

CenterPiece

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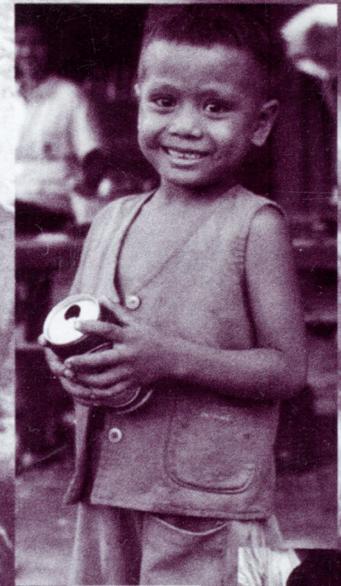
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CENTER FOR PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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CenterPiece

For the past eleven years the Center for Psychology and Social Change has been seeking avenues for addressing the world's intractable problems by looking at the deeper psychological roots driving them. Our work explores the mutuality between our inner and outer worlds, and applies psychology to the process of healing and reshaping destructive relationships in the social, ecological, and spiritual realms. Our projects are designed to promote shifts in consciousness and behavior that invite sustainable, equitable, and peaceful ways of living.

CenterPiece supports the work of the Center and its projects, providing a forum for reflection, communication, and calls for social action. We feature the work of visionaries forging new paths; we recognize the central role of the human psyche and its power to address the challenges we face as a global family. Together we seek to create a more harmonious world.

Changing what we do by changing how we see

Changing how we see by changing what we do

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Finding Ourselves in Our Stories: Lessons from Children of War

by Mary Ellen Hynes



Judith Thompson

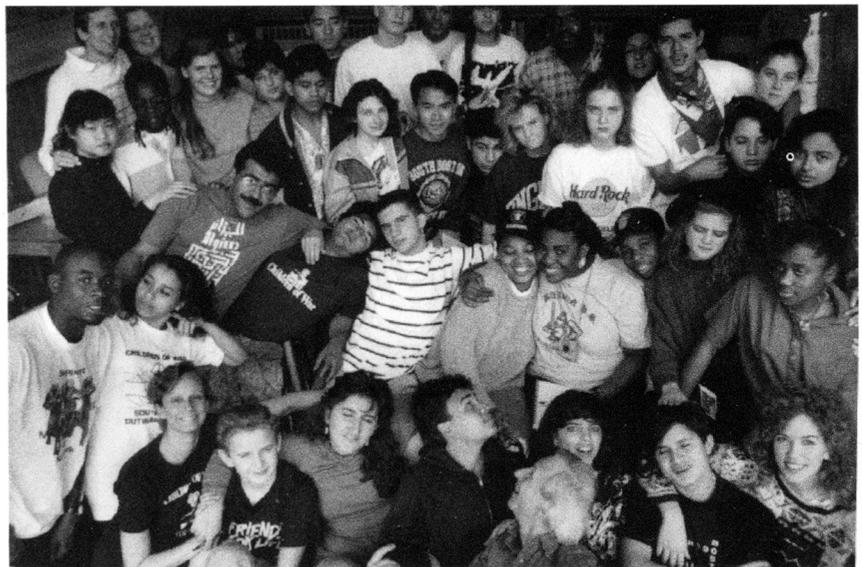
Judith Thompson, the 1993-'94 Peace Fellow at Radcliffe College's Bunting Institute, is the new chair of the Center for Psychology and Social Change's board of directors. What follows is a description of her work as the executive director of Children of War and the lessons that continue to be drawn from it.

On a sundrenched afternoon, Judith Thompson and I sat down and talked about her deep commitment to working with young people, helping midwife a new generation of leaders who can lead us into the new millennium. "Every person can make a difference; every soul carries the same ability to tap into divine love. But we all need to be reminded of that, and experience it. Often, people who've suffered the most from violent circumstances can, by the very fact that they are on a raw edge, make a leap into the land of sacred moments where the soul sees. But to really be effective communicators and transmitters of this requires a lot of ongoing support to heal from the trauma of the past, and a sense of community—connectedness to others who share the same mission. That's what Children of War has really been about—helping young people to utilize their painful experiences as a doorway to wisdom and compassion, and then giving them the support to take it out into the world where it will have a far-reaching effect on others. There's a lovely quote by Kahlil Gibran in *The Prophet* which goes, 'Your pain is the breaking of the shell of your understanding.' We help walk people through the pain so they can meet their understanding."

Judith Thompson cannot talk about Children of War without mentioning Arn Chorn and his remarkable spirit. A survivor of the Cambodian genocide, Arn met Judith upon his arrival in the U.S. as the first Cambodian orphan to be allowed into the country in 1980. Judith was then working as a community organizer assisting Cambodian refugees to rebuild their lives. She worked closely with Arn, who felt a burning need to share his story with anyone who would listen. Not only was telling the story crucial to his own healing, but Arn's extraordinary facility to translate his own suffering into universal lessons on

morality and compassion propelled him into ever larger arenas at a young age. He spoke before Congress and the United Nations. He evolved as a student leader helping to raise awareness among his peers, and traveled around the world with Amnesty International. By 1988 he would receive the Reebok Human Rights Award on behalf of Children of War.

In 1984, when he was only 18, Arn joined Judith and Catholic priest Paul Mayer in co-founding Children of War, an international youth leadership development organization bringing together young people from all over the world who have survived the "violence of human madness." The program offered a month-long training process which included healing, empowerment, and activism, utilizing trainees as peer role models for U.S. teenagers. Children of War was made up of young people from war zones around the world, in addition to drawing from domestic war zones—inner cities, Native American reservations, homeless shelters, and farm labor camps.



Children of War

Children of War groups began with a week-long initiatory process involving sharing of personal stories as the group quickly bonded into a community. Then they traveled in teams across the U.S., acting as peer role models in high schools and community centers where they not only shared the cruel consequences of war, but stressed their newfound hope and the power found in connectedness. Their example encouraged local youth to tell their stories and create community for themselves.

This community-building movement reached more than 250,000 young people in U.S. cities, serving as a catalyst for the development of forty-two new multicultural youth groups. Hundreds of young people from war zones went through Children of War's "initiation," a process that helped them to move from being victims to being visionaries.

Imagine sitting in a room with fifty young people who have survived genocide, torture, imprisonment, environmental disaster, gang life, and war. One by one they each tell their story. It might begin with Arn Chorn telling his story of being a child in the Cambodian killing fields witnessing the terror and unbelievable brutality of the Khmer Rouge. "There is a common ground of suffering between all of us," Arn says. "For myself, I saw all of my family executed. When I saw babies being smashed, I died myself a million times. I thought it would be better to be born in another life instead of living in a world where there was no love and compassion." As Arn speaks people are transfixed, eyes full of tears, their hearts open and listening. Arn survived for three years at a child labor camp, formerly a Buddhist temple, where he witnessed daily executions and was forced to dig the graves for those who were killed. Later, at age twelve, he was forced to carry a gun to fight the Vietnamese before he finally fled into the jungle and made his way to the refugee camps on the Thai border. "It seems almost unbelievable that I could forgive what happened to my people, but more and more I realize I'm alive. Not just because bullets failed to reach my brain, or because I wasn't butchered in the awful Cambodian genocide; I'm alive, really only painfully, after all these years, because I can love again. I can feel the suffering of others, not just my own, who are enduring the violence of human madness."



Judith Thompson and Arn Chorn

After Arn finishes speaking you can hear a pin drop. Similar to Arn the fifty young people in the room have all lost something—siblings, parents, country, self-esteem. They want to be leaders, they have and feel a sense of commitment to changing their socio-political situation. In listening to each other's stories, Judith explains, "they begin to see and feel each other's pain and get a lot more access to their own pain as well."

Judith continues, "Anyone who lives in a frontline situation doesn't have time to deal with their feelings. They are in stress all of the time. We give them a safe space for the first time ever to grieve and share their pain. This experience is heightened by the excitement of being with a large group of people from different backgrounds who are all uniting around what Arn calls the 'common bond of suffering.' This is the higher aspect of solidarity work."

The work of Children of War is grounded in what Judith calls four C's—compassion, community, commitment, and courage. "These are the things that are necessary for social transformation to happen on a broad scale. Compassion implies an experience of connectedness to other human beings and the rest of creation. It must be at the center in order for any real change to take place."

Compassion

"Compassion implies that the suffering of the world is my suffering. There is a relationship between our ability to feel suffering and empowerment itself. They seem contradictory but they're not—they're different sides of the same coin. If I can feel the suffering of another person and recognize their suffering is connected to my suffering, that realization can be the doorway out of that suffering, that kind of deep connectedness opens the doorway to joy.

"What amazes me is that some things are so basic, but have been passed over time and again. Listening well and providing safe space is the most human thing in the world, yet is so rarely done.

"I was in Croatia for the third time this summer. I went with a group of people involved in creating a Children of War theater piece. The director said to me, 'I feel so awkward

going there and hearing stories and then leaving them. It feels like a rip-off.' I told him you can't go to Bosnia and listen to the stories and feel like somehow you're going to be able to do something to change their life in terms of the external circumstances. You can't. That's very frustrating for many people and one reason why people avoid doing it. They don't want to enter into something they feel they can't change. But what they don't understand is how they do change, shift energy, support, feed, nurture, and nourish individuals by allowing them to give their story, feelings, and pain in that moment. If you are truly present in love—fully present as a container for their pain—then you've given a gift."

Community

"Learning how to be present with each other is key. The power of this work is in offering opportunities for people to be present with each other in a way that is deeper and more authentic than they have ever been able to be with anyone else. That is a life-generating thing—a battery you can plug into at anytime. I remember receiving a letter from a young man who was writing from a bomb shelter in Beirut. He said that the bond he felt to his peers on the other side of the world was what kept him going. Before, he would've felt hopeless and powerless.

"This bonding has been particularly creative between U.S. inner-city youth and international war survivors. For young people in the inner city who have internalized a lot of negative self concepts and who have limited experience of the world, getting connected to their peers from South Africa or Nicaragua helps them plug into a bigger experience of themselves. They too know war, they too have been oppressed by systemic racism and classism, they too are survivors, they too are strong and courageous, and they too can tell the truth about their pain, can weep for themselves and the world."

Commitment

"Commitment is a natural extension of compassion and community. Once the covenant is forged through sharing our lives and learning to listen and feel for, and with, each other, commitment to each other is the next step. There is no question about it when we feel connected. When you become family with any group of people, you will naturally

commit yourself to them and if you don't there is usually an ideology about commitment. If all you're carrying with you is an ideology and not a relationship, a shared experience, you are more likely to feel burned out or compromise your beliefs. If we are fortunate enough to expand our circle of compassion wider and wider and embrace more and more people, then our commitment will extend to the world.

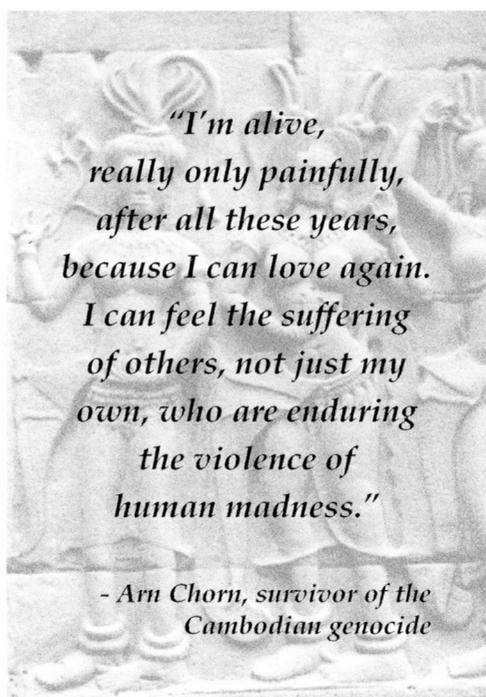
"The relationships have been absolutely sustaining for all of us involved. This kind of power interests me: both the power of individuals who, if you can assist them in their healing process, can move forward incredibly in their ability to do good things; and the power inherent in relationship—in commitment to individuals, in commitment to each other, in commitment to the community. It's an incredible power, an energy form. It's not just an abstract power, it is a real

release of energy. When we talk about what is the binding power of the universe, it's love—let's face it. People might use different words, but when you get down to it, love is an energy. Whatever we can do to release love is what we want to do, right?"

Courage

"A lot of the work of Children of War was also to allow young people to retain, and many times to remember, the larger vision of the way the world could be. Most people have this vision as children. When you're a baby, the world is filled with wonder—anything is possible. At every opening talk I would do with Children of War, I would put a big picture of the planet up and we would start to relate to that planet as home, as a living entity, instead

of as Bosnia, or other nationalistic boundaries. We would start to talk about remembering what we were like as children. What were our hopes? What did we believe in? What did we believe was possible? How big was our vision? People would say, 'My vision was big—anything was possible.' Then I would ask, 'What do you believe now?' and the reply would be, 'Well, not much is possible.' A lot of the work is helping people to reconnect with the vision that anything is possible because, as we know, we create it. If we say 'nothing is possible,' then nothing is possible. If we say 'everything is possible,' then everything is possible. That's the truest, most radical notion of empowerment—the recognition that we are creators—we are gods—it's not 'out there' somewhere. Whatever Source is, which is omnipresent, it intersects and materializes in each one of us, and that's our lifeline to creation. (Continued on page 25)

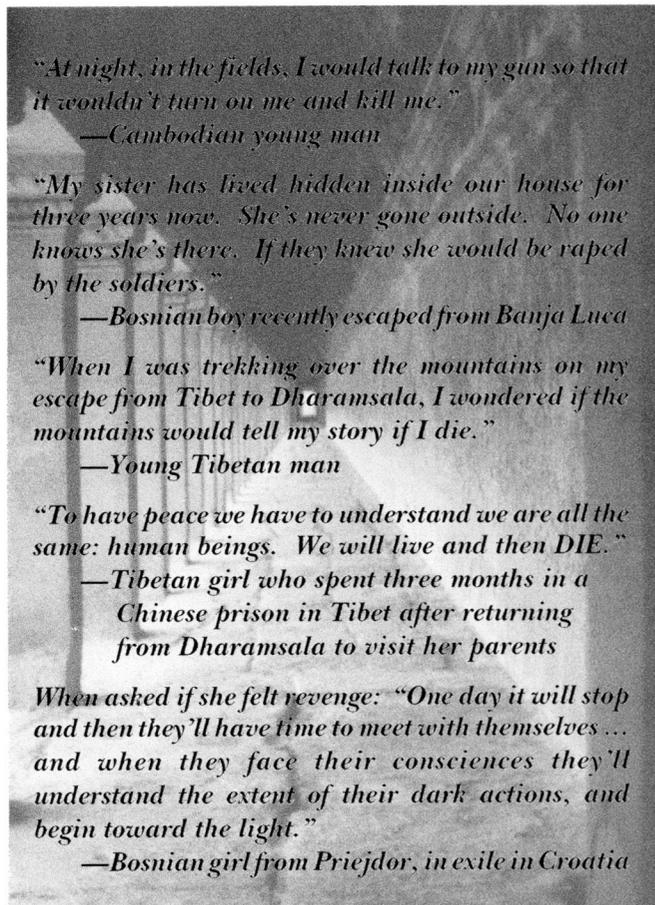


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really only painfully,
after all these years,
because I can love again.
I can feel the suffering
of others, not just my
own, who are enduring
the violence of
human madness."*

*- Arn Chorn, survivor of the
Cambodian genocide*

A Pilgrimage to the Heart of Compassion

by Judith Thompson



"At night, in the fields, I would talk to my gun so that it wouldn't turn on me and kill me."

—Cambodian young man

"My sister has lived hidden inside our house for three years now. She's never gone outside. No one knows she's there. If they knew she would be raped by the soldiers."

—Bosnian boy recently escaped from Banja Luka

"When I was trekking over the mountains on my escape from Tibet to Dharamsala, I wondered if the mountains would tell my story if I die."

—Young Tibetan man

"To have peace we have to understand we are all the same: human beings. We will live and then DIE."

—Tibetan girl who spent three months in a Chinese prison in Tibet after returning from Dharamsala to visit her parents

When asked if she felt revenge: "One day it will stop and then they'll have time to meet with themselves ... and when they face their consciences they'll understand the extent of their dark actions, and begin toward the light."

—Bosnian girl from Prijedor, in exile in Croatia

Voices from Children of War: Cambodia, Tibet, Bosnia

When Larry Sacharow, director of River Arts Repertory in New York, came to me saying that he wanted to create a theater piece based on Children of War, I had no idea that three years later we would be traveling around the world with six others to gather material for the play. Larry decided that in order to be absolutely true to the spirit of the material, he wanted us to enter, as best we could, into the world of "children of war."

From the killing fields of Cambodia to the Himalayan refuge of Dharamsala to the European city of Zagreb, we met with young survivors, called by Arn Chorn, co-founder of Children of War, the "hostages of madness." And, while there was understandable bitterness in some, there was also a universal desire to reach out, to heal, and to help others.

In Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge reigned from 1975 to 1979, the child survivors are now in their twenties and thirties, and have rarely, if ever, talked about their experiences living through the nightmare of the Khmer Rouge genocide. We worked both individually and in a

group setting and, while there was an initial fear of breaking the cultural contract of silence, the moment the door was opened, others quickly followed, eager to be heard.

In Dharamsala, where our stay included a two-hour meeting with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, the most striking characteristic of the youth, all of whom had taken a treacherous trek through the Himalayas to arrive there, was their relative wholeness. To me, the Tibetan situation provided a model for healing. Here they have a sophisticated community support system that includes assigned surrogate parents, a children's village which educates them through high school, and the loving attention of the Dalai Lama who is continually reinforcing Buddhist non-violence.

To leave there and head straight for the carnage in the former Yugoslavia was a lesson in contrasts. Yet, even there, the clarity and wisdom of the young people we met contradicted the disturbing images which ran daily across the television screen. (We were there during the Croatian mobilization and re-capture of the Krajina.) Our host and guide, Miki Jacevic, a former resident of Sarajevo and the central force in a small students-in-exile community, shared many evenings with us and a group of his best friends, all of whom he helped to escape from Bosnia or from the refugee camps throughout Europe. He houses ten of them in his one-bedroom apartment in Vienna—Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, all best friends.

Everywhere we went, Arn held the vision for our group. As one who had himself lost everything in the killing fields, he related to each person's story as if it were his own, and it gave him the power to touch deep within the heart of "the other" and bring each the message he has so often shared. "You and I are one person. Together we have a bigger heart to hold the suffering of the world."

The Children of War theater piece will open in New York in the fall of 1996 and will then travel to other cities. Outreach will target schools, and will be accompanied by workshops for youth. A documentary is also being produced by two-time Academy Award-winning producer Barbara Kopple.



Children of War

This past September the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet, visited the United States in an effort to raise political awareness for the Tibetan struggle for autonomy. He spoke to a capacity audience at the Wang Center in Boston. David Ison, member of the board of directors for the Center for Psychology and Social Change and president of TheraSound, Inc., was inspired by what the Dalai Lama had to say, and raises here the paradoxical question of a nonviolent culture having to consider violence in order to avoid being eradicated. Over a million Tibetans have died since the Chinese occupation began, twenty percent of their population. Do our choices change when survival of our very culture is on the line?

Recently I had the privilege of hearing the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of the Tibetan people, present his latest views on the nature of choice and personal responsibility. It was an extraordinary experience, full of surprises, and ringing with the evolution of the practice of compassionate mindful awareness.

In order to understand fully the progression of this enlightened person's way of seeing the world, it is important to place the Dalai Lama's life experience into context. Since 1949, the country of Tibet and its people have been living under the thumb of the Chinese occupation forces. While campaigning to regain their homeland, the Tibetans have endured the horrors of brutality and persecution; yet they are standing their ground, staunchly adhering to the principles of nonviolence and loving compassion toward all beings, including one's executioner. The Tibetans' ability to remain steadfastly committed to these principles is an extraordinary testimony to their power, a power so sustaining that it has supported and uplifted the Tibetan culture for decades.

The period of Chinese occupation has been a long and painful affair with the threat to the survival of Tibetan culture always lurking in the background, a threat seemingly distant enough to be looked at with compassionate non-attachment. Now, however, this situation is finally destroying the very fabric of the Tibetan culture. The unique Tibetan way of living and perceiving how the world works may soon be gone forever.

Impending cultural annihilation has spawned questions about maintaining the ideals of nonviolent action within the

current conditions. It was this issue that the Dalai Lama chose to address in his talk.

He spoke passionately, stressing adherence to the fundamental principle of bringing loving compassion to one's enemy. His approach to this conflict is, as it has always been, one of mutual collaboration and cooperation. He has continually attempted to bring these principles to the negotiating table.

The problem is that this approach is not working. The Chinese authorities have consistently refused even to meet with this gentle man. They have refused to acknowledge his position as the spiritual and political voice of the Tibetan people. By denying the Dalai Lama's leadership role, the Chinese have nullified his position, and have effectively stymied all outside attempts toward a mutually satisfying resolution. Instead, they continue their assimilation efforts at full force.

What to do? I saw the Dalai Lama himself being challenged by the ideals and perceptions that have held the Tibetan culture together for thousands of years. As he spoke he gave some examples where violent resolution to a situation can be a positive act, carefully placing these events within the container of compassion toward all beings. This viewpoint concerning the validity of force is far from traditional Buddhist principles and practices; it came as a great surprise to me and, I'm sure, to most of the audience as well.

Despite the pressures on the Tibetans' cultural survival, the Dalai Lama stressed that he does not advocate the use of force as a remedy to this situation. Rather, he emphasized and took courage from the fact that the campaign for Tibetan self-rule has many supporters within China, largely because the Tibetans have not altered their position on nonviolence.

Through the Dalai Lama's words, I felt him resonating with the need for a great change in his perceptions and ideas about what it means to lead a people out of isolation and into the twenty-first century spiritually and politically. I felt the pain of the Tibetans' isolation and their need for a new way of interacting with the world, for a shift in their worldview. The purity of their isolation in the high mountains of the Himalayas has allowed their enlightened way of being to

The Gift by David Ison



The Dalai Lama



evolve, but that isolation has also kept them from becoming members of the world community. Moreover, the Chinese are not bringing Tibetans out of isolation; they are eliminating the culture through drastic assimilation policies.

While puzzling over this situation, I thought of the metaphor that when your back is against the wall, you will come out swinging. The intensity of the threat to Tibet's cultural survival is causing a fundamental shift in deeply held beliefs and modes of perception about how the world works. It is clear that the Chinese occupying forces are operating with a fully developed intention to eradicate the culture of Tibet down to its foundations. It seems that only when a situation, such as this one, reaches critical mass does great change occur. The shift that the Dalai Lama and his people are undergoing requires great strength of will. The need for the Tibetan culture to survive has come forward and this need is the determining factor precipitating a radical shift in people's long-held convictions.

This led me to think about the human story of evolution. As human beings we are a highly creative species. We maintain our livelihood by identifying, choosing, and creating our survival requirements.

Unfortunately, we have used our creative powers to make a world based on separation and division, leading to a set of global conditions that do not support our continued survival and growth.

It is our capacity to choose that enables us to live in a world of our own design. This capacity also creates the potential for both "mindful awareness and responsible right action."

The Dalai Lama suggested that the time has come for all human beings to choose to bring forward the evolution of our natural ability to create the world around us.

Resonating with the meaning of the Dalai Lama's words, I came to a new awareness of the situation, and my mind was guided toward a broader understanding of the meaning of the Tibetan people's gift. The great gift that the Dalai Lama, his people, and their culture are bringing to all of us on this planet today is the example of how they maintain their commitment to their noble path and continue to survive.

An Old Story, a New Story

History is the story of how we have held the planet hostage and forcefully invaded, depleted, and decimated the spirit, the body, and the resources of our world. The perceptions and worldview that allow the Chinese government to rationalize

and validate its policy of eradication and assimilation of Tibetan culture are not unique to the Chinese culture; they are at work in many human enterprises. For many centuries we have been an occupying force, brutally justifying and morally validating our self-serving occupation of Earth.

Like the Chinese occupational forces, we have used our natural creative powers to design a worldview that is so internally consistent that it creates within us a powerful inner strength. This inner strength is deeply self-affirming and is capable of removing the doubts in our minds concerning our right to acquire what we think we need by any means necessary.

I came to know that the Tibetan situation mirrors our planetary situation as a whole. Like the Tibetan people, we are faced with one of the greatest challenges that has ever come before the human race. That challenge is to choose to use our creative abilities to develop a process of creation that reverses the trend toward planetary destruction. Our processes of creation and all the methods we use to determine our choices must grow into an awareness of the functions of interconnection and unity, leaving the old perceptions of separation and division behind.

This new creative process will incorporate a way of thinking and doing that enables us to embrace our role as caretakers of the earth and our fellow beings. This process will embrace growth and expansion, fundamentally altering the current motion toward depletion and decay.

Finally, I came to understand that the Dalai Lama was right to insist that all of our actions and choices need to be created from within the container of compassion and mutual respect. Within this vision of all beings working together to create shared solutions to globally shared dilemmas, I experienced a surge of hope; and for the first time in quite a while, I began to see a light at the end of this long dark tunnel. Like the Tibetan people, our backs are against the wall. And we will succeed in bringing about this great change within ourselves and within this precious world we all share, because we have to.

Ultimately, I came to know that this vision of hope and possibility is truly the wonderful gift given to all beings by this great and humble man and all of his people. Let us all share the intention that the Tibetan people and their wondrous culture will indeed succeed in fulfilling their mighty quest for freedom and self-determination. And let their quest be a beacon for us: a continual model of social action through compassionate nonviolence that can bring about more unity throughout our troubled world.

Peace.



Like the Tibetan people, we are faced with one of the greatest challenges that has ever come before the human race.

The Efforts Continue – What You Can Do to Help

During his recent visit to Boston, the Dalai Lama said projects closest to his heart were those which helped his people inside Tibet, particularly in health and education. You may support such a project by sending a gift to: U.S. Tibetan Society for School and Culture, 66 Charles Street, Box 179, Boston, MA 02114.

The International Campaign for Tibet

Recent reports demonstrate China's aggressive attempts to undermine Tibetan Buddhism by defying the Dalai Lama's recognized choice of the reincarnated Panchen Lama. Last May, the Dalai Lama recognized a boy, Gendun Choekyi Nyima, as the Panchen Lama in accordance with Tibetan tradition. The boy has not been seen in public in recent months and is reported to be detained somewhere in Beijing. The Dalai Lama's choice was rejected by Beijing, calling it illegal, invalid, and an interference in China's internal affairs. China's move to isolate the Dalai Lama from any role in the recognition process of the Panchen Lama is something which has never occurred in Tibetan history.

The Chinese government in November announced its own choice, a six year old boy, for the reincarnation of

the Panchen Lama and simultaneously revived the Ganden Tripa, a major religious post which it had banned since 1959. The Ganden Tripa is the head of the Gelupka sect of Tibetan Buddhism, a sect of which no foreign country, including China, has ever had any role in whatsoever. The move is believed to be a significant step in Beijing's recent campaign to reduce the influence of religion in Tibet by strictly controlling and dominating all major religious posts and institutions.

China's selection of the Panchen Lama comes less than a week after announcing that Wei Jingsheng, Chinese dissident and human rights activist, would be charged with treason, indicating that some top Beijing leaders are unconcerned about the upcoming United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva. The move is particularly brazen given the recent lobbying of the United States and other countries not to push for a resolution in Geneva against China's human rights abuses.

For more information on the Tibetan campaign write to: The International Campaign for Tibet, 1825 K Street, NW, Suite 520, Washington DC 20006; or call (202) 785-1515.



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UN Forum Focuses on Values in a Global Society

by Rina Amiri



Why is it that the word “values” is becoming increasingly visible in the media and as a topic of conversation? What is being called for when politicians advocate a fundamental shift in values for our times? Does understanding our values help create policies for a more congruous world?

The United Nations Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in March 1995, has been called a summit of “values,” an unprecedented attempt to focus world attention on social development and its underlying values. Nancy Roof, Ph.D., the UN representative for the Center for Psychology and Social Change, addressed the entire governmental meeting of the summit, attended by 184 governments, on the issue of values.

“Values are an inherent part of every political discussion,” says Nancy, “and at the heart of many of the issues raised in the Women’s Conference held in Beijing in September. We can no longer live like we have in the past. We need to examine our values and consider what minimum values we need to have in order to live in an interdependent world. We need to reflect on our options in order to transform our values and to transcend our differences. The tragic consequence of our intolerance to differences has been witnessed in the calamities of wars in places like the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia. We need to find new ways to settle the differences between our governments and nations and cultural identities. We need a moral regeneration and values that tolerate diversity. We have to ask ourselves if there are universal values that cross all cultures. If all states agree on a minimal set of values, we will have a basis for the terms of conduct for global harmony.”

Nancy furthers this statement by citing Harvard researcher Sisela Bok’s work on ethics and global values. Bok argues that no society will survive without three essential values: a degree of caring for other people, a system that limits violence and betrayal, and a systematic form of justice.

This statement does not originate from a utilitarian or humanitarian perspective, but rather is based on the fundamental understanding that certain forms of behavior must be eliminated in order to co-exist in our global society.

Nancy realizes that even a global commitment to such minimal standards will not necessarily end war and violence, but she maintains that these standards are necessary in order to establish a degree of accountability and to create a global consensus on the unacceptability of certain acts against humanity. She is committed to the idea that people must agree on a set of values before transforming themselves and ultimately closing the gap between actions and values.

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Nancy has become the co-chair of an international values caucus, and on October 12, an overflow crowd of ambassadors, UN civil servants, and NGO leaders attended the first forum on *Consciousness and Choice: Toward a New Culture of Values and Ethics in a Global Society*, hosted at the United Nations, and co-sponsored by the Center for Psychology and Social Change and the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University. There is hope that this forum will become a more permanent part of the UN community, extending the discourse on values beyond UN conferences. The forum included pioneers in using value-oriented approaches to their disciplines. The panel featured Peter Senge, director of the Organizational Learning Center at Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Claire Gaudiani, president of Connecticut College; and Pragaluxmi Govender, South African member of Parliament. Dadi Prakashmani, chief administrative head of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, delivered the opening remarks. H.E. Samuel Inasanally, UN ambassador from Guyana and president of the 48th Session of the General Assembly, moderated the panel.

Nancy notes that before people can label and prioritize global values, they must first reflect on how they prioritize

(Continued on page 15)

The Politician Within

by Andrew Samuels

Across the globe, the search is on for the remodeling and resacrilization of politics. People's sense of disgust with politics is more evident than ever, indicating in part that we are far more political than we imagine ourselves to be. The dissatisfaction can be an igniting force in our passion for a more ethical society.

*Bringing a psychological perspective to bear on such issues as leadership, citizenship, the economy, and nationalism, as well as seeking to reveal the hidden politics of family experiences and issues of gender and sexuality, Jungian analyst and author Andrew Samuels applies depth psychology to politics. He spoke at the Center for Psychology and Social Change on September 21, 1995. He is the author of the popularly acclaimed *The Political Psyche*, as well as *Jung and the Post-Jungians*; *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*; and *The Plural Psyche*, which are available through the Center (see page 31).*



Andrew Samuels

While politics will always be about getting things done or stopping things from happening, most citizens know that there is usually a private, even a secret dimension to the ways in which their political beliefs, commitments, and actions have evolved in them. We need a language in which to explore “the politician within,” and at present we lack such a language. This exploration has to be conducted with respect and affection for the diversity of the politician within each citizen. I want to avoid creating another monolith, an “I” or “we” that won’t survive in politics today.

What happens if we pay the kind of attention we give in therapy, to the inner life of the individual, to what might be called his or her “political selfhood?” We would be entering the realm of “self-awareness” and, because it is scarcely possible to give an objective history of one’s politics, we should think instead in terms of the “political myth of the person.”

Most often, psychological forays into the realm of politics have focused either on the psychology of politicians—their character and likely behavior in stressful situations and crises—or have studied the voters to help politicians appeal to or manipulate them. There has not been very

much psychological work done in relation to the citizen’s experience of and in politics.

A good deal of political debate boils down to disagreement about what constitutes human nature. After all, people have always spoken about politics and politicians in emotional terms. Why, then, are they so reluctant to turn to psychology and psychotherapy as sources for new political ideas to fill the current vacuum?

From the greed and envy highlighted by Whitewater to the sexual confusions of the Clarence Thomas hearings, politics presents us with unmistakably psychological issues. But in analyzing our reactions to these events, the media and the electorate fail to connect the inner, private levels of life with the outer, public levels.

In a new language to link psychology and politics, it will be more and more difficult to make universally true statements. We will want to know more about the hidden, personal agenda of the person who is speaking and acting.

Therapists know that everyone teems with inner people (sub-personalities), something that both therapists and clients find difficult to acknowledge—it is much easier to take personality as something organized and unified. In the same way, we need an approach to politics that understands that no citizen has a single, unified political identity.

That is not only a strategy for political strategists and pundits. Many people want to know how they can translate their emotional, imaginative, and bodily responses to Bosnia, to ecological disaster, or to homelessness into action. How can they begin to make use of their private reactions to public events?

Over the past few years, I have been running workshops and conferences in several countries on psychological approaches to politics. In this work, I have discovered that people are much more political than they believed. They know more about the political events of the day than they think they do. Gradually, participants discover that they have long been living in a political world about which they had always been informed. What often emerges is that people have more and stronger political commitments than they knew about. Such commitments need time to emerge; they are not always found by signing petitions, going to demonstrations, or voting.



These buried sources of political wisdom lie in the private reactions everyone has to political events. Yet these reactions have no ready outlet, since they are all too often dismissed as subjective.

For example, at a workshop in New York, shortly after the Los Angeles riots in 1992, I asked a largely nonprofessional audience to dig up and record their emotional, fantasy, and physical responses to the riots. Unexpectedly, just doing this in a contained setting had a cathartic effect. The participants said that they had often reacted in a highly personal way to political events. But they feared these responses would not pass muster in everyday political discourse. Their conception of politics fit in with how our leaders would like us to define politics—as if it were an objective activity.

Jung told his students that “when you treat the individual you treat the culture.” The interpenetration of individual and culture is the essential backdrop to discovering how things that are usually regarded as supremely private may be reframed so that their secret politics is laid bare. People cannot be seen in isolation from the society that played a part in forming them. Both individuals and society would benefit from such a shift in perspective.

Once we see that there is a politician within each of us who has developed over time, we can start to track the political history of a person—the way the political events of his or her lifetime have affected the forming of the individual’s personality. So we have to consider the politics a person has, so to speak, inherited from his or her family, class, ethnic, religious, and national background—not forgetting the crucial variables of gender and sexual orientation.

The exercises at right can help the reader to sharpen his or her political self-awareness by reflecting on what emerges.

But all this is a bit too rational! Maybe there are also accidental, constitutional, fateful, and inexplicable elements in our political makeup. Maybe people are just born with different amounts and kinds of political energy in them. (I discussed this in “Political Energy,” *Tikkun*, March/April 1995.)

If so, there would be significant implications for individuals and for our approach to politics. What happens if a person with a high level of political energy is born to parents with a low level (or vice versa)? What if the two parents have vastly different levels? What is the fate of a person with a high level of political energy born into an age that does not value such a high level? Did your parents foster or hinder the flowering of your political energy and your political

First Exercise

Which of the following do you think has influenced your political views, commitments, and actions over the years? Score the possibilities on a scale of one to ten, with one equalling “not a lot” and ten equalling “very greatly”:

your parents

other family members

other significant figures
(teachers, ministers, national leaders, etc.)

your gender

your sexual orientation

socioeconomic factors

ethnic factors

religious factors

national background

particular political events
(specify which event as well as scoring it)

Second Exercise

This second exercise explores the reader’s political energy level in relation to other levels: On a scale of one to ten, score yourself for political energy, one equals low political energy and ten equals high political energy.

Score your father.

Score your mother.

Score your present closest person.

Score the community you grew up in.

Score the community you live in now.

Score the epoch in which you grew up.

Score the level of political energy in our times.

potential? In which direction are your politics moving, and why? The answers to such questions shape not only the political person but the contemporary political scene. Yet I do not think these questions are presently on either a mainstream or an alternative political agenda.

My interest is not in what might be called political maturity. No such universal exists in politics, given its adversarial nature. Ho Chi Minh was a hero for some and a demon for others. Many of Nelson Mandela's admirers once regarded him as a dangerous communist. In the United Kingdom, while government and opposition alike condemn the violent acts of the IRA, other commentators acknowledge that the bombing campaign on the mainland was politically effective. So the creation of a schema or hierarchy of political maturity is a dubious and hopeless task.

Instead, let's make it easier for citizens to assess themselves. My interest is in how people reflect upon where they are politically and, above all, in how they themselves think, feel, explain, and communicate about how they arrived there—this is what I mean by the political myth of the person. From one angle, it may often turn out that someone is not where he or she thought politically. Or they might have gotten there by a route of which they were unaware. As far as the politician within is concerned, this is not relevant, because there is a narrative truth to consider as well as a historical truth, a matter of meaning rather than a matter of fact.

I'll conclude by suggesting there is something else that needs to be addressed—what we could call "political style." For a variety of reasons, some of them to do with their personal backgrounds, some to do with their levels of political energy, people will live out their political selves in different ways. Some will be violent terrorists; some pacifists. Some will want to consider ideas and arguments carefully; others will fly by the seat of their pants. Some will definitely enjoy cooperative activity; others will suffer the nightmares of trying to do things in a group only because they believe in the ends. As we begin to make a start on a psychologically driven transformation of politics, let us not make the mistake of insisting that everyone do it in precisely the same way. There is probably something desirable and creative in a diversity of political styles being equally valued and honored, and we can think of ways of protecting and privileging such diversity.

In each of these exercises, the goal is to pay the kind of attention to the individual's political selfhood that therapists pay to the individual's inner life. People who have done these exercises often tell me that they end up feeling more

Final Exercise

The final exercise concerns political style.

First, answer the questions according to your current self-assessment. When you have done that, ask yourself what your ideal political style would be and record the answer to that question as well:

Do you feel more comfortable engaging in political activity, or do you tend to reflect on the great issues of the day?

When politics is the topic, do you have greater or lesser difficulty in speaking up than usual—or about the same?

Do you see yourself as good or bad at handling conflict in your life?

When it comes to political conflict, are you especially ill at ease?

Which of the following terms most accurately sums up your political style (*feel free to choose more than one or to organize terms in an order of priority*): warrior; terrorist; martyr; exhibitionist; leader; activist; parent; follower; child; victim; trickster; healer; analyst; negotiator; bridge builder; diplomat; philosopher; mystic; ostrich.

fragmented than ever—yet, strangely, more optimistic about today's politics. In other words, the exercises seem to work.

A fragmented society such as ours will no longer respond to an analysis that assumes homogeneity, order, cohesion, and a commonality of interests across the board. The politician within is thus a new kind of political analyst, capable of engaging with a fragmented society by virtue of being politically self-aware of his or her own fragmented political selfhood and evolving political myth. 

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Politicians Don't Know What People Want

by Donella Meadows

I should be writing about how the grinch in Congress are trying to eviscerate the Endangered Species Act, or about their latest tricks for stomping on the poor while handing the nation's resources to the rich, or about their lack of interest in hearing public comment on these depredations.

But I get tired of being outraged. No matter how disgusting the spectacle I am witnessing, I can sustain outrage for just so long. Then I have to avert my eyes and look around for something healthy to revive my soul.

So, after writing some scathing opening lines about atrocities in Washington, I gave up, looked around, and found, in the pile of new books on my desk, one called *Choosing Our Future: Visions of a Sustainable World*.

It's a collection of short statements by people from many countries, describing how they would like things to be in the year 2050. After the pandering of power-crazed politicians, I found amazing relief in the hopes of ordinary humanity.

Guess what! The people quoted in this book do not dream of the information superhighway or the growth of corporations or the magical mystery machine of the free market. They don't mention the capital gains tax or Star Wars or the freedom to buy the assault rifle of their choice. Their visions are more grounded, more important.

Here are just a few short excerpts of what they see, when they look into a future they really want:

Abdiel J. Adames, former rector, University of Panama: "Central America constitutes a community of nations where peace rules, with all countries in the region having eliminated national armies. The region's only militarized entity is under the control of the Organization of American States for the protection of the Panama Canal."

Dr. B. Bowonder, engineer, Administrative Staff College of India: "The Indian subcontinent will be able to limit its

population to 1.4 billion. This can be achieved through a comprehensive social program, including increases in female literacy, female participation in the labor force, access to public health services and family planning services. Our grandchildren will enjoy our natural heritage: tropical rain forests, wetlands, mangrove forests, and coral reefs."

Marta Echavarría Uribe, Colombian Association of Sugar Cane Producers: "I hope for a Colombia where once again we may be able to go fishing at night. Going fishing at night presupposes access to free time, proximity to a healthy watershed and the insurance of personal safety. It highlights the need for environmental awareness, to recognize the worth of our natural and social ecosystems."

Liberty Mhlanga, general manager, Agriculture and Rural Development Authority, Zimbabwe: "Zimbabwe [would have] a multicultural society, comprising black, white, brown and yellow people. This is an ideal setting for a rich socioeconomic and cultural creation that pulls together the strengths from different societies."

*People everywhere
dream of peace,
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Florence Robinson, biology professor, Southern University in Baton Rouge: "The unemployment rate is less than one percent, and all jobs give those who hold them a sense of dignity. No one has to feel like less than anyone else because of the work he or she does. All jobs will fall within a fairly limited income range, so we won't have neighborhoods of affluent people separate from those of the so-called poor people. No youngster in America who is talented

and wants a college education is denied it. People don't live in huge ostentatious houses, but ones that are adequate for their needs, sound and comfortable."

Alex Steffen, freelance writer, Seattle: "Our streets will have been largely reclaimed from the automobile. Ours will be a city of weekend drivers of cars run on renewable energy. Almost everyone will live within walking distance of a pedestrian zone where they can shop for groceries, stop in for a beer at the tavern, visit the library or community center, stroll through the park or catch a commuter train. Traffic-free areas will be the hubs around which cities turn, for we will have realized that walking builds community."

Pauline Tangiora, Maori tribal elder, New Zealand: "Nuclear testing will stop. Dumping of the world's waste into the Pacific will stop. Native timber will not be cleared to make room for exotic trees just because they can be harvested over a shorter period of time. Overfishing and the contamination of the sea and rivers must be stopped."

Eduardo J. Viola, political science professor, University of Brasilia: "In the Brazil of 2050 people are well fed. Food is produced through sustainable agriculture with biological and insect control, soil and water conservation, and minimal use of chemical inputs. The population has been stabilized. Women and men share the same status. Preventive care forms the basis of the health-care system. Basic education is free and public. Teachers are well-paid and highly regarded."

People everywhere dream of peace, harmonious communities, environmental wholeness and simple sufficiency. Leaders everywhere work hard to convince us that war is necessary, hatred is inevitable, the environment is a luxury and there's no such thing as enough.

Somewhere there is a terrible disconnect. *Choosing Our Future: Visions of a Sustainable World* is edited by Tanzi Nagpal and Camilla Foltz and published by the World Resources Institute in Washington, D.C.



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U.N. Forum: Values in a Global Society

(Continued from page 10)

their personal values. She and other conference participants will work to understand how individuals prioritize and act upon personal values. She hopes that her work at this conference will result ultimately in a higher level of discourse about shared values that will sustain us in our interdependent world.

Further work on global values will consist of collaborative roundtable discussions and forums that work toward defining and developing the life skills we need in order to close the gap between our ideals and our actions. Nancy has contributed a chapter on these personal and social skills for a peaceful society in *A People's Response to Our Global Neighborhood*, available from the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. To order call (617)491-1169.



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Light Out of Africa



Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

—Nelson Mandela, president,
Republic of South Africa, from his
1994 inaugural speech

Musings

A column dedicated to the exploration of current thinking. The Muses, from Greek mythology, were the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, each of whom presided over a different art or science. A muse is a guiding spirit and a source of inspiration.

Shifts in Consciousness: Re-Connecting Mind and Body

by *Richmond Mayo-Smith*

*“There was a deep shift in the consciousness of Western Europe that began in the late Middle Ages and has continued into our own time.... The shift involves valuing reason above wisdom, **the abstract above the embodied**, the quantified above the intuited, the archetypically masculine above the archetypically feminine.”*

These words, written by James Thornton in joint authorship with Martin Borosin, appear in the Winter 1995 issue of *ReVision* magazine. James was the co-director of the *Summer Institute for a Sustainable Future* offered by the Center for Psychology and Social Change (see page 23). Helping to regain balance following these interconnected shifts is the purpose of the Center for Psychology and Social Change. This musing is about the “abstract above the embodied.”

It is difficult to imagine how much of our living has moved into the abstract. Twenty years ago I read a report that, at the turn of this century, people growing up gained seventy percent of their knowledge from direct personal experience and only thirty percent vicariously. The report estimated that in the 1970s the ratio was reversed.

One of the most useful items I remember from my days at the Harvard Graduate School of Education is a story. An elementary school teacher taught her class, “Milk comes from a cow.” They all got it right. Next she asked the children, “What is a cow?” The answers were: “A man who comes in the morning.” “A bottle.” “A store.” One child said, “An animal,” and when questioned further, described the animal as being the size of a dog. She had seen it in a book: “C for cow and D for dog.” The teacher then took them to a farm. They saw a cow, and some did not drink milk for a week.

It is fascinating to speculate where we are headed. Mitchell Kapor, founder of Lotus Development Corporation and designer of Lotus 1-2-3, describes how one of the leaders of artificial intelligence “prefers virtual sunsets to real sunsets—a virtual sunset is a representational image done in a computer graphic—because it is perfect and you can have it whenever you want it.” Kapor concludes “that if we lose our ability to prefer the real over the virtual, we will have a sickness of the soul that will be far greater than anything that has been previously imagined” because “the real is deep.

It is mysterious. It is complex. It is always changing. If people are not even aware that there is a distinction to be made—that would be terribly dangerous.” (*tricycle: the Buddhist Review*, Summer 1994)

Awareness is key, awareness of how often your mind is in one place and your body in another; awareness of how often what your body is telling you is ignored. Our bodies’ way of knowing is a great resource and we need to use the attention to the here and now it demands. A suggestion was once made that the button the President might use to detonate atomic bombs be buried in the flesh of its carrier, so the President would be forced to act on a body as a way of getting him out of abstract decision-making. It is a gruesome suggestion but it has a message—use the imagination given by the body as well as that of the abstract mind.

How might we balance our knowing between mind and body? In 1993 I attended an Applied Deep Ecology school in Shenoa, California. In her first talk, co-director Elizabeth Roberts described how all the faculty had been asked to speak at the edge of their knowledge, to take risks. Consequently, she would be presenting “some thoughts in my mind which are not yet fully in my body, and other thoughts in my body which are not yet fully conscious in my mind.” I was struck by how she saw full knowing as an integration of mind and body.



Richmond Mayo-Smith is a retired educator and the former chair of the board of directors for the Center for Psychology and Social Change.

Extraordinary Experience Research at PEER

by Caroline McLeod

There is a story told by Colin Turnbull of pygmies who lived deep in the rain forests of Africa. They journeyed for the first time in their lives to Lake Victoria, where there were people far out on the water, fishing. However, the pygmies were unable to perceive the fishermen on the boats. Instead, the pygmies spoke with puzzlement about things that looked like ants crawling on a leaf, though what they saw did not quite make sense to them. Because they had never before been in an environment with large expanses of space, the pygmies had never seen an object recede into the distance, becoming smaller and smaller as it moved farther and farther away. They were unable to perceive what psychologists call size constancy. Based on their history of living in the dense rainforest, the pygmies saw ants instead of people, even though they knew that ants on a leaf did not adequately explain what they saw. After several weeks of observing the boats moving back and forth on the shore and speaking among themselves, they were able to shift their understanding of reality to include objects observed on open expanses of water and land.

Turnbull doesn't tell us how these people were received by members of their own tribe upon their return to their homeland. How do you suppose they described and explained to their own people about vast expanses, so different from their rainforest homes? Did the other members of the tribe think about this other land in terms of belief and superstition? Were the travellers treated as special members of the society, or were they thought to be crazy?

It may be that many people are now facing situations similar to that of the pygmies who were struggling to understand their puzzling perceptions. More than 2,000 individuals have contacted the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER), a project of the Center for Psychology and Social Change, to report that they think they have had some extraordinary experience. By definition, an extraordinary experience is an experience which occurs at the edge of our culturally shared, commonly accepted reality. Most commonly, these experiences involve a strange encounter with technologically superior, nonhuman beings. Our society remains unsure about how to understand these experiences and how to relate to these people.

Most of the people contacting PEER cannot explain what they have seen in terms of the reality which we all share. They often speak in terms of "dreams that seem real," or they describe strange events with conviction in one breath, and with questions about their own sanity in the next. Many are in distress and are looking for explanations for what they have experienced.

Just as the pygmies began to describe and puzzle over the incongruous ants on the leaf, PEER seeks to document and

describe the perceptions and characteristics of extraordinary human experience. In order to explore the range of extraordinary experiences and better understand the people who report them, we ask individuals contacting PEER who think they may have had an unusual experience to fill out a survey. Most people had heard of PEER through Dr. John Mack's book on the alien abduction phenomenon, or through his televised appearances on the subject. Dr. Mack, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, is the founding director of the Center for Psychology and Social Change. The survey is ten pages long, and covers subjects from demographic status to psychic experiences. We have sent out 404

surveys so far, and 235 have been returned to us, providing a 58 percent return rate.

We were interested in several areas of extraordinary experience, ranging from the backgrounds of people who report these experiences, to social aspects affecting the perception of anomalous events. Our major findings based on the first 200 surveys follow.

Demographics of the Survey Respondents

We wondered if people who report extraordinary experiences were on the fringe of society. We found that our respondents had the following characteristics:

- 25 percent were professionals or manager
- 43 percent were male, 57 percent were female
- 94 percent were white
- 81 percent had taken some college courses
- 46 percent completed a college degree
- 56 percent were married or in a long-term relationship

By definition, an extraordinary experience is an experience which occurs at the edge of our culturally shared, commonly accepted reality.



- 75 percent had children
- 50 percent had been in their present line of work for ten years or more
- Median family income was \$60,000.

Categories of Extraordinary Experiences

In order to get a sense of what kinds of extraordinary experiences were reported, we asked our respondents if they had had “memories not obtained under hypnosis of events that are not usually accepted by most people as part of reality.” Surprised by the variety of anomalous experiences reported, we coded and categorized them according to a coding system with over 90 percent interrater reliability.

- 38 percent of our sample reported memories that contained clear images of what has become known as the alien abduction experience.
- 9 percent reported memories that contained elements suggestive of abduction, but without interviews, it was impossible to be sure how to categorize them.
- 19 percent described experiences that contained purely psychic elements, such as precognition, remote viewing, telepathy, and telekinesis.
- 7 percent of the sample described their memories in a distinctive manner that made us wonder about psychopathology; the reports tended to show pervasive lack of coherence, grandiosity, or paranoia.
- 19 percent reported other experiences which ranged in form, from ecstatic and other religious phenomena to other unusual, unclassifiable events.
- 7 percent reported no unusual memories; these respondents tended to report unusual dreams instead.
- 2 percent returned surveys that were incoherent, with answers that failed to conform to questions we asked, and which we categorized as uncodable.

The Impact of Extraordinary Experiences

We wondered whether extraordinary experiences were part of a well-formed alternative worldview, or whether they occurred contrary to expectation. We asked respondents to rate the impact of their experience on a scale with “no change” at one end and “a lot of change” on the other, and whether the change was permanent or not.

We found that unusual experiences seem to have profound impact because what is perceived is so profoundly challenging to what is understood to be “real.” John Mack, in his work with abduction experiences, calls this factor “ontological shock.”

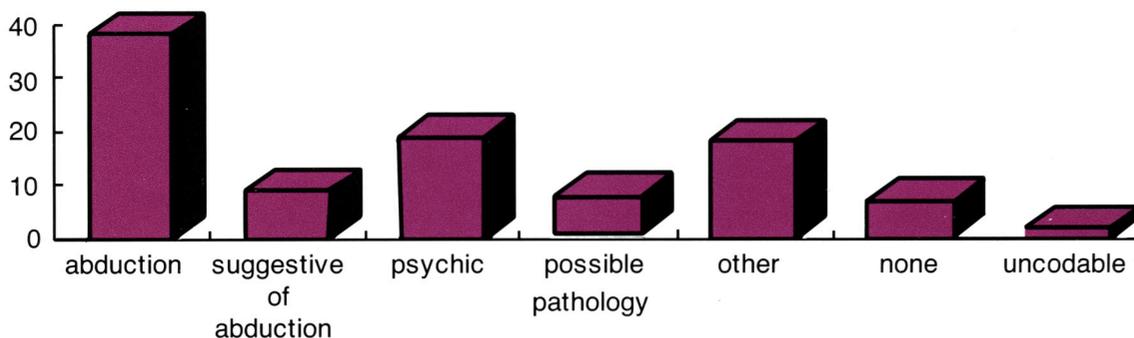
Forty percent of our sample reported that their experience brought maximum change. Abduction experiences seemed to create the most impact of all; 48 percent of individuals reporting abduction experiences were significantly more likely to report that the experiences resulted in *maximum, permanent change*, whereas only 28 percent of individuals reporting other experiences reported such change.

Memory Disturbance and Extraordinary Experience

We were also interested in exploring whether gaps in memory were associated with unusual experiences, particularly abduction experiences. Abduction researcher Budd Hopkins has found that a high percentage of his clients report “missing time” episodes in conjunction with a UFO or alien sighting. We know that gaps in memory can occur when people have been exposed to a traumatic event. These gaps might also be symptoms of a more pervasive dissociative disorder, in which continuity of consciousness is regularly disrupted in response to stress.

Contrary to expectations, only half of our sample reported a gap in memory not associated with drugs or a head injury. Reported memory gaps tended to be short-term and

Categories of Extraordinary Experiences Reported



infrequent; of those who reported this gap, most people (71 percent) reported that it happened one to three times, for a period of between fifteen minutes to three hours. So it seems that the experience of the memory gap was unusual in the lives of our respondents, which is evidence against the presence of a dissociative disorder.

Unexpectedly, the incidence of a gap in memory was similar for people reporting extraordinary experiences (53 percent), but was significantly lower in the 12 individuals reporting no unusual experiences (17 percent). Interviews need to be conducted to ascertain the *context* for these gaps in memory. What aspects of an unusual experience is associated with the memory gap? Could a memory gap be related to ontological shock and an inability to assimilate an undeniable experience into current cognitive structures? Is disrupted memory a defensive move to protect the self from the memory of a traumatic experience? Or do extraordinary experiences occur in an altered state of consciousness, making memories difficult to recall while in a normal state of consciousness?

Hypnosis

Hypnosis is known to be associated with some distortion in the “recovery” of memories. It has been suggested that abduction experiences are products of hypnotic trance induced by the researcher. We wondered in how many situations hypnosis was used to recover information about an extraordinary experience.

Hypnosis was reported by 51 percent of our sample, but was not associated with any one kind of extraordinary experience. Since almost half of abduction experiencers (45 percent) had never been hypnotized, their accounts cannot be attributed to hypnotic elaboration. *Of those abduction experiencers who underwent hypnosis, 97 percent of them reported that their strange memories existed before hypnosis and were often the motivating force for seeking hypnosis.* Thus, in these data, hypnosis and the distortions it introduces do not seem to adequately explain abduction reports or any other kind of extraordinary experience.

It does seem clear that hypnosis is a preferred method for exploring unusual experiences in a high proportion of individuals who report them. Why would this be true? First, hypnosis may provide a safe social role to present crazy-sounding material. Hypnotically recovered narration can always be disavowed or held in doubt, and is therefore more comfortable for the experiencer to report. Second, memories of an anomalous experience may be laid down while a person is in an altered state—either one of high arousal corresponding to shock and disbelief, or some other altered state related to the experience itself. Such memories may not

be accessible from an ordinary state of consciousness. Thus, hypnosis may provide the altered state necessary to retrieve material laid down as state-dependent memories.

The level of distortion created by hypnosis remains a source of controversy, however, and for this reason, material recovered under hypnosis must be compared across individuals and with material reported in an ordinary state of consciousness. In their case studies, abduction researchers have used this method to glean the most important aspects of the abduction phenomenon, though this kind of research has yet to be undertaken with large samples or with other forms of extraordinary experience. Such research would not only help us document the characteristics of extraordinary experience, it would help investigate what aspects of experience are most likely to be remembered and what aspects are most likely to be distorted by altered states.

Mental Health, Psychotherapy, and Extraordinary Experience

Given that the report of an extraordinary experience is often a sign of psychopathology to mental health professionals, we wondered how people reporting anomalous experiences related to psychotherapy. Were they mentally ill or psychologically unsophisticated? How have they fared with psychotherapists?

A surprising 71 percent of the sample reported having gone to a psychotherapist or a counselor at some time in their lives, but only 8 percent were currently in therapy. The high incidence of exposure to therapy is probably a reporting effect—individuals who have been to counselors are more likely to be sure of their mental status and may be more willing to come forward to participate in psychological research.

Thirteen percent of the sample reported having sought help from a counselor for problems stemming from abduction experiences. Clinicians and researchers report that abduction experiencers often suffer from post-traumatic symptoms such as nightmares, trouble concentrating, phobic avoidance of situations and objects symbolically linked to the abduction material, and emotional intrusions related to their reported experience.

The proportions of our sample seeking help for depressive symptoms (17 percent), for schizophrenia (1 percent), and for manic-depression (1 percent) were comparable to the proportions in the general United States population. At 17 percent, our sample was about two times more likely to seek help for anxiety as the general population. The findings are similar to those of other researchers of abduction experiencers, who find a low incidence of serious

(Continued on page 26)

Ecopsychology in a Maximum Security Prison

by Michael Nicastro

This is a story about the ripple effect.

Sarah A. Conn, Ph.D., has been teaching a course on the self-world connection for the Center for Psychology and Social Change since 1987. In that same year, Sarah joined the Prison Ashram Project of the Human Kindness Foundation in Durham, North Carolina, and was matched with Michael Nicastro, who is serving a life sentence in a maximum security prison in Alabama. Sarah and Michael were matched together because they had indicated similar spiritual questions and explorations. Michael has been in prison for twenty years, since he was 17.

*This past June, Sarah sent Michael a transcript of a presentation she and her husband, Lane K. Conn, Ph.D., gave on ecopsychology. Michael wrote back (an excerpt entitled "The Snake" appears below), and Sarah and Lane invited him to take via correspondence their semester course, *Ecopsychology: Towards New Models of Mental Health and Psychotherapy*. He began the course readings immediately and responded with the writing below entitled "Boundaries." His weekly writings have been distributed to members of the class and several are shared below. "The Crow" is his introduction to the class, including his response to two questions asked of participants in the first class. "A Large Family" was written after he had completed the readings and his writings in response to them.*

Anyone wishing to correspond with Michael Nicastro may do so at this address: Michael Nicastro 113452, 100 Warrior Lane F-1, Bessemer, AL 35023-7299.

The Crow

Hi! I am an Alabama prisoner and have been one for the last twenty years of my life. Currently, I'm serving a life term sentence for a variety of crimes I committed when I was a much younger, more foolish man.

Over the last ten years or so, I've been struggling to correct those mistakes that led me here, to rebuild my life, to learn of life and how to fully live life.

There are several reasons that I'm drawn to this course. I'm thrilled that mainstream psychologists are now openly considering and validating ancient wisdom and insights expressed in the teachings and lives of shamans, witches, mystics, and many cultures, and I wish to participate in this shift of thinking with the pioneers of our life wave. The small amount of material I've read of ecopsychology also validates many of the experiences I've had as I've opened myself more than in times past; experiences which caused me to question my sanity and wonder if 20 years of incarceration was finally getting to me. Ecopsychology literature also gives a voice to insights that for me have been non-verbal, and gives a common language with those who have similar experiences.

I hope to get from the course a deeper understanding of this vast new world. In turn, I wish to share my discoveries and touch people of like minds who are, from my perspective,

living in a simultaneous parallel dimension. And to further comply with the course requirements, I would briefly like to share a time when a natural being presented itself to me on its own terms.

I run a lot here at the prison. But when I run I don't like to experience myself as a runner running around the field. I like to lose my sense of personal identity of experience. It is one of the many reciprocal processes that occur as a result of running. In t'ai-chi we're taught to perform the dance as if we swim in air, to feel the resistance of the air against us as we move. When I run I become the air pressing against me from all sides. I become the ground rising to meet each step. I become the awareness of the carbon dioxide I exhale being inhaled by trees surrounding the prison. My heartbeat becomes the pulse of all life.

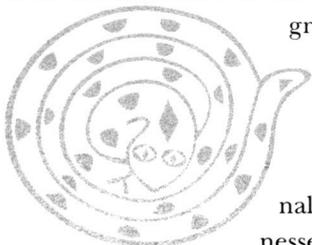
This past Sunday as I was running, my daily armor relaxed and I became aware of a crow cawing loudly in the trees. I stopped to try and locate the crow because I was being called to. And although I couldn't discover the crow visually, its presence became more an audible one. As the crow was asking me to respond, I noticed a pattern... two caws, a pause, and then three caws... a pause, then a long shrill caw, then the two, three pattern repeated.

So I began to imitate the pattern and caw in return. The crow and I began to caw to each other. As soon as I ceased

***I've learned that
for every step
I take towards
Nature, she
takes two
towards me.***

to caw, the crow began. When it ceased, I began. I intuited that the crow was somewhat anxious at not being able to locate its family of six other crows and was cawing to them. Simultaneously I intuited that I was also cawing to try and locate my family as well. The crow thought it was looking for its family of crows, while I was crying out in loneliness to mine. And we both discovered each other and our extended family.

When the crow and I quit... the moment ceased as quickly as it began... I pulled some hair from my leg and blew it in the direction of the crow's cawing as a token of my gratitude. The crow, in turn, gave me a feather.



The Snake

We may be covering up the signals from the earth by treating illnesses at the level of symptoms. But even if we are (and I'm sure we are) we still can't make absolutes out of this realization that cause us to react and go to the other end of the spectrum and cease placing emphasis on the individual treatment. Every little bit helps and contributes to the whole. A full frontal, holistic approach is the order of the day.

When it comes to how we got here, Krishnamurti always emphasized that understanding the cause does not bring freedom from the effects and is often an escape from the effects.

I really like techniques to help people connect, loosen their boundaries, and expand their sense of self. What really was pivotal in helping me do this was my friend Wayne Carter. The guy who wrote all the poems, do you remember him? Anyway, one day I was down and pouring my heart out about not getting visits, receiving no money and hardly any mail— just going into my loneliness. I remember that he told me that when all his human relations failed, he turned to non-human ones. Then he showed me a poem he wrote one day while conversing with a “lump of grass” in the exercise yard. It was entitled, “A Clump of Grass” and really inspired me to approach all things as animate and sentient and to explore ways to share with them. My tentative approaches were overwhelmingly successful and these served to reinforce my desires and increase my openness. I've learned that for every step I take towards Nature, she takes two towards me.

I am still clumsy and brutish, but she is patient. Here's a recent example. On my birthday (May 31), I went outside early in the morning to go for a long run. I was walking the track

(which is really a well-worn path) and I noticed a feather. I scooped to pick it up. As I bent to get it, I noticed a fairly large rattlesnake coiled about ten inches from my right foot. I wasn't afraid but was taken by its beauty. The snake was actually sleeping with its eyes closed. I caught him and played with him awhile. But in doing so, I attracted a large group of cons.

Fear killed the snake. They feared that if I let it go it would find a way to eventually bite someone. I was afraid to go against the “public mood,” so I let them kill the snake who presented himself so gently. I really felt bad too. I made an offering to the snake by giving some of my hair to the spot we met, and by learning how fear kills and growing so that such foolishness on my part won't happen again. I actually cried. The snake did not want me to let the crowd have him and wanted me to try to chuck him over the fence. But I didn't. I should've just faced the consequences of the crowd.

Yet because I was willing to learn to seek relationship in even death, the spirit of the snake still resides with me, teaching me. And I know that the next time will be different. He was beautiful, too, Sarah. The day ended with a blazing rainbow in the eastern sky.

It's part of my world now to approach Creation as alive and intelligent (even storm systems). I'm so grateful that I've awakened to that “bond” you spoke of. I am telling you from first-hand experience that there is enormous potential in allowing the earth to teach us how to live sustainably in all of our relations. One can even live with rattlesnakes.

Boundaries

It's hot as hell as I'm sitting here writing you. The dorms aren't air-conditioned and the only fans are three large ceiling fans that pull air inside through the windows. My window faces the asphalt pavement in front of the dorms and the air that's pulled in is incredibly hot, since the asphalt holds heat and often it gets as hot as 130°. Compound that with these metal pre-fab dorms and you can imagine how hot it gets. Whew!

I've just started your book [*Ecopsychology*] and found that you have a chapter too! I've not made it through Hillman's introduction yet. He is a very skilled writer. I liked the way he showed just how open to debate the boundary of the self actually is. Ken Wilber did the same in his “Spectrum of Consciousness,” and he also gave a couple of exercises that one could perform and prove experientially the unreality of the boundary.

There are two things I'm curious about, though. In showing that there are no boundaries to the self in the



"...because I was willing to learn to seek relationship in even death, the spirit of the snake still resides with me, teaching me."

examples Hillman used, he logically reasoned that there are no boundaries except one we arbitrarily construct. But I wonder about this...

Perhaps one reason that boundaries can't be located is because we (humans) are composite beings and have bodies, or aspects of self, on levels other than the physical, or on levels more subtle, and therefore it's

impossible to locate boundaries that we can apprehend using the lower, more dense centers. And just because we're unable to locate boundaries, doesn't necessarily mean there aren't any.

I've also been studying some basic genetic concepts at the same time I'm reading your book. The same evening I read Hillman, I also studied about the structure of cells and saw some possible parallels between the structure of cells and the self and its boundaries.

A cell, by definition, is a self-contained living unit. That definition also describes humans too. A cell has a membrane that encloses the nucleus, ribosome, mitochondria, membrane network, and the cytoplasm. The cell membrane acts as a protector by allowing only certain things into or out of when functioning optimally.

Perhaps we have boundaries, too, that we just don't arbitrarily create anymore than a cell arbitrarily creates its own membrane, and that serves similar purposes.

I know from my own experiences with psychedelic drugs that our brains have filters that filter out a lot of sensory data so that we can function without sensory overload. Psychedelics temporarily kick the filter out, and one experiences all sorts of "hallucinations" as a result. Perhaps we have boundaries of the self that serve in a similar capacity. Our skin is indeed a boundary on one level of our "composite self." Imagine yourself without it!

And in order to demonstrate to someone that we are connected to the world at large, it may be unnecessary to dialectically demonstrate there are no boundaries, and it may be unwise in the long run. It is quite possible that cranks and quacks could cause this pioneering science of the soul to degenerate into superstitious solipsism. One must, when preserving new and revolutionary ideas to the masses, take into account their level of understanding.

I've discovered I have to be very careful in trying to show people that the self is all-inclusive and that I am the rocks, the trees, the river, and the stars. They look at me like... "You've lost

it." And even though what I'm saying is true in a sense, I must be cautious and discerning how I present that truth.

Also... having boundaries, in and of itself, may not be harmful. The membrane surrounding our cells doesn't inhibit them from remaining connected to the world at large. Pathology may be defined as boundaries becoming rigid, hard, so that an exchange of energies and data isn't able to flow unimpeded in a reciprocal sense.

Cells at the molecular level coalesce and form ascending higher structures. I see us humans similarly... individual cells forming a higher structure (the human race). And all species of flora and fauna being also structures made up of smaller cells. Us all comprising an even higher structure, the planet, which is itself a cell within a larger body, that is also a cell. Subsets within sets to infinity.

But some cells become cancerous when rampant individuality occurs. It does seem that the human cell has become cancerous, our boundaries individually and collectively, not allowing a free exchange of energies and data.

I look forward to the readings!

A Large Family

This is really a good course—it has helped me greatly. One thing it has done is to give me a sense of connection by making me aware of the existence of many people who see as I do. In prison things get strange sometimes because there aren't any people here who think like this. Oh, they may intellectually consider such ideas, but the ideas aren't living realities. Every one of the writers in the book and the handouts I intuitively know that what they write about comes from direct experience. It's like being lost and all alone and then discovering the existence of a large family. And even though I don't know any of the people personally, like I do you, still, I know them. I would love to spend time with all of them.

A lot of my discoveries have been validated as well so that now I don't feel strange, or weird.

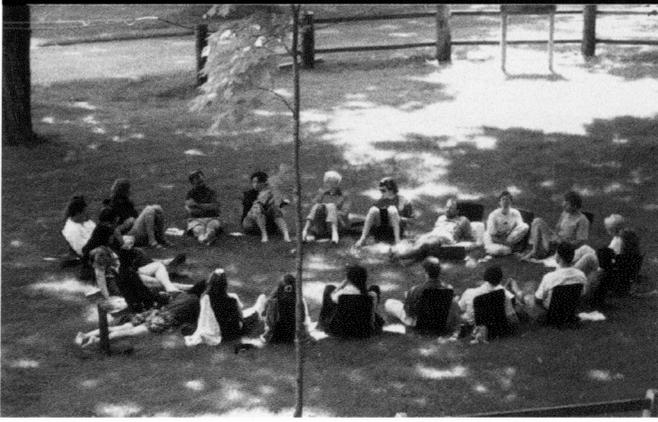
Doing all of the writing [for the course] has helped me greatly as it has allowed me to see what's inside myself more clearly and give a somewhat clearer expression to insights and ideas that have heretofore been somewhat nebulous.

I'm grateful to you both for allowing me to participate and for taking it back to the people. As a race, we face many problems that if aren't rectified will have very severe consequences. I don't know how to best present the answer, but I feel honored to have a kinship with those who are learning how. Yes, indeed.

May the blessings be! Love, Michael



AFTER THE SUMMER INSTITUTE:



Circle of participants

Graduate Students Committed to a Sustainable Future

The Center for Psychology and Social Change, in association with Positive Futures and Integral Sustainability Associates, offered its first Summer Institute for a Sustainable Future, June 12–19, 1995, at Green Pastures Estate in Epping, New Hampshire. This pilot program was a great success and was attended by twenty highly talented graduate students. The faculty included Sarah Conn, Ph.D., David Ison, Will Keepin, Ph.D., Vivienne Simon, J.D., and James Thornton, J.D. The curriculum combined experiential and contemplative practices and included presentations on biophilia and Gaia theory, new paradigms in physics, deep ecology exercises, Holotropic breathwork, psycho-acoustic therapy, theory and practice of ecopsychology, transpersonal psychology, and meditation practices. Plans are under way for two events next summer, one on the west coast and one on the east coast. Graduate students interested may call the Center to be included on the mailing list, (617) 497-1553.

A sense of community has developed for the participants in the institute, who have formed a discussion group on the Internet to continue learning and supporting each other. The following pieces are reflections from some of the students about their experience.

The Summer Institute for me is still emerging as a validation of some deeply held perceptions and a turning point in my professional development. The richness of quality and variety of participants and facilitators made this institute one of the defining moments of my quest for a lifestyle worth living... Once the program was under way, I knew that I was finally in the company of like-minded and like-hearted people, and I felt a sense of rightness and belonging to the group and sharing the concerns that we were expressing. Personally, I had a few moments that were especially powerful that might capture some of what these words are struggling to express. Here is one of them:

Walking toward my quarters at night from the council room where we had just finished a day's activities, I came upon two of the group who had stopped under a light by the path and were standing, looking quietly at the pathway at their feet. We had agreed to maintain the noble silence of a spiritual retreat for the night, so I did not ask them why they had stopped there. After a few moments, I realized that they were looking at a large toad or frog who was parked motionlessly in the middle of the walk. While the three humans and one frog shared this space together for some brief time, I began to feel a sense of honor for my buddies, who had cultivated the attention to take careful notice of the frog in the road. I felt a sense of honor for the frog as well, who was symbolizing so much for each of us in those moments. (For me, he was like a silent meditator, showing us how to "just sit," and like a messenger from the animal world, reminding us to be aware of those smaller, quieter, and more froggy than ourselves.)

About a minute after I had arrived, the other two moved on down the path toward our rooms to turn in for the night, and I remained for a little longer. I stayed in part to continue in this serendipitous communion, and also to wait to see if there were more of the group who were coming down the path, so I might act as a reminder to them, as the others had for me, to take a moment and contemplate ourselves in the context of a shared world, where walking down the path can offer opportunities for so much more than just getting from point A to point Z.

After a time, I decided that I was probably the last of our group, and so I bid the frog a silent farewell and continued on my way.

—Michael DiIanni, Ph.D. student in psychology, Massachusetts School for Professional Psychology

Living within a paradigm shift is difficult at the best of times, but it is particularly challenging when one is actively working to bring about the transformation. Feelings of isolation, burnout, and confusion can haunt, numb, and even immobilize a person.

At times like these, personal affirmation is a godsend. And when that affirmation is contextualized within a community, the re-creation of spirit is greatly magnified. This affirmation through community was but one of the gifts manifested during the Summer Institute, yet for me, it was perhaps the most momentous.

Such affirmation took several forms. I was personally affirmed, both through the opportunity to share my ideas and talents with others, and by their desire to share their gifts and thoughts with me. And, of course, this affirmation was

concurrently extended to everyone else through the web of our community. We were all valued for what we had to offer, and were strengthened by the recognition that others deliberately chose to share themselves with us.

These exchanges took place face to face, not through the anonymous communication of words and ideas in articles or texts, but by striving to be wholly present to each other. We created a communion of whole people, flourishing and journeying together within the rest of the earth community. We spoke, listened, touched, laughed, and cried, all of us, human and non-human, in one grand and blessed meal.

And I am equally thrilled by the way in which we have maintained our affirming community. We continue to exchange ideas, suggestions, struggles, and hopes via our Internet discussion list, now able to envision and re-experience the people who send us e-mail messages ...

I find that this affirmation through community nurtures, inspires, and brings joy and strength. I cherish it, just as I cherish each person I met at the Summer Institute.

—Dennis Patrick O'Hara, Ph.D. student in theology, University of Toronto

It was exciting to be able to share some gems I have acquired and see them received with appreciation. Too often most of the world doesn't seem receptive to them, and that makes me feel lonely sometimes.

A beautiful, leaderful group emerged. From hurting to hearting, me-ing to we-ing, we, for a moment, felt eco's psyche flowing.

—Claudia Robinson, Masters graduate in physics, Clemson University

It's good to be connected again. Back from Green Pastures, I walked the land and returned home. It's the end of a hemlock glen where a stone wall comes to a gentle curve, due south of a small house I helped build, seven years ago. The gossamer dwelling is pitched facing north and east, toward Nova Scotia, namesake of my ancestors' land.

I found all of my relations at the institute. This realization's silent tears are older than the rings in my tree-like bones. I can taste a salty eon's worth of joy, distilled. If our global future is

to sustain us, it will be through the strength of layers past, holding forth sane present, to continue building layers past, of strength. The same wires I set seven years ago that power my computer in the woodland house send light through an enlarger in the darkroom I designed.

Implicate order? Renaissance. A modem now connects me with my ancestors whose present faces I've come to truly know in one week that held centuries, quiet and pervasive as the sunshine, last June. A tulip tree was blossoming.

The institute experience was one that now provides the fuel of meaningful intimacy, borne by shared goals, to the work which I will carry on for the rest of my life—engendering joy for this Earth's healing through the field of environmental communications. The work of turning frowns to smiles can be exhausting. But I'm part of a well of help, understanding, varied insights, and talent which magnifies my efforts. These waters are a computer's touch away, every day, until face to face through years to come. It's what's really always been within me, implicate, now explicate and standing on the practical plane of this world's tasks.

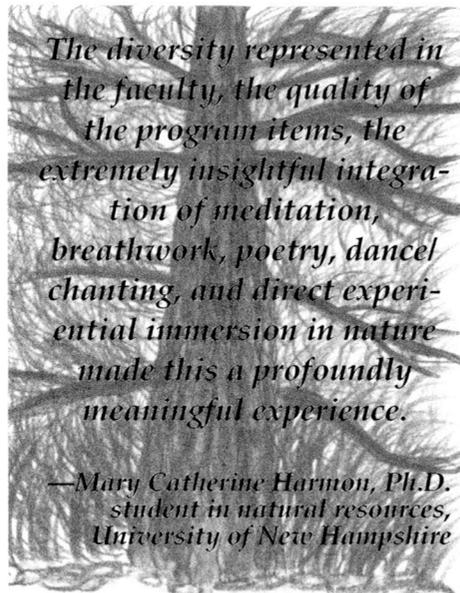
I brought the culmination of a project with me to Green Pastures and future participants might do the same. With a concrete item in my hand—a learning tool for coming to know the properties of Gaia—the input I received was invaluable. I know now that, with the strength of all of my relations, continually revitalized in a meditative space, I will bring this tool to life in our world's commercial marketplace. It's what I can do when I quietly persist within the realm of this Earth's strength.

—Pamela Allison Moore, Masters graduate in environmental studies, Antioch New England Graduate School

Answering Earth's Call: Integrating Mind and Nature with Open Hearts

This is the first ecopsychology networking and discussion list on the internet for sharing artful, spirited, and scientific discussion, on a wide range of topics related to the emerging field of ecopsychology.

To subscribe send a message to:
LISTSERV@SJUVM.STJOHNS.EDU or
LISTSERV@LISTSERV.NET
subscribe ecopsychology planet earth
Owner: Claudia Robinson<claudia@hubcap.clemson.edu>



The diversity represented in the faculty, the quality of the program items, the extremely insightful integration of meditation, breathwork, poetry, dancel chanting, and direct experiential immersion in nature made this a profoundly meaningful experience.

—Mary Catherine Harmon, Ph.D. student in natural resources, University of New Hampshire

An Interview with Judith Thompson

(Continued from page 5)

“Of course, the beauty of the work Children of War did was that this was not what we talked about. We basically had experiential processes where people began to experience connectedness to each other, as well as a sense of self that was new and expanded. When they would go out into public high schools to meet with their peers, they were sharing that message through who they were being—and the radiance was palpable. The radiance was forged by the willingness and the courage to walk through a process of healing and wholeness, and of reclaiming vision, and of falling deeply in love with each other.”

Supporting New Visionary Leaders

“I’ve talked a lot about the healing process here and its relationship to personal transformation. All of us doing this work came out of the social justice movement and were longtime activists on many fronts. Our commitment was to help develop youth leaders for social transformation who would bring the movement new vision and compassion. It’s a delicate alchemy to commit your life to justice, to hold accountable the perpetrators of genocide, torture, and abuse, *and* to begin to hold out a picture of a world beyond dualities, to begin to disclaim ‘we and they’ thinking. It is the paradox of the work. It is especially challenging for young people who have been victims of torture, imprisonment, or loss of family. Yet the courage it takes to do that, to see clearly, fight for justice, and have compassion for all people—that courage has such a high wattage output that it transcends being a personal act and becomes transpersonal. It pulls through a lot of energy. Martin Luther King was a good example of this, and so is Arn Chorn.

“These are the kind of leaders we need. Those who are steeped in the suffering of their people—all people—yet able to rise from the ashes with a torch of compassion in their hands. The deeper the darkness, the brighter the light must be.

“We create our reality. I think most of us affiliated with the Center tend to believe that now. If that’s so, then we need, as much as possible, to feel that we are acting out of a free space and not one encumbered by a lot of wounds or reaction to things—with access to clear energy and the ability to respond to situations in front of us. Our understanding of the healing

process and its relationship to social change and advocacy work was a new element introduced to the whole process of leadership training. Most leadership training in the socio-political realm doesn’t deal with looking at the insides of individuals, only the causes they represent.

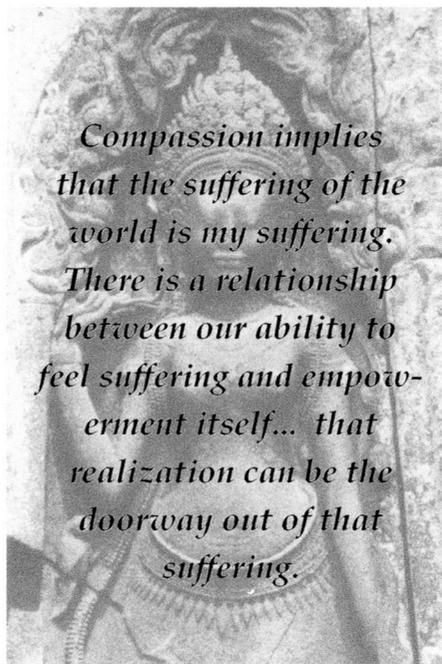
“Children of War chose to work intensely with the leadership of limited numbers of people in the belief that those numbers of people would themselves have an impact upon larger groups of people. If you can bring out the true power inherent in individuals acting freely from love, they themselves will turn around and multiply that many fold.

“People embody the world in themselves, don’t they? When you can really be present with any individual you enter an entire universe. That’s the beautiful mystery of the holographic universe—the whole is present in the parts. My intent is to find the world in individuals. To understand that love power, transformation power, change power that is released every time two individuals or fifty take the time to be present with each other.

“I think that that has been what’s calling me, not only with Children of War as an organization, but in my daily interactions. As I have moved beyond the form of an organization which had a history, into a more fluid way of being with my own calling, I recognize it to be about helping be a catalyst to release love energy wherever it can be done. The form for me continues to be in my relationship

with young people, it’s a history that I’ve had for fifteen years. I know young people everywhere around the world. Whenever I can mentor or be a part of their lives and help them move forward in their own human spiritual growth, I do. That is why most of the young people I know come to me now—I give them organizing support, I give them financial support, I do a lot of different things. But mostly I help them hold the space, vision, and self-love which is very important to fulfill their dreams.”

Judith speaks with conviction and clarity. I’ve heard her present the work of Children of War a number of times and I am always deeply moved. It is a wonder that someone can be so open, positive, and hopeful after hearing endless horror stories of so many young people’s abuse. Compassion, community, commitment, and courage are not just ideals but principles, deep foundational principles one lives by moment to moment, and in doing so transforms the world into a global community inspired by love.



Extraordinary Experience Research

(Continued from page 19)

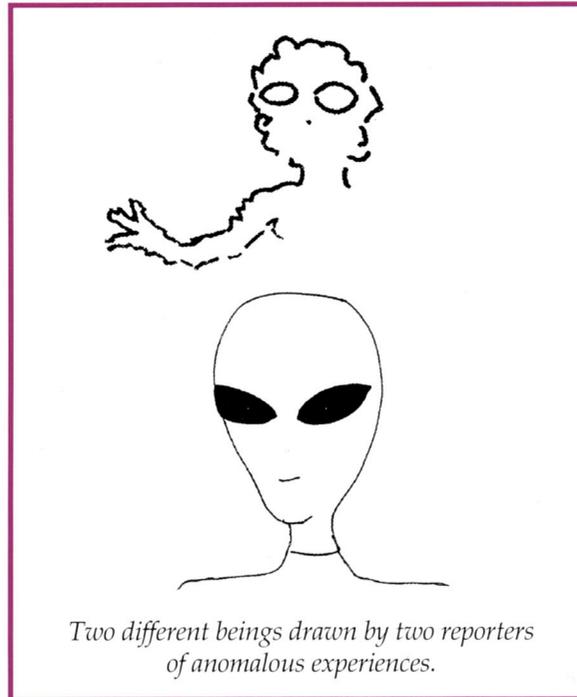
psychopathology among individuals reporting such experiences.

Our sample was slightly more likely than the general population to be taking psychoactive medication; 19 percent of our respondents were taking psychoactive medications, compared to 12 percent of the general population. Most of the medications reported were anxiolytics and antidepressants; only 4 percent of the sample reported taking antipsychotic medication.

We received additional data from a subsample of 71 individuals who answered questions about psychotherapy and their experiences. Seventy-one percent reported that they had disclosed their experience to their therapist. Of those who did disclose their unusual experience to their therapist:

- 34 percent said that disclosure about the experience was unhelpful. Respondents in this group stated that therapists dismissed the experiences as imagination or otherwise refused to address the feelings of the individual involved.
- 14 percent reported that disclosure was harmful. Respondents stated that therapists in this group imposed the label of sexual abuse to the experience or were felt by the respondent to be more interested in the abduction material than in the person who was frightened by it.
- 52 percent said that disclosure of their extraordinary experience to their counselor was helpful. Respondents stated that the sense that they were not alone in trying to cope with their extraordinary experience was extremely helpful. A number of people noted that the caring presence of the counselor made a life-saving difference.

Thus, a psychotherapist can be extremely helpful to individuals dealing with extraordinary experiences when the therapist is able to tolerate not knowing about the reality status of the experience, while paying attention to the feelings and struggles of the person involved.



Social Aspects of Extraordinary Experiences

It is well known that people tend to organize and interpret the ongoing experience of life in terms of shared frameworks of knowledge. We wondered whether interest in UFOs determined how a person described their anomalous experience.

Despite the variety in the kind of experiences reported, a similar high percentage (about 80 percent) in each group reported that they enjoyed UFO books, movies, and television shows. Thus, mere exposure to UFO and abduction material was not sufficient for an individual in

our sample to reorganize and reinterpret an unusual experience in terms of abduction. Our sample had other interests besides ufology; they also reported high interest in documentary (79 percent) and comedy programs (72 percent), as well as science books and periodicals (61 percent).

The high level of interest in UFO material could be a natural consequence of an extraordinary experience. Because human beings live according to shared symbols and knowledge, an individual having an extraordinary experience will try to make sense of that experience by investigating what has happened to other people. This decreases the experienter's sense of isolation and anxiety.

However, there is also a downside. Skeptics often dismiss the consistencies in reports of alien abduction and other extraordinary experiences as the products of media exposure. Not surprisingly, individuals with anomalous experiences who have extensively explored paranormal references have similar concerns; to what degree are memories of past and subsequent experiences influenced by what has been read? It's a difficult bind for the experienter who wants to feel less isolated, but who is also wanting to understand his/her own experience.

A number of people noted that the caring presence of the counselor made a life-saving difference.

Future research into extraordinary experiences will help us understand the relationship between socially constructed images and symbols, and perceptions generated from personal experience. The pygmies' experience shows us that it is difficult for humans to organize in a meaningful way perceptions occurring outside commonly shared symbolic knowledge. To what degree can we differentiate socially constructed images from images of personal experience? How do anomalous phenomena get perceived and organized in meaningful ways by the individual, and how does individual experience influence what is accepted as real within a community?

In summary, we found that people reporting extraordinary experiences seem to have fairly stable lives, with low reports of psychopathology, despite experiences that seem to have high impact. Alien abduction experiences had particularly high impact. Although anomalous experiences could not be explained away as hypnotically constructed memories, the high proportion of the sample exposed to hypnosis and the prevalence of gaps in memory raise questions about the role of altered states in the creation and recovery of memories of extraordinary experiences.

The study of anomalous experiences is important because it is only through the recognition, description, and careful study of anomalies that science moves forward. Just as the pygmies who are described in the introduction of this article needed to observe and discuss the anomaly of the "ants on a leaf" in order to finally perceive the fishermen on the lake, so PEER is actively involved in collecting data about extraordinary experience. And, we expect that, just as the pygmies gained a whole new ability to perceive aspects of their world, so must our study of anomalous experiences expand and enrich our own capacity to perceive that which was previously hidden to us.



Caroline McLeod, Ph.D., is the director of research at PEER, the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research, a project of the Center for Psychology and Social Change.

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JANUARY

Professional Training in Psychosynthesis, Three-year program beginning January 1996, Kansas City, MO, Synthesis International, (816) 941-9926.

Academic Council: Robert Bosnak and Claire Sylvia—*The Psychological Integration of Heart Transplants*, January 11, Macht Auditorium, Cambridge Hospital, Center for Psychology and Social Change, (617) 497-1553.

Creating Integrated Healthcare, First Annual Alternative Therapies Symposium, January 18-20, San Diego, CA, co-sponsored by Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine and Planetree, (800) 899-0753.

Spiritual Psychology: Restoring the Soul with Thomas Yeomans, Ph.D., January 20–21, Cambridge, Interface (617) 876-4600.

Clearing Phobias and Trauma from Physical Injury, January 21, Judith Swack, Ph.D., Cambridge, Interface (617) 876-4600.

Network Chiropractic, January 24, Deborah Miller, D.C., Julie Burke, D.C., and Dan McGovern, Cambridge, Interface (617) 876-4600.

Winter Deep Ecology Retreat, January 26–28, North Quabbin Farm, Petersham, MA, sponsored by EarthSeed Community, (802) 869-3115.

Ecological Psychology and Animism with James Hillman and David Abram, January 28, New York City, Learning Alliance, (212) 226-7171.

FEBRUARY

Ecopsychology: New Models of Mental Health and Psychotherapy, February 7–May 15, Sarah and Lane Conn, Macht Auditorium, Cambridge Hospital, Center for Psychology and Social Change, (617) 497-1553.

Academic Council: Sarah and Lane Conn—*Bringing Ecopsychology into the Practice of Psychotherapy*, February 8, Macht Auditorium, Cambridge Hospital, Center for Psychology and Social Change, (617) 497-1553.

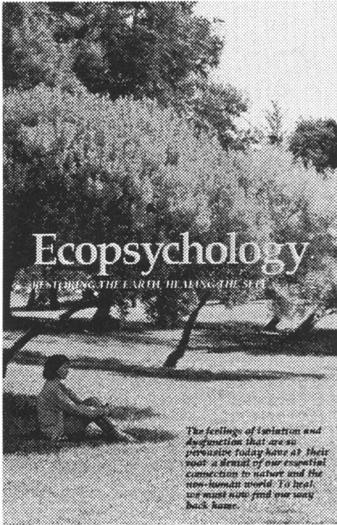
Hawaiian Sailing Expedition, February 12-18 and February 19-25, Kahalui Maui, Ocean Mammal Institute, (610) 670-7386.

MARCH

Mother-Blaming, Women-Blaming, Self-Blaming, March 28, Janet Surrey, Ph.D., Interface (617) 876-4600.

APRIL

Grof Holotropic Breathwork, April 12–13, Helen Gitkind and Honey Black Kay, Interface (617) 876-4600.



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