ARMENIAN UNITY: UNMASKING THE MIND'S EYE

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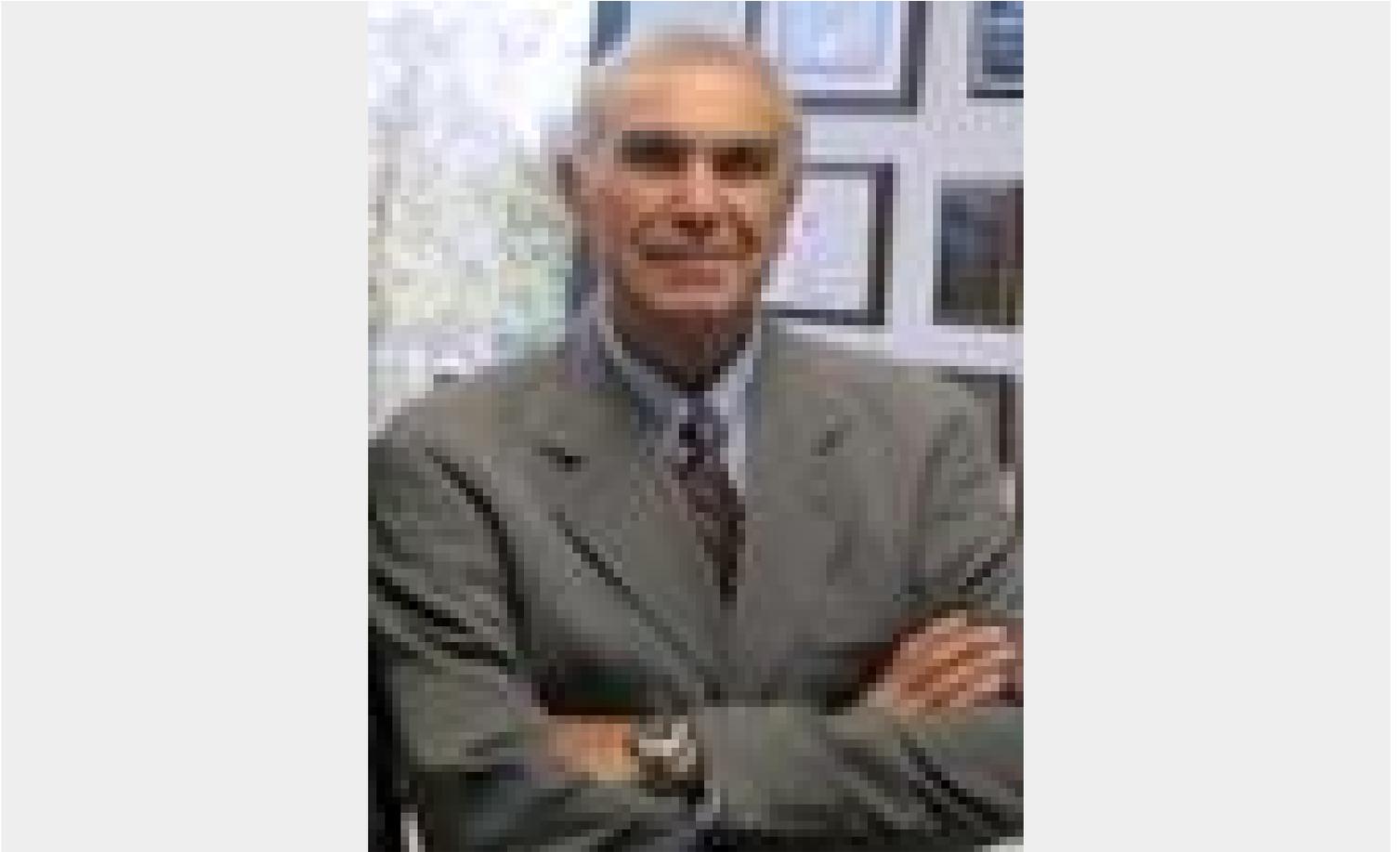
Z. S. Andrew Demirdjian, PhD, Armenian Life, 28 July 2015

Time, over the years, has made granite mountains to decompose, mighty rivers to carve deep canyons, volcanoes to create islands, cultures to conquer empires, but Armenians seem to have not learned to get along with one another. This Lone Ranger trait has caused them disunity, fragmentation, weakness and eventually loss of homeland. Yet, for ages, Armenians have deplored this characteristic of "other Armenians" rather than by looking themselves in the mirror to recognize their own personal, inner sanctum problems.

By using one's mind's eye, that is to say, personal perception, Armenians have projected their own faults on others. A person may set up a defense mechanism against motives, desires, and character traits which he is not willing to recognize in himself or herself by attributing them to others.

Thus, psychological projection is an empirically validated theory in which human beings defend themselves against unpleasant impulses by denying their existence in themselves, while attributing them to others. For example, a person who suffers from inferiority complex would have the tendency to knock someone else's success or find faults in others.

According to psychological projection, the individual rationalizes by using the familiar device of interpreting motives and behavior in a way that makes a person "look good" to himself and (he hopes) to others. The person makes an unconscious effort to defend or enhance his self-concept in a potentially threatening situation. For example, the person feels that he does not have time or inclination for unity but to avoid showing himself as being selfish or unpatriotic, he would choose a positive position on the issue which would sound socially unacceptable not to hold. He would say: "I AM ALL FOR UNITY!" Instead of saying: I am a lone ranger; I do not feel safe outside my clan, click, or social-political circles; I am busy; let others do it. Therefore, I need to find fault with those who have or doing something about unity.

A real-world example is found in a recent commentary in The California Courier (July 16, 2015) by a

certain gentleman called Avedis Kevorkian. I frankly do not know him personally, but I have read some of his writings, full of dripping irony and sarcasm. He must be a fine person, an articulate and dedicated professional to the Armenian Cause, but if you were to read his commentary you would realize that he is not for unity as he pretends to be by naming his piece "It is Time for Armenians to Unite". This sounds socially acceptable position to hold, but if you were to read the commentary further, Mr. Kevorkian shows his psychological projection hang-ups. He is not practicing what he is preaching about Armenians needing unity. Oxymoronic? You be the judge. He begins by condescendingly stating that "I must respond to a yet-another Keghart editorial, 'A Blueprint for the Future', which was touting a book that was promoting the creation of a new organization for uniting the Diaspora."

Mr. Kevorkian's negative impulses are manifested by not even mentioning the title of the book nor its author. He does not even mention that the editorial was written by none other than a creditable community activist Dr. Dikran Abrahamian who calls the book "… blue print for the future of the Armenian nation", and who strongly recommends the book by saying, "The slim volume (185) pages) should be pored over by every Armenian committed to a bright future of Armenians". Mr. Kevorkian goes on to relate that he too had thoughts about unity and that his father and others had attempted at establishing certain associations, organizations, etc. In this way, he is trying to marginalize the book despite the fact that the main subject of the book is about establishing a transnational diaspora-based supra structure and not another fragmented organization. The book is first of its kind devoting its entire content to the rationality and method of creating an Armenian Diaspora-based leadership through democratically elected representatives. A passionate foreword is written by Mr. Charles K. Paskerian and a brief, but succinct epilogue by Mr. Harut Sassounian who is one of the staunchest proponents of unity of the Armenians.

Instead of saying we should all read this book titled The Viability of a Worldwide Armenian Organization by Z.S. Andrew Demirdjian since it is on a vital topic regarding Armenian unity, Mr. Kevorkian says towards the end without giving any valid reason except that the book, he is sure, won't go into the past failed attempts at organizing the Armenians: "No, I have not read the book touted by Keghart, nor do I intend to …" Here he is showing his colors of projecting his internal fears, motives, upon someone else. His fears of insufficiency in doing something constructive about unity. Irony, sarcasm, being cute, does not help the community to advance. Moreover, dwelling on failed attempts at organizing the Armenians in the past would not be a motivating voice for our new generation to follow. Does anyone condemn a book without having read it? What do you call this, a violation of the Roman principle of being innocent until proven guilty or rather a paper-tin scholarship? Does anyone reject a book that is "promoting" unity? It is like saying someone is questioning or denying the sanctity of motherhood. But those who subscribe to 19th century mentality, do.

Instead of being realistic, some people engage in projection and transference. Whenever we seek to

avoid the responsibility for our own behavior, we do so by attempting to give that responsibility to some other individual, organization or entity. Truly courageous people must continually push themselves to be as honest as possible in the moment. Increasing our consciousness about how we are interpreting the world and our interactions with others has important implications. It informs us about not only who we are trying to be, but also who we are trying to hide and who we truly are. When we understand the concepts of projection and transference of guilt we can begin to accept personal responsibility for our language, actions and perception of life. We learn how easily we project negative opinions and criticisms onto others rather than on our own behaviors and we begin to learn how readily we transfer our past experiences onto the present. Spiritual development includes the realization of bringing the concept we have of ourselves into greater congruence with reality.

That we interface with the world through our senses is a common knowledge. We make meaning of the world by what we see, smell, hear, taste, sense and intuit. This personalizes the world and makes it unique unto each of us. No one else experiences the world in quite the same fashion; I can only have my version of reality. I do not really ever know your reality. How I interact with the world is based on my perception as well as my previous experience. Mark Twain in his classic essay "The Lowest Animal" remarked that "In truth, man is incurably foolish. Simple things which the other animals easily learn, he is incapable of learning." He was referring to how animals of different species readily accept one another as opposed to unbending human beings who are constantly at the crossroads of disagreement and at war with one another. Many of the faults humans see in others are their own nature reflected in them. An example of this behavior might be blaming another for self-failure. The mind may avoid the discomfort of consciously admitting personal faults by keeping those feelings unconscious, and by redirecting libidinal satisfaction by attaching, or projecting, those same faults onto another person or object.

How to deal with the psychological projection when it becomes a disorder in people –and it seems that it has become a disorder in the Armenian persona for centuries? Let me briefly state three workable methods:

Gaining Maturity. Without getting into the jargon of psychology, suffice it to say that the individual who is suffering from this type of problem the person must accept his or her problem and understand it intellectually. In other words, the person's entire ego must comprehend the problem so that his behavior can become more mature –more in accordance with reality of unmasking one's mind's eye to see themselves as they are in the mirror rather than have a distorted image of being for unity when in fact the person cannot get along with his own kind. Projection tends to come to the fore in normal people at times of crisis, personal or political, but this problem is more commonly found in the neurotic or psychotic personalities functioning at a primitive level as in narcissistic personality disorder which implies immaturity.

Group Loyalty. Another method to get out of the tentacles of the octopus by being a member of a

group is not to be clannish. While it is normal for persons to belong to groups, but to be tribal is very primitive and creates disunity or at least is not conducive to national unity. Accepting people outside one's group, party, clan, click, oligarch is a healthy way of getting along with others and fostering unity. The fear of betrayal if you associate and accept someone outside your group is very counterproductive where unity is direly needed for a small nation as Armenians are.

Sensitivity Training. The most successful organizations, for profit and not-for-profit alike, understand that being able to work well with others is critical in today's increasingly diverse societies. Most Armenians have been scattered around the globe due to the Armenian Genocide. In addition to not embracing national unity in practice, over the years, the Genocide survivors and their descendants have acquired local cultures. We have mostly hyphenated Armenians: Armenian-Americans, French-Armenians, Lebanese-Armenians, Hayastantsi, Karabaghtsi and so on and so forth. We have evolved into a nation who does not share the same beliefs, backgrounds, lifestyles, or traditions of anyone outside of our immediate social or political circles; therefore, we all can benefit from our sensitivity training programs. Ideally, every Armenian organization should offer some sort of programs to counter the age-old feelings of disunity. Our Armenian schools should hammer into those young minds that the only way to get ahead for our community is to work together.

Among other benefits, the sensitivity training should provide the individual with the following:

- The foundation every Armenian needs to be culturally competent
- Cultural awareness and a greater understanding of cultural differences
- Enhancement of one's cultural sensitivity
- Generational training for improving communication between different generations
- An introduction to effectively working with members of other organizations of the community
- Acquire tools to reduce misunderstandings and create positive relationships in among members of different organizations
- Knowledge of respectful behaviors that promote harmony with others in the inter- and intra-organizational settings
- Gain unbiased sincere perspective(s) over gender differences
- Skills to resolve conflicts that may arise, as well as strategies to help get the results that are in the best interest of all parties by getting along with others

Armenians who seem to be overly dependent on their group as a mainstay of "identity" are those who fear themselves the most. Their fear is shown by their compulsive efforts to obtain support and approval from others. These type of people are often unwilling to acknowledge their inner fears. They cling to the notion that such an acknowledgment would make them appear weak, irrational, lacking in confidence. Still, some way must be found to deal with the fears and relieve the tension. This is done frequently by externalizing the fears — by projecting them onto someone else. In essence it means that unacceptable emotions (desires, fears, hatreds) are shifted to other people. The individual, refusing to recognize that the "dirty," discreditable thoughts are his own, decides that

they actually belong to someone else. And, naturally, the "someone else" must be despised and perhaps punished in some way for having such thoughts. The tendency is to mirror his shortcomings.

In the final analysis, we should all share the blame; we drastically need ways to get rid of the illusion that we are all for unity when in fact we are against it when we are not making a concerted effort to unify. What we see in the mirror, is not reality. To see ourselves as we are we must first unmask our mind's eye. Projections to blame all others for our own shortcomings will continue to hurt us as a nation from moving forward toward accomplishing our national goals and realizing our most ardent dream of getting justice for the crime of the millennium: The Armenian Genocide.