

Geoffrey Whitfield

**REFLECTIONS ON THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE
INSTITUTE OF BIOENERGETIC ANALYSIS**

It was very surprising and uncomfortable to be thrown into contact with my loneliness so abruptly this July. I had spent ten days working and visiting friends in the States and was then set down in Waterville Valley, New Hampshire, for the 3rd. International Conference of the Institute of Bioenergetic Analysis. The conference office was closed and I was ushered immediately into a large room which was full of noise and 250 strangers throwing their arms round each other and looking ecstatic. Not a familiar face was in view, and I sunk into my frightened lonely self who just wanted to find a hole in the ground. The return plane didn't leave for another week.

But some sparks of light began to invade my darkness. First Al Lowen - recognition and warm greeting; then Lesley Lowen and another warm response and introductions to the people she was talking to. All real live Biogenertic therapists - how awesome! I still wondered how soon I could leave! I found myself venturing to talk with one or two of these people and found a response which helped me to emerge. Soon I felt able to speak frankly and openly. It was an introduction to the nurturing environment which was to make the conference so unforgettable. I have attended many conferences which have been supporting, but none which had that element of consistent nurturing on that scale, which made it a place where it was safe to move into exploration and danger.

The conference was not, as I had expected, dominated by Al Lowen. Indeed, apart from the first paper on the first morning, he gave no other presentation, though he made his contribution as a participant.

Let me briefly sketch an outline of the week and then pick on certain events which I found valuable.

Each morning at 7.30 there were Bioenergetic exercises for an hour. These were led by a variety of therapists and were well attended on each occasion.

After breakfast, the sessions were taken by one of the trainers who either took the whole morning or divided it into two. These were the major presentations of the day. After lunch the afternoon was divided into two with four optional presentations in each half.

Dinner in the evening was followed by spontaneous happenings sometimes serious, often social which went on until the early hours - after that, to be up again at 7.30 became an ordeal.

The variety of topics included homosexuality, cancer, massage, music, and even

humour. The daily clinical seminars were important because here the therapists could be seen working on actual patients.

Some of the presentations stand out. Dr. Bob Lewis of New York City gave a paper on premature ego development - (see the current issue of *Energy and Character*). This concluded with an exercise in pairs which resulted in the profound discovery for me that I had never yielded myself to anyone in my life - my task in life it seems was to be responsible for the nurturing of others but to have no needs myself. That meant the opening up of an important area which is still being explored. I had never seen myself in terms of a masochistic character structure before!

Another was the morning with Carl Kirsch, a presentation with so much that was educational and so much that was personal. I recall especially his references to uncertainty, an experience which is closely related to helplessness. An effective way of dealing with uncertainty is to be right. However, the price you pay for being right is to be out of pleasure. To drop the need for being right is to release the energy to enjoy life. The avoidance of being wrong is therefore a heavy price. You can stay safe and not be rejected but you lose the chance of pleasure. To have pleasure you have to risk. Carl then suggested a dialogue between the sphincter and the buttocks of 'Let Go' and 'Can't let go'.

The other point which I find valuable at this moment is the area of responsibility. He said that you can use responsibility in a blaming way or a denial i.e. 'It's your fault' or 'It's not my fault'. However if I take responsibility for myself, I take the blame and cease being a victim. I have to do something about my own damage and not leave it to someone else.

Carl also mentioned a factor which I believe is crucial in therapy. It is currently fashionable in therapy to have violent interactions with parental figures. However, it seems important that one should move beyond the confrontation to catharsis. What is required is a cleansing of the agenda through making peace with the parent. Carl went to some length to describe how vital it is to see through the unreal and unfair demands by the parent on the child; this family tragedy goes on through the generations. If you have a real catharsis you can move through this to forgive the parent because 'they know not what they do'. Thus a new contact can be established with the parents. This Carl illustrated by his own life and the event brought a moving response through the whole conference session.

The following morning the Trainer from Connecticut John Bellis, a comedian of the highest quality gave a presentation using music, humour, even outright hilarity. I found it tremendously significant. My notes on his offering are miniscule but the recollection is vivid. How can I properly convey such an existential event? His line was 'To play is better than to talk'. Thus with the clicking of teeth and the snapping of fingers, the clapping of hands and the raising of arms, individually, as a small group, or as a large group, we discovered a togetherness and a centredness. We moved from singing non verbally i.e. making a sound, to laughter, to movement which found a unison and harmony which I long to continue exploring. It may be of interest to mention that I used some of John Bellis' approach in a service of the Lord's Supper,

and found the service developed profound and lasting spiritual qualities.

The morning exercises were taken by different therapists with different styles. Each morning Al and Lesley Lowen were present together with about a third of the conference - after all it was 7.30 a.m.! Quite apart from the positive value of using the exercises, it made me aware of the various blocks within my own body. However, I was quite unprepared for the effect of a session taken by Hazel Stanley of New York. As I left I found that something in my body had been unlocked to release the sadness of the years and that sadness surged out as a liberated discovery which was as welcome as it was unexpected.

It was very much an American occasion (there were only three other people from Europe) and it seemed important to work out some way of arranging the formal training of people outside the U.S.A. One suggestion was for the Institute of Bioenergetic Analysis to send a trainer for a week at a time every three or four months. Facilities are available in Brussels and Brighton and these could be the venues for the Training workshops. Full details are still being worked out with the Institute but we need to know of anyone interested in taking the Training Programme. Once we know how many we can work out the financial details.

Next Easter, it is hoped that Ginny Liebositz of Chicago will be coming to Europe and in September, Michael Maley of Minnesota will be here. It is anticipated that they will be able to conduct the first of the workshops. As well as this it may be helpful, or indeed even required to visit the United States for the Summer workshop which is organised by the Institute. So could anyone interested in pursuing the Institutes Training Programme contact me in Brighton at the University and I will keep them informed of developments.

CORRECTION

John Rowan's article *Alternatives to Hierarchy* which appeared in the November issue was in fact an extract from his new book *The Power of the Group (Book 3 of the series Psychological Aspects of Society) Publishes by Davis Poynter in October 1976. Apologies to author and Publisher.*
