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**Charles Elliott**

# **Carl Rogers Encounters R.D. Laing**

400 persons encountered Rogers and Laing encountering at the Hilton on August 17th. For an hour we worked too hard at saying our own thing, debating small grouping versus staying with the Rogers and Laing encounter and other impulsive necessities. After lunch the "two" were asked to take responsibility. Laing and Rogers held a genuine encounter. They sat like two, **real**, mutually respecting persons and asked each other questions. How the other works? feels? past educational experiences? of a deep and satisfying nature! The group of 350 were all sitting around informally in a circle and they just talked. Carl really gave us his newly thought out (. . .right there in front of us) - thoughts about his own experience . Laing called him the "grand old man" (I didn't like that). He showed a real desire to understand Rogers' way of functioning. He asked him if he (Rogers) ever felt really evil and how he dealt with the antisocial impulses in himself. Rogers confessed to his strong

dislikes of institutions and gate keepers in institutions but said he had really been lucky. Most of his experiences of feeling evil came through his clients as he empathized with their feelings and experiences.

Laing proved to be rather difficult to follow but worth the effort. He doesn't expect to be understood all the time when he speaks and so he is sort of like a projective test where meaning "comes through". It feels good. When he is fishing around in his head he does it out loud. He moves restlessly and rather fearlessly around the group of 350 and seems very much at ease, enjoying the scene without being phony about it.

The throng, cum group, settles to listen with satisfied interest as Carl shares his experiences. He moved from fundamentalist family to world conference in Asia feeling the subsequent impossibility of ever "going home again" to rigid attitudes. He speaks of his slow lifelong movement away from rigid institutional structures, denying he is an anarchist. He shares his "realistic fantasy" of homes where children are listened to following births a la Leboyer, and schools where children are responded to as individuals. He shares his hope that persons in positions of responsibility in the EEC might come to deal with one another in encounter group fashion, simply as persons rather than as representatives of other countries.

Ronnie further probes for the dark conflicts in Carl. Carl confesses to an involvement of rather sudden intensity in the inner life of a psychotic patient - that took him too far from his inner centre at an early stage in his career. He packed up his wife and went off for two months to clear and re-centre. A dark rather frightening episode.

We set up in groups of six on the floor to give birth primals to volunteers. I was in one of the groups. We put hands on the body of the foetus (lying on the floor in a foetal position) in front of us and held firmly as the foetus tried to get born. We struggled hard against and with the baby. . . who was a grown man in both cases I worked on.

The experience lasted for a long hour and was thoroughly exhausting. We really got into breathing with him as he tried to push himself against us. . . with his eyes closed as though he were actually going through the birth canal again. A most moving and satisfying experience. I have done birth primals with a clinical helper myself but alone on the floor. I was wringing wet with sweat and felt as though I had really been the mother. The foetus was named Stan. He and I felt really close to each other after he came out of the womb. Nothing phony. A real struggle experience. Breathing together with five others all holding his body tightly into the foetal position on the floor and he struggling against us. He really looked beautiful when he came through us all sweated out. I had soaked my shirt through and through struggling to help him and feel it with him. I am now a mother. Got much closer to the birth of my own children. My wife was whisked off the corridor by a group of doctors with Lauralyn (now sixteen years old). I felt so left out of the experience at the time of her birth. They did not allow me to

be in the delivery room, but I wanted to. So this experience brought to mind much of that feeling of being left out. This time I was really involved in the birth of Stan. Laing directed us on how to hold the body and what to do with massage on the base of the neck and lower back to get the birth contractions started. I could feel the head pushing out between my hands exactly as though my hands were the vaginal opening.

Following this moving experience - entendre intended - discussion of dangerous implications from a "physician's" point of view. Serious rejoinder by Ronnie that follow-up, though not systematic occurs all the time and the process is risky and not to be tried by the inexperienced.

Calm Carl and Restless Ronnie provided us with a fine eight hour session. They did their thing. We all shared and expressed our views. It was a mutual experience. Really wish you could have been there and many others. All would have gotten new experience from the togetherness and communication that took place.