

A Step toward Hope in Religious Education: The Relational Experience

Hatice Fakioğlu Bağcı, Marmara University, Turkey, haticefakih@hotmail.com

Abstract

Anxiety is defined as the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing. The human lives an intense despair during anxiety. "Courage of existence" has an important role to overcome anxiety and despair, and such a courage comes out in the relational experience. Because human in the relational experience has to be existent and in tendency. The exist and tendency have significant capacities to overcome both anxiety and despair. One of the aims of religious education should be to create awareness that the hope as a capacity is hidden in the individual's own relational experience and that only he can reveal it himself.

Introduction

The aim of this study is to state that one of the aims of religious education should be to create awareness that the hope as a capacity is hidden in the individual's own relational experience and that only he can reveal it himself. In accordance with this purpose, the problem of research is as follows: How do courage and hope arise from relational experiences?

Methodology

The method of this research will be the conceptual analysis. Concepts such as Anxiety, nonbeing, being, despair, hope, courage, relation, experience and relational experience will be analysed with regard to the aims of religious education.

Analysis

According to Paul Tillich, "*anxiety is the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing.*" In shorter words "*anxiety is existential awareness of nonbeing*". Every human existentially is aware of the threat of nonbeing and therefore worries. Nature of despair experienced during anxiety is indicated in the etymology of the word despair: being without hope in other words nonexistence of way out about the future (Tillich, 1952, 66-76). Courage has an important role in order to overcome anxiety and despair experienced during anxiety, because courage is individual's self-affirmation in spite of nonbeing. Individual's self-affirmation has two sides: one is the affirmation of the self as a self. The other is the affirmation of the self as a part. The manifestations of each affirmation are different. But there is a "*courage to be*" which unites both forms by transcending them. "*The courage to be is essentially always the courage to be as oneself and courage to be as a part, in interdependence.*" (Tillich, 1952, 103-158).

In my opinion, courage to be against anxiety and despair comes out in the relational experience. Because human has to be in order to relate. The idea of being in the relational experience is against nonbeing that is the main source of anxiety. While the relational experience has a significant role in overcoming anxiety, it also contributes to cope up with despair experienced during anxiety. For, according to Tillich, despair reveals itself mostly in the way of loss of direction. And the reason of loss of direction is the lack of an object on which the subject (in the state of anxiety) can concentrate. (Tillich, 1952, 61.) Yet in the relational experience, the individual doesn't have loss of direction and has a tendency as long as he/she is in the relation.

The relational experience will be analyzed in two ways: human's worldly relational experience with other beings and religious relational experience with Absolute Presence. Human's worldly relational experience with other beings is finite and limited, at the same time, it produces a knowledge about that both individuals are existent and they have a tendency. As I have indicated above, the idea of being is against the idea of nonbeing that is the main source of anxiety and the idea of being in tendency is an important argument against the loss of direction that emerges during despair. In the human's religious relational experience with Absolute Presence, the human exists as a being and he/she has a tendency. But in this last relation, as human is included to endless power, he is surrounded with an endless courage and hope.

I wonder whether courage and hope can also arise from relational worldly experience. Before I respond to this question, let us view various opinions on the nature of experience. According to John Dewey, each experience that human lives has the traces of earlier experiences and has influence upon the quality of the latter experiences (Dewey, 1998, 26-27). Hans-Georg Gadamer expresses a similar idea. According to him, the experiences that human lives are not individual units. On the contrary, they are like parts of a whole associated with each other. In this context, each experience has an interior relationship with life and other experiences (Gadamer, 1993, 66-67). I can argue based on these views that worldly relational experiences which human lives with other beings influence religious relational experiences which human lives with the Absolute Presence. The relation which is established with the Absolute Presence influences the relation which is established with other beings. Hence, experiences cyclically influence each other. In response to the question I pose above, because the human experiences influence each other cyclically, courage and hope do not arise from religious relational experiences alone. Therefore, I can argue that worldly relational experiences have the potentiality to include courage and hope at least as much as religious relational experiences do.

Discussion

What does the fact that relational experiences have potentially courage and hope imply for religious education? Religious education can't ignore that relational experiences have the potential of courage and hope for the anxieties of the human. In this respect the aims of religious education should be reconsidered in my opinion. There are a number of approaches concerning the aims of religious education in the world. One of them is Deborah Court's. According to this approach, one of the aims of religious education should be spiritual aims which encompass religious relational experiences. In line with these aims, religious education should encourage and facilitate religious relational experiences (Court, 2013, 251).

However, in my opinion, religious education should not only consider religious relational experiences, but it should also take into account worldly relational experiences. As I have mentioned above, experiences influence cyclically each other. Hence religious education should regard them as a whole. And also religious education should create awareness that courage and hope aren't granted by others, but they arise from human's own relational experiences. There are studies in this direction in the UK. For example, in the article titled "*Experiential Learning in Religious Education*" written by David Hay, there are suggestions for creating an awareness in the students based on their religious relational experiences (Hay, 2000, 70-87). However, religious relational experiences of student are emphasized more also in this approach, like Court's approach that I have mentioned previously. In my opinion, as I have also indicated above, when the aims of religious education are determined, the whole experience of the human should be considered together.

Conclusion

One of the aims of religious education should be to create awareness in human that has courage to be and hope in both relational experiences and that only he can reveal it himself.

References

- Court, Deborah. "Religious Experience as an Aim of Religious Education", *British Journal of Religious Education*. 2013, Vol.35, No: 3, pp.251-263.
- Dewey, John. *Experience and Education: The 60th Anniversary Edition*. Indiana: Kappa Delta Pi, Indiana, 1998.
- Gadamer, Hans- Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: The Continuum Publishing, 1993.
- Hay, David. "The Religious Experience and Education Project: Experiential Learning in Religious Education", *Pedagogies of Religious Education*. Michael Grimmitt (ed.), Great Wakering, Essex: McCrimmons, 2000, pp. 70-87.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven: Yale University, 1952.