon for the patient to panic and slide down to the very bottom from which he convinces himself he will never recover.

(Panic hides fear of the rage underneath depression). Depression and rage ride in tandem. As depression intensifies, and comes to the surface of awareness, so does anger. At first (the real reasons cannot be pinpointed) ...rage is diffuse and projected onto outside sources (anger at life or the world or just angry in general.....Anger of the abandonment depression is far more intense and complex). Anger that is part of the abandonment depression. has more damaging consequences. Its intensity can cause bodily shaking, feelings of helplessness, feeling like a baby (age regression) and it comes from painful childhood experiences that may not be easily recalled because they are so solidly defended against.

Eventually in therapy real causes of the anger begin to become apparent but the anger is still defended against by being projected onto targets that are often stand ins or proxies....this occurs because feeling anger is associated with fear of rejection as well as fear of intimacy since in childhood being close came with difficulties and rejections.

Rage and fear (the) lead to panic.. Panic feeds on the fear that we cannot express our anger over emotional abandonment. It can be a claustrophobic strangling of energies, a tightening up of options : either we express our anger and risk losing the





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love of others or we deny the anger in order to remain in the helpless state of dependency and hold onto others.

The person living with (such a) helplessness and emotional pain, necessarily leads a fearful life, in which every move to express himself, to allow his real self to emerge, is accompanied by the need to look over his shoulder in fear and panic... panic can escalate as the patient slowly becomes aware of the depression and anger that have been bottled up over the years. The false self has blocked any expression of these feelings for so long that when they do manage to surface, even in the slightest way, the resulting panic can be paralyzing and terrifying. Fear of letting these feelings out into the open, even in therapy can mushroom into panic proportions.

(Clinging and guilt lead to...) helplessness. Failure to activate the impaired real self (and) to deal with painful feelings... which in the abandonment depression is abiding and total.... staying in unhealthy jobs and relationships, fearing moving on from old unhealthy patterns, even denying that we desire to.

