

NOURISH THE EGO

When a patient reaches a nursing home or extended care hospital he has to adjust to many changes, and the most traumatic are the social changes. The patient suffers much from this and finally breaks down to mental deterioration called social death. Social death is brought about with the loss of self respect and the identity. When a patient is allowed to make decisions, if his desires are respected and adhered to, he maintains his self respect, his identity - he is a worthwhile human being, he has status. This is only natural, to maintain our mental balance we must constantly feed our ego resources. Look how puffed up and elated I am to be here tonight! I have an identity, I am a mother, a nurse and I have been asked to promote an ideal which is dear to my heart. I live in a comfortable home surrounded by my familiar belongings. I am happy. My ego and I are great friends. I am not the only one who feeds my ego; everyone around me with whom I share pleasant experiences helps fill my storehouse of ego resources. Now, take all this from me and place me in the recipient role of which I have no choice or control. I wake up one morning in a very small room with a single overhead light fixture; walls, floor and ceiling are colorless. I do not see a familiar object from my comfortable home - in fact, the room is not at all to my liking. I am in a sterile, drab environment which emphasizes my sick role. My body is very weak, I cannot move my arm and I cannot speak.

A nurse in starched, white uniform comes in, washes my face, makes no attempt to apply makeup, combs my hair, which by this time has been allowed to come in down. My poor ego is dying to be nourished. I receive excellent care which I soon recognize as being custodial care. My bed and my body is kept clean and I am fed. Because it requires patience to understand my mutterings, conversation is not initiated and silence prevails. Because it takes much time and patience to help me to feed myself, the nurse impatiently spoons my very soft, unappetizing food

to me. I wear a white gown, and on my arm I have an identifying bracelet lest someone take me for Mrs. Jones. My dresser has a few cards, the flowers are wilted and so is my ego. I lie quietly all day, every day - I am lifted in and out of bed; no attempt is made to strengthen my body, I become weaker every day. When I am up, I am tied to my chair lest I fall and come to harm. My ego doesn't ask for attention quite so often.

I spend countless hours counting cracks on the wall, watching the shadows move across the room. From time to time, I imagine I am in front of a crowd talking about something, but just what escapes me. Boredom and frustration and heartache takes its toll. I no longer hear my ego, a phantom gnome now sits at the foot of my bed telling me I look terrible, that no one asks my opinion, that I no longer amount to anything. I have lost complete control. Now, my cache of ego resources are depleted. This is the loss of identity, the loss of self respect.

You do not have to be sick to have this happen. This can happen in any suite in the city when the person cuts himself off from the outside world. Inactivity of body and mind weakens both.

When we started this program we had 72 ladies whose average age was 84.7. In the main they had reached the latter stage of regression, and this film shows that this regression can be reversed. If it can be reversed, it leads one to think it should not have occurred in the first place.

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