Salman Akhtar, a distinguished analyst, Professor of Psychiatry at Jefferson Medical College, and a Training Supervising Analyst at the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia, immigrated from India as a fully trained adult. He is the author of many books and articles and has received many honors for his scholarly work. He has written here a fine book on the immigration experience, particularly in the United States. The book consists of 4 large parts and an Appendix.

Part I, Leaving and Arriving, consists of 1 chapter, “The Trauma of Geographic Dislocation.” As the title of the chapter indicates, the author regards immigration as a traumatic experience that requires 5 major steps in adaptation: repudiation (I’m not here, I’m not one of them), return (the country of origin is not the same when revisited), replication (recreating the past in the host country, sometimes in a shrine-like fashion), reunion (a nostalgic relationship with the original country), and reparation (a release of creative energy). A noteworthy feature of this first section is the attention to the non-human environment, including adaptation to unfamiliar flora and fauna and the immigrant’s different view of time. It also provides guidelines for the treatment of the immigrant patient, essentially a mirroring and allowance for the stages of adaptation described.

Part II is entitled Being and Becoming and consists of 4 chapters. “Work and Money” addresses the psychological necessity of work and the difficulty many immigrants find in locating suitable employment commensurate with their abilities and interests. The author then addresses the major role of money in the life of the immigrant. “Sex and Marriage” confronts the powerful themes of the place of women and the experience of sexual repression in a more open environment. Marriage, private or arranged, becomes a central issue in the life of the immigrant, whether with a member of the same culture (homoethnic group) or a member of the host culture (heteroethnic group). A separate chapter entitled “Friendship and Socialization” explores the tension between seeking friends from one’s own culture and friends from the host culture. A related and sensitive issue is that of loyalty to the host country, which sometimes is suspected by people in the host country. This is lightly touched upon in poetry that the author has written: “And now, we hum the national anthem, but our pockets do not jingle with coins of patriotism” (p 91). The central role of food is also richly addressed, including emphasis on its availability and variety, often compared to deprivation in the original country.

A final chapter, “Religion and Politics,” recognizes these elements as major motives for immigration. Noteworthy is a thoughtful discussion of immigration and its effect on the economy of the host country. Further, there is sensitive discussion of the relationship of the new immigrant with African American citizens. The author makes a helpful distinction between the experience of the immigrant who chooses to change country and the refugee or exile, which are difficult to understand or believe. But regardless of one’s analytic orientation, there remains a treasure of accurate, well-documented, well-illustrated, and often surprising observations of immigrant life. Hence, the book is rewarding to all who are interested in this profound experience, whether they are immigrants or not.

I, for one, being an adult immigrant to the United States, found the book instructive and entertaining. I do not necessarily agree that immigration is a traumatic experience—challenging, yes, but not necessarily traumatic. For the same reason, I am also not sure that the immigrant healer is always a wounded healer. Nonetheless, I recommend this book.

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