

this very natural and profound mode of deep and total emotional release is rarely seen today. Why is that? A person undergoing deep emotional discharge with some form of convulsive movements, even if it is just shaking of the jaw, a panting breath or sporadic vocal moaning, is extremely vulnerable and aware of what is going on around him as well as within. If the person feels embarrassed or that he may be embarrassing others, and in today's world this is often the case, then he will not have the emotional openness needed to undergo the full emotional release even if he wanted to.

In the film, 'W.R. The Function of the Organism', we saw a number of people in a group setting undergoing various forms of convulsive emotional discharge. Actually it seemed to me that the people were not for the most part undergoing the genuine emotional relief itself but were doing exercises that invoked the emotional discharge body movements. This is a helpful therapeutic method for reclaiming lost ground. People who become more open to permitting convulsive emotional movements through guided therapeutic exercises will be more capable of undergoing the genuine emotional discharge when the provocative occasion arises. The group was conducted by Dr. Alexander Lowen, one of the foremost body therapists in the world and a pioneer in this field. However, because these film sequences were surrounded by other scenes that were mocking, unserious and sarcastic, I experienced these negative moods infecting the scenes of people undergoing convulsive movements. Thus I felt embarrassed and repulsed when viewing these scenes and felt others would also experience them negatively. Shame and repulsion is what our society trains people to feel upon exposure to one's own or other people's somewhat out of control emotional convulsive body movements. The film re-enforces these negative attitudes of today's civilisation and thus does a disservice to a new form of therapy which is trying to nurture the flower of sensitive vulnerability within each person.

Ron Shepherd

A personal look at the Gestalt 'Prayer'

I never had the privilege of meeting Fritz Perls in person, more's the pity, for I could have had a dialogue with him over his so-called 'Prayer' that bugs me so much right now. It comes at me, these days, from all directions - from A.H.P. and from Pelican books - all dressed up in red like a car sticker. (I wonder if that is how I am expected to use it?) It is also directed at me in a more intimate way in that it is frequently dangled before my eyes by persons struggling with problems of 'Identity', 'Meaning' and 'Purpose' in life, or who are otherwise seeking an encounter with me, for reasons best known to themselves, in evocative and

provocative correspondence. In this context the 'Prayer' is often quoted as a sort of ultimate ethos or aim.

Why did Perls regard it as a 'Prayer' I wonder? How can I relate his expression to my own understanding of Prayer as a spiritual centring; affirmation of being; Identification in Silent Joy; or 'the substance of things hoped for'? If Prayer be an experience of deep communion and fulfilment, why then does the 'Gestalt Prayer' jar so much, in its present form, on my sensitive nerve ends? Wherein lies this note of discordance?

In the simple act of stringing these few words together to discover the limitations in the Gestalt Prayer - and by the same token, in myself - I find that, being a walking question mark for most of my life, hoards of unanswered questions start knocking at the door of consciousness demanding an opportunity to be allowed entry and dance upon the stage of my perceptiveness.

The Gestalt arena looks at the Wholeness of experience therefore the Gestalt Prayer must perforce be a prayer towards the experiencing of global perception of life in the round, seeing things as they are and seeing them whole.

Abraham Maslow (see *Farther Reaches of Human Nature*) goes to the heart of all experience with his assertion that 'Knowledge of one's own DEEP nature is also simultaneously knowledge of human nature in general.' This conjures up the injunction to 'Know Thyself' of an earlier age and culture. How 'deep' - or 'high' - is one's nature? Just what are the limits, if any, to one's openness to new (alternative?) understanding about ourselves and therefore, by the same token, about others - and the relationship between?

While listening to the 'still small voice' within for some intuitive whisper I find George Starbuck Galbraith's poem (1954) float into view:

*To human eyes too much of light
Is blinding as the blackest night
And this is so, too, of the mind,
In total ignorance it's blind,
But more truth than it can absorb
Will overwhelm the mental orb.
So, lest our vision burn to ashes
God shows us truth in bits and flashes,
White revelation that the brain
Can comprehend and yet stay sane.
And we, poor fools, demand truth's noon
Who scarce can bear its crescent moon!*

Can this help to solve my concern and puzzlement over the Gestalt Prayer?

'I do my thing and you do your thing.' - Fair enough, we all need room to breathe our own air. But what if 'your thing' and 'my thing' are really the SAME thing but as we perceive it differently we consider our 'things' are poles apart?

'I am not in this world to live up to your expectations and you are not in this world to live up to mine.' So I crave independence, a life of my own. O.K. But we all share in the One Life together so the same water or matrix of the Universe laps at the shore of our imaginary islands that we have ourselves projected, and in which we now live and move and have our being. We need to grow through and out of this phase as soon as possible.

'You are you and I am I.' Yes, this may be so, but how about you and I being the mirror image of each other? - 'I and Thou', 'Thou and I', 'We Together'? Two people in communication produce a new entity - 'US'. This is the joy of being human for we have the capacity for self-evolution as a trinitarian unit of conscious awareness. You plus I plus the Relationship Between Us equals We Three.

'And if, by chance, we find each other, it's beautiful' runs the Prayer. By chance? By accident? Isn't this another illusory concept? Aren't we drawn to our meeting point by some sort of 'Ipsacausal Synchronicity'? (Charlotte Bach) If we find each other, i.e. truly communicate with each other in depth and height, then it is more of a 'Real' experience than what one experiences in the oceanic experience of great beauty. An experience of 'Reality' in meeting can often be very hard to bear! Awareness of each other at the intersection of the timeless with time - which is true meeting - does not necessarily bring happiness (emotional experience regarded as beautiful) but it does make a man or

woman more Whole, more Alive, more Real, more of a True Person.

'If not, it can't be helped'. (i.e. if we don't 'find' each other). Can't it? Here is a fallacy for sure. By our very human existence we are related to the wholeness of experience - past, present and future - to each other and to all life. It can be helped - by further inward growth towards Wholeness of Being.

So, as I see it, the Gestalt Prayer is a prophesy in part only - a limited view of relationships that, albeit, takes us up to the point where personal 'I' awareness is

made secure and to a limited extent individuated, but to limit ourselves to this vision of achievement debases the greater fullness of therapeutic or learning experience about ourselves and each other.

Words - words - words. Don't they limit and cause division rather than open up the barriers to communication and understanding? For me then it is not the Gestalt Prayer but rather the Prayer of Silence through which one perceives new life in all, through all and around all - the Grand Synthesis.

Peter Wells

Some Notes on Encounter and Social Change

I'd like to start with a general statement and to see now and later whether it works out. A lot of twentieth century developmental and behavioural practice has been concerned with affective (emotional) factors, hence the dominant position of the psychodynamic model associated with Freud, Klein and others. The field of cognitive development, researched extensively by Jean Piaget, has been relatively neglected outside the field of education. Yet it is at the cognitive level that decisions are taken which determine the shape of social institutions, distribution of resources - the whole business of organising life.

Piaget's discovery was that to think is to act, that by the co-ordination of cortical process and physical process the former acquires its characteristic developmental patterns. (The whole concept anyway of distinguishing inner from outer world rests on awareness of body sensations, knowledge of where my body begins and where it ends - or rather does not end but extends into outer space and continues an enlarged existence there.) There is a link here with the concept that political

thought and political action are inseparable.

What is the relevance of all this to encounter groupwork? First of all, encounter is an experiential process and its techniques stay within 'the thin top layer of the immediate here and now'. It involves both verbal and non-verbal communication. It requires participants to 'stay in touch with their bodies', not to intellectualise but to concentrate on immediate experience. It requires certain methods of taking responsibility - 'I am responsible for myself, for all I do, say and think. You are likewise responsible for yourself. I am not responsible for you nor you for me. But you begin at the point where you perceive and experience what I am and what I am depends on the acknowledgement and experience of my existence by you.' (At some point where I extend my body into outer space by use and manipulation of my environment I come into contact with your extension of yourself into the outer world and of your actual physical body and at that point I experience the possibility of conflict or of union with you: that is the primary experience of social reality.)