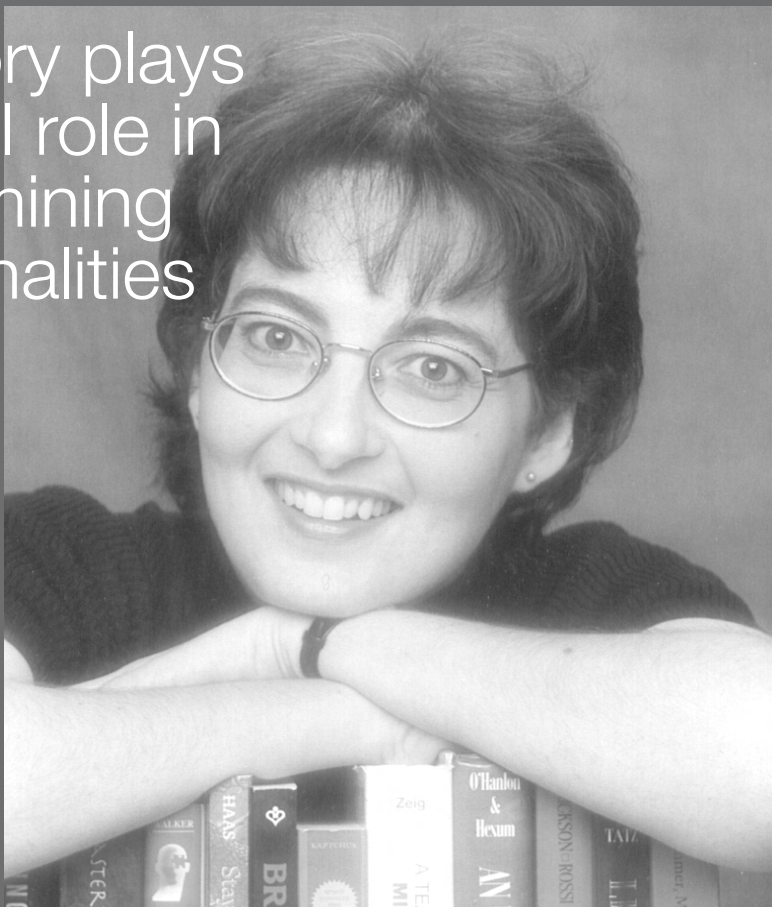


FEATURES

Memory plays central role in determining personalities



Psychotherapist Annette Poizner specializes in treating people with obsessive tendencies and difficulties with compulsive behaviour patterns.

By Shlomit Kriger
Special to the Tribune

Amy (*not her real name*) has obsessive compulsive disorder. She doesn't know why. But an interesting pattern is revealed in her earliest memories.

Amy remembers several times as a child when she was very ineffective in doing things or was clumsy. As a result of these early life experiences, her unconscious mind became convinced that she can't do anything right.

This belief stuck with her until adulthood. Her unconscious mind adopted various rituals and obsessive thoughts to distract her from the supposed difficult tasks she feels unable to perform.

Although she has become more confident over the years and holds a successful full-time job, her early memories appear to have defined how she would respond to the world throughout her life.

Psychotherapist Annette Poizner specializes in treating people like Amy with obsessive tendencies and difficulties with compulsive behaviour patterns, among others. Poizner runs a private practice in Toronto using projective assessment within brief psychotherapy.

Part of the projective assessment involves a technique developed by former Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler, through which Poizner analyzes written descriptions of about 10 of her clients' earliest memories, preferably from before age eight.

What makes these early memories so valuable, explained Poizner, is that young children have a more crude form of intellect, yet they are still forced to make some sense of the world around them. While they may have countless experiences, their unconscious minds will tend to hold onto certain memories that stood out for them and helped them make early generalizations.

These early memories strung together make up a type of map of the world that establishes what the individual can expect

from himself, from others, and from life.

"Not only do memories reveal personalities, they determine personalities," said Poizner.

The centrality of memory in one's life is also apparent through classic Jewish wisdom.

The Hebrew word for memory (*zocher*) and for masculine (*zachar*) comes from the same root word. So there is a relationship between the two, explained Poizner.

Masculinity is said to be associated with the planting of the seminal spark from which something grows and comes to fruition. Similarly, clinicians have found that memory plays an important role by way of "planting a seed" that establishes people's personalities, goals, and how they will respond to their life circumstances.

There are also ideas in Jewish mysticism that relate the role of memory in the lives of Jews as a nation. Poizner noted the idea that the beginning always has a middle and end encoded within it. As mentioned in the *Sefer Yetzira* (The Book of Creation), everything follows from the beginning.

In relation to this, Jews constantly revisit old memories, whether through study of Jewish texts such as the Torah or the celebration of holidays.

"It's as if when we go back to that seminal moment we can recalibrate ourselves," explained Poizner. "Jewishly we're going to be able to access some very powerful national memories, and they're going to have such an influence on the Jewish people and always keep us attached, always remembering."

While it is useful to tap into early memories and bring them to life, clinicians have found that to treat individuals and help them move forward, the memories have to be taken a step further. "It's important not just to marinate in the memories, but also to see each memory in the context of every other memory and put together a sort of life story out of that," said Poizner.

This concept also relates to Jewish tradition. Renowned Jewish rabbi and philosopher Maimonides described memory as one of the character attributes that a person should develop, noted Poizner.

There is also an idea discussed by international lecturer and author Rabbi Akiva Tatz, where he points out that in the Torah there is a part where God says to Moses, "You can't see my face, but you can see my back." Commentators, noted Poizner, say this means we cannot see the way that God is intervening in our lives in the present moments, but when we look back on things and do a life review we can get a better understanding of the bigger picture.

Rabbi Tatz expanded on this idea by explaining that part of each individual's personal agenda is to make a megillah of one's life. "Just like in the megillah read on Purim, God is hidden, when we tell our stories and look back for these interesting patterns, that's going to be part of how we heal memories," said Poizner.

Sometimes memories need to be revisited or desensitized, because they carry an emotional charge for a person or relate to present personality strengths and weaknesses, as was the case with Amy. Clinicians can walk individuals through their early memories and help them understand and change their views of these memories so that they can better cope with their present conditions.

"If you neutralize the negative memories, more positive memories come out," said Poizner. "And then you really have recast a childhood."

Poizner will be giving a lecture on the centrality of memory in one's life and Jewish insights into the function of memory at The Lodzer Centre Congregation on Jan. 14 at 8 p.m. Admission is \$8 with advance reservation or \$10 at the door. For tickets, call (416) 636-6665.

For more on Poizner's work visit www.annettepoizner.com.

Panel, concert pay tribute to German-Jewish poet Heine



Adrienne Cooper put on Yiddish song concert featuring the poetry of Heinrich Heine after merits of his work discussed.

By Rick Kardon
Tribune Correspondent

Heinrich Heine, along with Johannes Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, was one of Germany's greatest poets.

Heine was born into a prosperous Jewish family in Dusseldorf in 1797. Having had to cope with the antisemitism built into the fabric of German life at the time, he decided to become a Lutheran in 1831 to gain what he hoped would be acceptance into German literary circles. He ended up regretting this move and he never got the acceptance. He remained proudly Jewish and his poetry reflected his Jewish identity vis-a-vis the existing social and philosophical trends of the times in which he lived.

In recognition of the 150th anniversary of his death, the Goethe Institute presented a tribute to Heine last week, consisting of two parts: a panel discussion by four major scholars of his work – its poetic and intellectual significance – and a concert by arguably North America's leading Yiddish songstress, New York's Adrienne Cooper, accompanied by her pianist Marilyn Lerner. Cooper sang songs, many of which were Yiddish translations of Heine's poetry.

The panel, hosted by York University's German Studies Professor Mark Webber, included Yale University Professor Jeffrey Sammons and University of Toronto professors Stefan Haas and David Pugh.

The discussion emphasized Heine's attempts to grope with the philosophical trends of his time.

Heine was a natural romantic who was most at home in German provincial culture. However, he distrusted the political conservatism of the 'back-to-the-land' German romantic movement, which formed the fertile soil for the Nazi movement a century later.

Haas showed slides of the early flight inventions such as hot-air balloons, which Heine initially romanticized as being a force for liberation. Yet, when Heine observed the technological advances of the British Industrial Revolution, he became frightened. He preferred idyllic rural Germany to industrial England.

Heine branded himself as a socialist populist revolutionary. However, he feared that socialist populism would lead to proletarian antisemitism, which in Germany, it eventually did.

So while Heine was sometimes philosophically inconsistent, his poetry, which reflected the complex fusion of sardonic satire and his romantic bent, established him as a far more modern, sophisticated poet than either Goethe or Schiller.

Yet Heine, despite his dalliance with Lutheranism, never forsook his Jewish roots. His mother had a Sephardic background and in the later years of his life, during which he endured painful physical illness, Heine seriously studied the Kabbalah and studied a history of the Jews by Michael Zaks, which emphasized the Sephardic traditions.

Heine also positively valued the Yiddish culture of Eastern Europe, and many Yiddish poets, most notably Reuven Eislam and Zisha Landau, supervised the translation of Heine into Yiddish. The translators also included some of the most famous Yiddish writers, including I.L. Peretz.

These translations, put to music, constituted the second half of the evening, performed by Cooper. Her pianist Lerner composed some of the music.

Cooper's marvelously expressive voice was the perfect instrument to convey the strikingly modernist realism of much of Heine's poetry. For example, she performed a Landau-translated love poem, *In The Dark*, with lines like: "Your hand is smaller, your face is milder, in the dark."

The spirit of Heine permeated many Yiddish poets and Cooper performed a few of these songs inspired by Heine such as Abraham Reisen's poem, *To A Woman Socialist*. Her last several selections were mid-century songs by Yiddish lyricists such as Anna Margolin, with music by Lerner, which bear a resemblance to art songs by Gustav Mahler.