

Ben Bedi

LOOKING BACK

When we see through our outer mask, face and image, we make contact with those deeper aspects of confusion, knowledge, sadness, joy, humility, arrogance, love and hate. Our aspirations, desires, wants and needs. Our rejection, contempt, sadism and fear. Our pain and of course, our peace.

All these we see behind the smiles, kind words, pleasant behaviour, social intercourse so acceptable, as to award sociability an oscar. And when no-one is looking, the tears penetrate our cheeks like salt in a wound.

I know I want to be free. I know that if I behaved in a manner corresponding to how I felt, I could say goodbye to all those knots in my stomach. Those tremors of fear, when my guts feel they must find release—either swelling up to a volcanic eruption, that those around me call my tantrum, or down under, causing me contortions of agony on the lavatory seat—now my favourite acquaintance, through frequent visits.

And I cry for help. Then Jesus said ‘Ask’, so I asked, and ‘Look’, so I looked, and ‘Seek’—and this is what I found . . .

First there was politics—but for me, that was like trying to make one man free by changing the whole world. I asked why we shouldn’t change the man himself . . . So I tried to educate him.

READ LEARN think . . . READ LEARN think . . . After going through the educational factory, the State’s intellectual machine, I read learned and thought of all the feelings I had— and I couldn’t educate them to obey my will. My education was extensive, but it didn’t make me ‘feel’ any better . . .

Then I tried religion, starting with Jesus (why do we always start with Jesus?) and working my way through Oriental religions, Theosophy and the Occult, and ending with Bhagwan. That I couldn’t take. It was ALL too much. But, I must admit, I gained a hell of a lot, in other ways. I’d like to thank Jesus, St. Anthony, Bhudda, Besant Krishna, Paul, Moreward, Koot Hoomi, A.E.L. and all the others, but I don’t ‘feel’ any better.

Then, and this is the moment we’ve all been waiting for— there was therapy. Individual work to begin with. I began to bubble shit right to the surface. Talking, crying, caring and projecting. I fucked my mother, castrated my father, myself, my therapist and all. I hated, loved, was confused. I screamed, screwed, wept—Christ how I wept,. . . I succeeded and failed, won and lost. I saw the Devil in the mirror and God in my reflection. But it was ME.

Then I went to encounter groups. And what happened? I saw, felt and, at last, KNEW that other people had shit and love . . . just like me. We didn’t have to pretend to be

'GOOD' or 'NICE'. We were people. No more, no less.

Sure, we were afraid. Sure, we hated each other. AND we loved. Oh boy, how we loved. I felt Great . . . Not secure all the time. But *myself* I've still got my mask-- but it's only part of me now--not all of me.

And yes—I make mistakes. Sometimes I bury my feelings, don't accept them or deny them. Anyone who doesn't is a liar (or a projection). But just to feel and flow. To begin to really accept myself AS I AM, not as I'd like to be or as I'd like others to see me.

Before I get carried away, if you're interested, therapy was MY way. It worked for me and works for me—but it may not be for you. You'll have to find your own way. But for pete's sake, take that freedom. Nobody else will take it for you.

We live in a mechanized age—if you are determined to be a machine—at least FEEL like one—but feel something.

A New Neighbourhood Project

On October 1st the Neighbourhood Contact Centre project was launched at a meeting of representatives from the Greater London Associations for Mental Health. This will primarily be a training scheme for those who themselves want to start neighbourhood groups and need to train as conveners for those groups. A small working and study group was set up to go into the practicalities of setting up the project.

To some extent this scheme is modelled on the Good Neighbourhood Project started in California by John Enright and George Pransky who visited Britain in August. They find that what they call in their inimitable language 'infra-ordinary people', that is people who may be at odds with society, can develop their abilities and offer valuable services given the right encouragement. They say that the abilities of most people are greatly underestimated.

Community workers have long recognised that poverty and bad housing can cause mental stress and that small self-help groups in depressed areas can change their attitudes from bellicose helplessness to effective and confident action. This change in attitude, recognising the choices open to them, can radically affect the lives of people who previously stood by bewildered, hostile and helpless. Community workers recognise the debilitating effect on mental health of bad social conditions and they work to change these conditions.

In this country NACRO has similar training schemes under their 'New Careers' project and surprisingly, or perhaps not so, they employ very similar methods to those put forward by the American team, role exchange, psychodrama, co-counselling, gestalt and encounter techniques, which are said to lead to an understanding of the whole we play, learning to make choices and taking responsibility for decisions.