Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page i

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page ii

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page iii

# THE MAGIC YEARS

*Understanding and Handling*
*the Problems of Early Childhood*

SELMA H. FRAIBERG

*With a New Introduction by*
T. BERRY BRAZELTON, M.D.

SCRIBNER
New York London Toronto Sydney

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page iv

SCRIBNER
A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 1959 by Selma H. Fraiberg

Copyright renewed © 1987 by Louis Fraiberg and Lisa Fraiberg

Introduction copyright © 2008 by T. Berry Brazelton

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book
or portions thereof in any form whatsoever.
For information, address Scribner Subsidiary Rights Department,
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

First Scribner trade paperback edition February 2008

SCRIBNER and design are trademarks of MacMillan Library Reference USA, Inc.,
used under license by Simon & Schuster, the publisher of this work.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases,
please contact Simon & Schuster Special Sales:
1-800-456-6798 or business@simonandschuster.com

Manufactured in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Control Number: 59-6073

ISBN-13: 978-0-684-16849-4
ISBN-10: 0-684-16849-9
ISBN-15: 978-0-684-82550-2
ISBN-10: 0-684-82550-3

Selections from the following sections were first published in *Parents' Magazine:*
"The Missionaries Arrive" (under the title "Taming the Toddler"), "Travel and
Perspectives" (under the title "Don't Cage That Crawler"), and "Laughing Tiger."
© copyright 1958, 1959 by Selma H. Fraiberg.

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page v

*To My Husband and My Daughter*

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page vi

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page vii

# CONTENTS

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page viii

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page ix

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page x

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xi

# Introduction to *The Magic Years*

T. BERRY BRAZELTON, M.D.

This book, now half a decade old, is a rare treat. I read it many years ago and it thrilled me then. Now, reading it again, it is absolutely wonderful. Not only is Selma Fraiberg an amazing storyteller but her writing is rare and insightful. As she talks about children's early years, she makes them come alive and become magical because she leads us into a child's imagination, into a world that all of us can begin to remember in ourselves. She carries us with her as we read about "her" children and how they tell her their innermost thoughts and dreams. We all share each child's fears, his reasons for lying about a mistake he made, and begin to understand why we must look into the closet to find a little girl's witches.

I had the great fortune to know Selma as she developed her way of thinking. First, I knew her as a fellow practitioner who held me spellbound as she told her stories. Then, later, as a grandmother, for she and her daughter brought their baby to me. All three of us—mother, grandmother, and pediatrician—watched this lovely baby together. Every movement took on meaning. Every response contributed to our shared delight. As the baby grew into her second year, every step along the way was our window into a world we had left physically, but which we could reenter by observing this small creature's development. We each became obsessed with her as if we were *all* new parents. What an experience to share Selma's insights and observations, to have the opportunity to see

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xii



what her grandmother's point of view meant to her daughter. Was this baby overanalyzed? Of course. Don't we always interpret our children's development with our own experiences from our past, what Selma calls "ghosts from our own nursery"? These ghosts tell us what to make of our children's behavior and add a magical layer to the meaning the child may be making of his or her own behavior.

Suppose our meanings are wrong or are too powerful and overwhelm the baby's own ability to understand the developmental step he has just made. Can we be objective and sensitive to the importance of the process of learning independently? Of his becoming aware of himself as an autonomous power of his own in digesting and adapting to each new step in development? This book helps us recognize the child's needs. It will help eager parents pull back and reevaluate their roles—as protectors rather than as overprotectors.

For example, Selma documents one four-year-old child's need for the fears that balance her burgeoning aggressive feelings. Can we protect her from these fears? Of course not. They are part of her adaptation to an important new step in her development—of her awareness of (1) her new sense of power and influence on her world, (2) her surging feelings of wanting to dominate that world in order to recognize that power in herself, (3) her adjustment of her controls over that new power so it can be felt and used when necessary, but so it won't bring down the world that she is trying to conquer. That world is, of course, herself. With these brilliant mechanisms, she is able to learn the most important attributes: self-awareness and resilience in order to surmount overwhelming experiences. What important years these are!

As parents, we all want to support our small children as they conquer each stage in development. We are likely to overstep and to overprotect. We are bound to make mistake after mistake. This has led me to the conviction that learning to parent must be in large part attributed to learning from our mistakes. Our successes are absorbed and rarely even recognized, but our mistakes are magnified by the child and by ourselves, and are played out for

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xiii



us over and over by the child's "deviant" behavior. Each of us feels a failure daily. Selma's wonderful stories, wisdom, and advice give us back the courage and recognition that "all is not lost." A child's buoyancy and his ability to play out these "traumatic" mistakes and to use his magic dreams to restore his world gives each of us parents a new kind of hope. The child can become resilient. Can we?

Selma leads us into the power and pleasure of early attachment between parent and baby during infancy. This becomes the first and most necessary building block. Then each stage of the first few years is seen through the window of a story. For example, the way a ten-month-old examines a chair, takes it apart and puts it back together in his mind before he dares to pull himself up on it. Selma's observations give us the gift of daring to ascribe meaning to a child's behavior as he develops. As we come to understand the child's meaning and way of thinking, it is not difficult to become his partner in feeding, in toilet-training, and in discipline as teaching rather than punishment. We can think as the child does—and our own contributions are no longer just topdown. "You do this because I say so" becomes "let's share our words and our ideas." We can join them and say, "What do we want to achieve?"

We have the unique opportunity to keep up with the child's imaginary dreams by reading Selma's book. She makes each stage of emotional and mental development come alive! Every parent will feel that they've reentered and gained invaluable insight into the child's world and that they can relive it with their own child. Isn't that magic?

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xiv

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xv

# PREFACE

The magic years are the years of early childhood. By "magic" I do not mean that the child lives in an enchanted world where all the deepest longings are satisfied. It is only in the minds of adults that childhood is a paradise, a time of innocence and serene joy. The memory of a Golden Age is a delusion for, ironically, none of us remembers this time at all. At best we carry with us a few dusty memories, a handful of blurred and distorted pictures which often cannot even tell us why they should be remembered. This first period of childhood, roughly the first five years of life, is submerged like a buried city, and when we come back to these times with our children we are strangers and we cannot easily find our way.

These are "magic" years because the child in his early years is a magician—in the psychological sense. His earliest conception of the world is a magical one; he believes that his actions and his thoughts can bring about events. Later he extends this magic system and finds human attributes in natural phenomena and sees human or supra-human causes for natural events or for ordinary occurrences in his life. Gradually during these first years the child acquires knowledge of an objective world and is able to free his observations and his conclusions from the distortions of primitive thought.

But a magic world is an unstable world, at times a spooky world, and as the child gropes his way toward reason and an objective world he must wrestle with the dangerous creatures of his imagination and the real and imagined dangers of the outer world, and periodically we are confronted with his inexplicable

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xvi



fears or baffling behavior. Many of the problems presented by the child in these early years are, quite simply, disorders created by a primitive mental system that has not yet been subdued and put into its place by rational thought processes.

This book tells the story of personality development during the first five years of life and describes and discusses some of the typical problems that emerge with each developmental stage. I have tried to make this a practical book and for illustration have drawn extensively from the questions and problems that parents of normal children have brought to me over a period of years. But, as every parent knows, there are no short answers to the riddles posed by children even in the pre-school years. There are no household hints, directions before using, or universal antidotes to be prescribed in the rearing of a child. It is the quality of our understanding, often the intuitive understanding of a parent who is in intimate rapport with his child, that provides us with the right method at critical moments. But the inner life of a very young child is often inaccessible to us. Because we cannot remember this time of life, we cannot easily enter his world and adult intuition and imagination often fail before the problems presented by the pre-school child.

So it seemed to me that for a book of this sort to be really practical it must do more than describe typical problems and suggest methods of handling. It must also give insight into the mental life of the pre-school child and derive principles of child-rearing from the facts of development as well as the expectations of our culture. For these reasons, I chose to organize this book around developmental stages and to relate problems and methods specifically to a developmental period. It was convenient to divide early childhood into three periods, the first period covering the first eighteen months, the second covering the period eighteen months to three years, and the third covering the ages three to six. The book treats each period as a separate section with an introductory chapter or two describing personality development, followed by one or more chapters dealing with practical problems of child-rearing.

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xvii



If we understand the process of child development, we see that each developmental phase brings with it characteristic problems. The parents' methods of helping the child must take into account the child's own development and his mental equipment at any given stage. This means that there is very little point in speaking categorically about "childhood anxieties" or "discipline problems in childhood." The anxieties of the two year old are not the same as the anxieties of the five year old. Even if the same crocodile hides under the bed of one small boy between the ages of two and five, the crocodile of the two year old is not the same beast as the crocodile of the five year old—from the psychological point of view. He's had a chance to grow with the boy and is a lot more complex after three years under the bed than he was the day he first moved in. Furthermore, what you do about the crocodile when the boy is two is not the same as what you do about him when the boy is five. The two year old doesn't talk very well, yet. And the two year old creates other difficulties for us because he is thoroughly convinced that there is a crocodile under the bed. The five year old, on the other hand, can discuss the crocodile problem and has the further advantage that he doesn't really believe the crocodile is there. Therefore, a practical book for parents needs to approach the crocodile problem from the point of view of the two year old and again from the point of view of the five year old.

Similarly in the case of "discipline" we do different things in teaching self-control to the two year old and to the five year old. And if we want our discipline to be effective, we need to know what a two year old is like, what possibilities he has for control of impulse, and what a five year old is like and what equipment he has for cooperating with our discipline. It's useful to know, then, that a five year old has, or should have, the beginnings of a conscience and real possibility for self-control and that our discipline can make use of this conscience for teaching. It is just as useful to know that the two year old does not yet have internal controls and that our discipline must take into consideration a still inadequate control system yet must also build toward conscience. Obviously, then, the methods we employ in discipline of the two

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xviii



year old will be different from those used with the five year old. So we see again that we cannot speak of "discipline" without relating principles and methods to the developmental stage.

The suggestion for this book came from Helen Steers Burgess, who manages the extraordinary feat of keeping both ears to the ground in the fields of parent education and clinical child research, and who is editorial adviser to Scribners in these areas. As editor and parent educator, she had the impression that the clinical researchers were making large advances in understanding the psychology of the infant and the young child, that much of the psychoanalytic research and thinking in the area of ego development had enormous implications for child-rearing, but very little of this material was easily accessible to parents. She thought that parents might be interested in a book in which some of the problems of child-rearing were examined in the light of current thinking and research. This was the beginning of a most congenial collaboration between editor and author, and the book that emerged was the product of many editorial sessions and many more revisions than either of us can remember. If this book has succeeded in being a practical book for parents, much of the credit must go to Mrs. Burgess.

Although the responsibility for the ideas in this book is my own, I should like to record here my debt to certain scholars in the field. The writings of Anna Freud on ego psychology and her studies in early child development have illuminated the world of childhood for workers in the most varied professions and have been for me my introduction and most valuable guide to the "magic" years. The work of René Spitz in the psychology of infancy is in the foreground or background of large sections of this book, particularly in Chapters II, IV and IX. The writings of Heinz Hartmann and the late Ernst Kris in the field of psychoanalytic ego psychology have profoundly influenced my own thinking and I have extracted from their writings certain ideas that seemed to have practical value in child-rearing. Jean Piaget's investigations into the child's construction of reality provided part of the background out of which I wrote the story of mental development in infancy. Yet it

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xix



should be made clear that while these writers have influenced my own thinking and that of others in the field, I have not attempted to represent the theories of any one of them (unless explicitly stated in the text) and I have assumed responsibility for collating a number of studies on the same subject and choosing among disparate or uncongenial views in discussing a single topic.

My husband, Louis, has given expert help and advice throughout the preparation of this manuscript and, above all, lent his gift of clarity whenever I needed it, which seemed to be very often. This book owes much to the final authority of his pencil and to his generous and enthusiastic support of this project from the beginning. My mother, Dora Horwitz, has given valuable assistance to me throughout the writing of this book and undertook the labor of deciphering and typing large parts of the original manuscript. I am grateful to her and to Florence Jordan for painstaking work in transcription and for many good suggestions that came from their first reading of this material.

Selma H. Fraiberg

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page xx

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 1

PART I

# INTRODUCTION

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 2

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 3

# 1. All About Witches, Ogres, Tigers, and Mental Health

## A FABLE

*There once was a boy named Frankie who was going to be the very model of a modern, scientifically reared child. His mother and his father consulted the writings of experts, subscribed to lecture series and educated themselves in all the rites and practices of child-rearing sacred to these times. They knew how children develop fears and neurotic symptoms in early childhood and with the best intentions in the world they set out to rear a child who would be free—oh, as free as any child can be in this world of ours—of anxiety and neurotic tendencies.*

*So Frankie was breast-fed and weaned and toilet trained at the proper ages and in the proper manner. A baby sister was provided for him at a period in his development best calculated to avoid trauma. It goes without saying that he was prepared for the new baby by approved techniques. His sex education was candid and thorough.*

*The probable sources of fear were located and systematically decontaminated in the program devised by Frankie's parents. Nursery rhymes and fairy tales were edited and revised; mice and their tails were never parted and ogres dined on Cheerios instead of human flesh. Witches and evildoers practiced harmless forms of sorcery and were easily reformed by a light sentence or a mild*

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 4



*rebuke. No one died in the fairy-tale world and no one died in Frankie's world. When Frankie's parakeet was stricken by a fatal disease, the corpse was removed and a successor installed before Frankie awakened from his afternoon nap. With all these precautions Frankie's parents found it difficult to explain why Frankie should have any fears. But he did.*

*At the age of two when many children are afraid of disappearing down the bathtub drain, Frankie (quite independently and without the influence of wayward companions) developed a fear of going down the bathtub drain.*

*In spite of all the careful preparations for the new baby, he was not enthusiastic about her arrival and occupied himself with the most unfilial plots for her disposal. Among the more humane proposals he offered was that the baby should be taken back to the dime store. (And you know how thorough his sex education had been!)*

*And that wasn't all. At an age when other children waken from bad dreams, Frankie also wakened from bad dreams. Incomprehensibly (for you know how ogres were reformed in Frankie's nursery), Frankie was pursued in his bad dreams by a giant who would eat him up!*

*And that wasn't all. In spite of the merciful treatment accorded to witches in Frankie's education, Frankie disposed of evildoers in his own way when he made up stories. He got rid of witches in his stories by having their heads chopped off.*

What is the point of this modern fable? What does it prove? Doesn't it matter how we rear a child? Are the shibboleths of modern child-rearing a delusion of the scientist? Should we abandon our beliefs about feeding, toilet training, sex education as matters of no consequence in promoting mental health?

Parental wisdom and understanding in the conduct of feeding, toilet training, sex education, discipline, serve the child's mental health by promoting his love and confidence in his parents and by strengthening his own equipment in regulating his body needs and impulses. But the most ideal early training does not eliminate all

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 5



anxiety or remove the hazards that exist everywhere in the child's world and in the very process of development itself.

We should not be shocked—for there is no way in which children can be reared without experiencing anxiety. Each stage in human development has its own hazards, its own dangers. We will find, further, that we do not always serve the child's mental health by vigilantly policing his environment for bogies, ogres, and dead parakeets. We cannot avoid many of these fears. Nor do we need to. We do not, of course, deliberately expose a child to frightening experiences and we do not give substance to the idea of bogies by behaving like bogies ourselves, but when bogies, ogres, and dead parakeets present themselves, it is usually best to deal with them in the open and to help the child deal with them on the same basis.

We are apt to confuse two things. Anxiety is not in itself a neurosis. Frankie, of our fable, is not to be regarded as neurotic—not on the basis of this evidence. Is he afraid of the bathtub drain? Many two year olds share this fear. It is not necessarily an ominous sign. Has he bad dreams about a giant? Nearly all preschool children have anxiety dreams of this type occasionally. Doesn't he like his baby sister in spite of the expert preparation? Preparation for a new baby is essential and makes things easier, but no amount of preliminary explanation can adequately prepare a child for that *real* baby and the *real* experience of sharing parental love.

It is not the bathtub drain, the dream about the giant, or the unpropitious arrival of a sibling that creates a neurosis. The future mental health of the child does not depend upon the presence or absence of ogres in his fantasy life, or on such fine points as the diets of ogres—perhaps not even on the number and frequency of appearance of ogres. *It depends upon the child's solution of the ogre problem.*

It is the way in which the child manages his irrational fears that determines their effect upon his personality development. If a fear of bogies and burglars and wild animals invades a child's life, if a child feels helpless and defenseless before his imagined dangers

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 6



and develops an attitude of fearful submission to life as a result, then the solution is not a good one and some effects upon his future mental health can be anticipated. If a child behaves as if he were threatened by real and imaginary dangers on all sides and must be on guard and ready for attack, then his personality may be marked by traits of over-aggressiveness and defiance, and we must regard his solution as a poor one, too. But normally the child overcomes his irrational fears. And here is the most fascinating question of all: How does he do it? For the child is equipped with the means for overcoming his fears. Even in the second year he possesses a marvelously complex mental system which provides the means for anticipating danger, assessing danger, defending against danger, and overcoming danger. Whether this equipment can be successfully employed by the child in overcoming his fears will depend, of course, on the parents who, in a sense, teach him to use his equipment. This means that if we understand the nature of the developing child and those parts of his personality that work for solution and resolution toward mental health, we are in the best position to assist him in developing his inner resources for dealing with fears.

## WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

In recent years we have come to look upon mental health as if it were nothing more than the product of a special dietary regime, one that should include the proper proportions of love and security, constructive toys, wholesome companions, candid sex instruction, emotional outlets and controls, all put together in a balanced and healthful menu. Inevitably, this picture of a well-balanced mental diet evokes another picture, of the boiled vegetable plate from the dietician's kitchen, which nourishes but does not stimulate the appetite. The product of such a mental diet could just as easily grow up to be a well-adjusted bore.

Therefore, it seems proper in this discussion of mental health to restore the word "mental" to an honored position, to put the

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 7



"mental" back into "mental health." For those qualities that distinguish one personality from another are mental qualities, and the condition which we speak of as mental health is not just the product of a nourishing mental diet—however important this may be—but the work of a complex mental system acting upon experience, reacting to experience, adapting, storing, integrating, in a continuous effort to maintain a balance between inner needs and outer demands.

Mental health depends upon an equilibrium between body needs, drives, and the demands of the outer world, but this equilibrium must not be conceived as a static one. The process of regulating drives, appetites, wishes, purely egocentric desires in accordance with social demands, takes place in the higher centers of the mind. It is that part of the personality that stands in closest relationship to consciousness and to reality which performs this vital function. It is the conscious ego that takes over these regulating and mediating functions, and it does this work for all of the waking hours of a human life.

We should not err by regarding personal satisfaction, "happiness," as the criterion for mental health. Mental health must be judged not only by the relative harmony that prevails within the human ego, but by the requirements of a civilized people for the attainment of the highest social values. If a child is "free of neurotic symptoms" but values his freedom from fear so highly that he will never in his lifetime risk himself for an idea or a principle, then this mental health does not serve human welfare. If he is "secure" but never aspires to anything but personal security, then this security cannot be valued in itself. If he is "well adjusted to the group" but secures his adjustment through uncritical acceptance of and compliance with the ideas of others, then this adjustment does not serve a democratic society. If he "adjusts well in school" but furnishes his mind with commonplace ideas and facts and nourishes this mind with the cheap fantasies of comic books, then what civilization can value the "adjustment" of this child?

The highest order of mental health must include the freedom of a man to employ his intelligence for the solution of human prob-

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 8



lems, his own and those of his society. This freedom of the intellect requires that the higher mental processes of reason and judgment should be removed as far as possible from magic, self-gratification, and egocentric motives. The education of a child toward mental health must include training of the intellect. A child's emotional well-being is as much dependent upon the fullest use of his intellectual capacity as upon the satisfaction of basic body needs.

The highest order of mental health must include a solid and integrated value system, an organization within the personality that is both conscience and ideal self, with roots so deeply imbedded in the structure of personality that it cannot be violated or corrupted. We cannot speak of mental health in a personality where such an ethical system does not exist. If we employ such loose criteria as "personal satisfaction" or "adjustment to the group" for evaluating mental health, a delinquent may conceivably achieve the highest degree of personal satisfaction in the pursuit of his own objectives, and his adjustment to the group—the delinquent group—is as nicely worked out as you could imagine.

Theoretically, then, mental health depends upon the maintenance of a balance within the personality between the basic human urges and egocentric wishes on the one hand and the demands of conscience and society on the other hand. Under ordinary circumstances we are not aware of these two forces within our personality. But in times of conflict an impulse or a wish arises which conflicts with the standards of conscience or which for other reasons cannot be gratified in reality. In such instances we are aware of conflict and the ego takes over the role of judge or mediator between these two opposing forces. A healthy ego behaves like a reasonable and fair-minded judge and works to find solutions that satisfy both parties to the dispute. It allows direct satisfaction when this does not conflict with conscience or social requirements and flexibly permits indirect satisfactions when judgment rules otherwise. If a man finds himself with aggressive feelings toward a tyrannical boss, feelings which cannot be expressed directly without serious consequences, the ego, if it is a healthy ego, can

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 9



employ the energy of the forbidden impulses for constructive actions which ultimately can lead to solution. At the very least it can offer the solace of daydreams in which the boss is effectively put in his place. A less healthy ego, failing at mediation, helpless in the face of such conflict, may abandon its position and allow the conflict to find neurotic solutions.

A neurosis is a poor solution to conflict, or, more correctly, not a solution at all but a bad compromise. Underground, the conflict persists in a disguised form and, since the real conflict is not resolved, a neurosis perpetuates itself in a series of attempted compromises—neurotic symptoms. On the surface a neurosis resembles a cold war between two nations where strong demands are made by both sides and temporary compromises are achieved in order to avoid war. But since the basic issues are never dealt with, fresh grievances and demands are constantly in the making and more and more compromises and bad bargains are required to keep the conflict from breaking out into the open. The analogy of a cold war suggests another parallel. If each of the nations in conflict must be constantly prepared for the possibility of open warfare, it must expend larger and larger amounts of its wealth for defense purposes, leaving less and less of the national income for investment in other vital areas of national welfare. Eventually, so much of the national income and the energy of its people is tied up in defense that very little of either is available for the pursuit of healthy human goals. Here, a neurosis affords an exact parallel. For a neurosis engages a large amount of the energy of a human personality in order to prevent the outbreak of conflict. Energy which should be employed for the vital interests of the personality and the expansion of the personality must be diverted in large quantities for defense purposes. The result is impoverishment of the ego, a serious restriction of human functioning.

Whenever the underground conflict within the personality threatens to break out in the open, anxiety is created by the anticipation of danger. Anxiety then sets the whole process of neurotic defense and compromise into action once again, in the self-perpetuating process we have described. It would be correct

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 10



to say that anxiety generates the neurotic process, but we must not deduce from this that anxiety is in itself a pathological manifestation. Anxiety need not produce a neurosis. In fact, anxiety may serve the widest variety of useful and healthy adaptations in the human personality.

## WHAT IS ANXIETY?

In normal human development, dangers, real or imaginary, present themselves in various forms. If the ego did not acquire the means to deal with danger it would be reduced to chronic helplessness and panic. The instinctive reaction to danger is anxiety. In the beginning of life the infant behaves as if any unexpected event were a danger. We say he is "shocked" by a sudden loud noise, or sudden exposure to strong light. Later, when his attachment to his mother increases, he reacts to her disappearance from sight with anxiety, something still close to a shock reaction. There are large numbers of such circumstances that produce anxiety in an infant. Yet if the infant continued to react to all such events with terror and helplessness, he could scarcely survive in our world.

But soon we discover that the number of such "dangers" diminishes. Ordinary repetition of these experiences helps the infant overcome the sense of danger, and the "shock" reaction diminishes to something that is often not much more than a slight startle, or surprise. Meanwhile another means is developing within him for meeting "danger." (I use quotes because these are dangers to him, though not to us as adults.) He learns to *anticipate* "danger" and prepare for it. And he prepares for "danger" by means *of anxiety!* His mother leaves him at naptime or bedtime. In an earlier stage of development the infant reacted to her leaving with some manifestation of anxiety, an anxiety of surprise or shock following her disappearance. Now, at this later stage he produces a kind of anxiety, crying, protesting, when he approaches his bed, or even his room. He anticipates the feared event and prepares for it by producing anxiety before the event

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 11



takes place. This anticipatory anxiety is actually a help to him in managing the painful separation from his mother. We have some reason to believe that separation from his mother is less painful when he can anticipate it in this manner than it was in the earlier phase when each separation was like a surprise or shock. We think this is so because throughout all human development the effects of danger are less when the ego can prepare for it by producing anticipatory anxiety.

From this we immediately recognize that anxiety is not a pathological condition in itself but a necessary and normal physiological and mental preparation for danger. In fact, the *absence* of anticipatory anxiety may under certain circumstances invite neurosis! The man who succumbs to shock on the battlefield is a man, who, for one reason or another, has not developed the necessary anticipatory anxiety which would have prepared him for danger and averted a traumatic neurosis. Anxiety is necessary for the survival of the individual under certain circumstances. Failure to apprehend danger and to prepare for it may have disastrous results. We will find, further, that anxiety can serve the highest aims of man. The anxiety of performing artists before going on the stage may actually bring forth the highest abilities of the artist when the performance begins.

Anxiety serves social purposes. It is one of the motives in the acquisition of conscience. It is fear of disapproval from loved persons as well as the desire to be loved which brings about conscience in the child. It is fear of criticism from one's own conscience that brings about moral conduct. It was anxiety before danger of extinction which first bound human groups together for mutual security. We could go on endlessly with a catalogue of human inventions and human institutions to demonstrate how danger and the need to defend against danger provided the motive for the highest attainments of civilized man.

But we know that anxiety does not always serve useful ends for the individual or society. The inability to cope with danger may result in a sense of helplessness and inadequacy, in reactions of flight, in neurotic symptoms, or in antisocial behavior. Only in

Fraiberg_Magic_i-300_PTR 11/27/07 1:44 PM Page 12



such cases can we speak of anxiety as pathological, but it would be more correct to say that the solution or attempted solution was a pathological one.

So we return to our aims in promoting the mental health of children. We need to understand the nature of the fears which appear in childhood and we need to examine the means by which children normally overcome the dangers, real and imaginary, which accompany each stage of development.

## FIRST: A HUMAN PROTECTOR AGAINST DANGER.

Long before the child develops his inner resources for overcoming dangers he is dependent upon his parents to satisfy his needs, to relieve him of tension, to anticipate danger, and to remove the source of a disturbance. This is the situation of the infant. To the infant and very young child the parents are very powerful beings, magical creatures who divine secret wishes, satisfy the deepest longings, and perform miraculous feats.

We cannot remember this time of life, and if we try to recapture the feelings of earliest childhood we can only find something analogous in fairy tales. The genies who are summoned in fairy tales and bring forth tables heaped with delicacies, the fairies who grant the most extravagant wishes, the magic beasts who transport a child to far-off lands, the companion lion who overcomes all enemies, the kings and queens who command power over life, give us imaginative reconstructions of the small child's world.

We know that the infant and very small child need to feel that they can count on these powerful beings to relieve tension and alleviate fears. And we know that the child's later ability to tolerate tension and actively deal with anxiety situations will be determined in good part by the experiences of early years. During the period of infancy, of biological helplessness, we make very few demands upon the child and do everything possible to reduce tension and satisfy all needs. Gradually, as the child develops, he acquires