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How to run a Zenalys Group

(or *'Unconsciousness-raising group'*)

The name 'Zenalys' comes from a joke, combining Zen + Psychoanalysis. In the process of trying to devise training methods for applications of psychoanalysis to pairs and groups, I tried to figure some way of experiencing the peculiar but interesting relationship between Analyst and Anlysand; perhaps we could call this Zenalyst and Zenaland! The key communication is 'free-association'. Popular ideas of free-association are usually mistaken. In fact you have a conversation, a dialogue, a discourse between two people. The difference from ordinary conversation is that you do not reply in the ordinary logical way, but you reveal to the other person whatever chain of thoughts, feelings or images that come into your mind. You also do not tell a person they are right or wrong, or that they should or should not do something, or that their ideas should be this or that. You might share your own spontaneous associations, or help the other person to extend their associations. Sometimes, you might do a 'judo' (interpretation) aimed at helping the other person explore a related tack. It can lead to a way of relating that is neither the conventional 'story-telling' way of people being together, nor the intense relations of those who love or hate each other.

In many ways, some of the recent pioneers of psychoanalysis share something in common with the Zen masters of Buddhism, I refer to Bion and Lacan. Part of this, is aiding people to learn for themselves, and learning to 'let people be what they are'. There is still the goal of people helping each other to gain more enlightenment, and to reach some new truths. In the suggested norms below, there is the idea of a new truth floating about seeking a head to lodge in. This strange idea derives from Bion. The 'Zen Cushion' proposed below, is a process whereby any truth that strikes a member of the group can be communicated to all members. It is a sort of democratisation of Gurudom. I believe that all persons have a capacity for really original thinking and the idea is to encourage this and discourage the notion that Truth is embodied in the person of some aged and worthy sage.

The following are some suggested norms for organising such a group (or pair). At this point in time, I have only experimented with pairs and I do not know how or if it works with groups. I am writing this short paper so that people may experiment. I hope people experiment with the norms as well and not assume that they are fixed and unchangeable.

Suggested Norms

1. Try to let people be what they are. Don't try to change anyone, by for example, trying to cure, "interpret", social-work, advise or give them exercises. If someone is sad, happy, laughs or cries, let them be. Try not to offer solace nor pity nor solutions, but do not ignore them. Try to accept persons' destructive or fighting drives (e.g. Hate, Fear, Envy or Greed) as equally valid and natural as their Loving Drive (Love, Gratitude, caring). However, take as an axiom, that no-one should act-out destructive drives physically -i.e. no-one should damage another living creature. Try not to change anyone's ideas, theories or beliefs. Try not to make anyone do anything such as an exercise or game: but also try not to prevent anyone doing some action, sound or movement etc.

2. Treat everyone as a new person. Even if you know members of the group well, or even if you met them last week, they have changed since then. They are a different person.

3. Put aside any past memories or desires you have of others who are present. If such memories arise, just acknowledge that they have come into your mind and put them aside. This means also putting aside any theories or beliefs of your own that you associate with others who are present.

4. Let yourself free-associate. As you see and hear others, allow whatever thought arises in your mind to come into consciousness. Let these thoughts follow through as a 'chain'. Have a conversation with yourself. You do not need to take what someone says literally. For example, someone speaking about Margaret Thatcher might spark in your mind thoughts about a head mistress who took your school milk from you when you were 8 years old.

5. Communicate what is going on within you. When you feel like it, or opportunity occurs, communicate to others what is going on within you here-and-now. Have a conversation with the group or a member. Aim to communicate at a deeper level than the normal

social level. Remember there does not have to be any conventional logic or sequence to the conversations. Also try to steer between over-communicating and leaving no space for others and under-communicating and therefore depriving the group of your creativity.

6. Treat personal remarks as projections. If someone makes a personal remark like, for example, 'You are a rotten chauvinist pig who always puts me down' try to react as if the person was offering you something from inside them for you to free-associate about. You might reply, for example, 'Pigs remind me of policemen, and I remember an incident where I was really frightened during a demonstration when a cop on horseback seemed about to run me down'. (This is an example of a 'Judo', see below).

7. Share dreams that are 'sparked' by the conversation. If something reminds you of a dream in the conversation, then it is useful material to share. I suggest you do **not** share a dream simply because you remember it from last night, but only where the **conversations** bring it into your mind.

8. Share and visualise body sensations. This idea come from an obscure analyst named Caron Kent. It works like this. If you become aware of a body-sensation, like a pain, ache, or musculature 'feel', then see if a visual image comes into your mind. If so, you might share the image with the group, who might help you to investigate its meaning. (Kent treated these images just like dream material).

You might also take note of when your peristalsis sounds (tummy rumbles). Though on the face of it, this may seem silly, I have found Gerda Boyesen's work confirmed; a tummy rumble during a session often signals an insight or new truth. It might help to comment if you hear someone's tummy rumble by asking them whether they've had an insight.

9. Imagine a New Truth is buzzing around the room seeking a head to lodge in. If you feel a new Truth, idea or notion, go and sit on the 'Zen cushion' and communicate the truth. The 'cushion' can be a chair or cushion. In a pair you might simply touch the cushion or any other agreed object. The point is to share an insight about yourself or the world. You could copy or 'guy' the traditional Guru by saying it in the form of a 'saying'. It does not have to be profound. Imagine that the New Idea or Truth may be disguised as a joke, poem, paradox or be apparently trivial or nonsensical. Or you may be perceiving some pattern or germ of an idea that is more collective; perhaps a theme is emerging from the associations and ideas coming from different people. This might be a step towards the new Truth; take

a chance, and try not to assume that your associations are trivial or not worth reporting. It could be that your creative unconscious chooses an apparently trivial path to avoid your internal censorship.

You could collect the new truth's by writing or taping the 'sayings of the Zen cushion'.

10. Treat Silence as a good space to meditate within. If the group is silent, try not to let your anxiety force you to 'fill' the space with speech. Try to treat silence in the group as a non-verbal and interesting communication or space. You might try to regulate your breathing so that it coincides with others in the group. On the other hand, try not to be intimidated by silences if you feel you have something important to communicate.

11. Aid others to free-associate. If someone seems to want to say something but appears stuck, try to help them extend their associations by using open ended containers or statements like "what else does that 'x' (something abstracted from the person's statement) remind you of?"

12. Try to practice a verbal 'Judo'. This is easier said than done if you have not had quite a bit of practice. A 'Judo' is an unexpected response which **deflects** the person onto a different tack. It is neither a command to do or not do, nor a solution. The effect is that the person's energy continues in the same direction but is deflected along a side turning, so to speak. It is the essence of the much misunderstood psychoanalytic 'interpretation'. Suppose, for example, that someone breaks the norms or rules. A 'Judo' would not tell the person they had broken the norms, nor suggest they are in the wrong. The idea would be to continue in the same direction, as when in actual Judo, an assailant charges you, then you do not resist but 'fall with them' and deflect the energy.

For example, suppose someone says 'I think this whole Zenalys process is stupid, what we should do is all stand up and put our arms around each other'. Now a 'bad Judo' would be to say that this is against the norms, or that the person is trying to manipulate the group. A better Judo would be to say 'I feel stupid too, being here with people I do not know, and it rings a bell with other times I've felt stupid'. In this case one is 'falling with' the person in the direction of 'stupidness', and suggesting that this is a theme worth associating about. Of course, a response could be from the first person, that this is a ploy to keep the group doing Zenalys rather than hugging each other. You would have to discover where you went from there.

The whole notion of doing this process is itself a ploy or 'Judo'. I am not suggesting it should be a philosophy or way of life or even applicable to ordinary interaction. It is also not a substitute for other group activities; a Zenalys group could be run from time-to-time in any programme of groupwork, if it proved useful. It is therefore an idea or process that should be used if it is useful or enlightening and if not, not. One interesting fact I have discovered, is that it is possible to do this process in intimate relations like couples. My evidence to date is that it is a calming and gentle process (and the word 'Judo' means 'the gentle way'). If you experiment with Zenalys groups or pairs, I would like to know the outcome - especially the difference between long v short sessions, and the dynamics of size. Please write to me at the address below.

Report on a Zenalys Group: a cautionary tale.

I circulated the above paper 'how to run a Zenalys Group' before I had actually initiated one myself. I thought that the dynamics might be interesting but would not be 'heavy'. My first experience leads me to change my mind. It can be heavy. There might be a lot more 'punch' in doing this activity than I had anticipated. So I am rather hastily trying to circulate the following account.

The story is about a group of teachers who assembled for a weekend. We do this each year in preparation for doing groupwork for social-work students. The setting is a 'country house' residential weekend, and our tradition is to experiment and explore. On the Friday evening, I suggested a Zenalys group as a way of, possibly, integrating new members, and putting us all on an equal footing - i.e. the 'experienced' would not be at any particular advantage, vis-a-vis the inexperienced. So, we read the norms, and prepared to begin.

I talked through the 'norms'. Members were a little puzzled. So I proposed a demonstration session. A woman and myself sat in the middle and 'free-associated' at each other. This seemed OK. We knew each other, and we had both done 'analysis'. The idea seemed clear enough. I suggested we split into pairs. There were 9 people in all. I stayed out of it and offered to be the 'time-keeper'. People went off in pairs. They wandered around the lovely garden looking as though they were on a film set devised by Bergman. Pleasant enough. Each pair seemed animated and into deep conversation or interaction. So far so good. After ten minutes or so, I suggested that the pairs become 'quartets' and get together. This they did. Later feedback was interesting. The pairs worked. The quartets

did not. People felt somewhat invaded by the quartets. The preliminary conclusion I came to, is that the best 'jump' is probably to go from pairs to a total group, and not to try some intermediary constellation, like, quartets or trio's. (Future experience may contradict this). Eventually we all returned to the room where we started, and formed a group. From this point onwards everything seemed to change. I had noticed that when people formed quartets, they seemed to laugh a lot. Not the laughter of fun, so much as a slightly hysterical laughter.

I came into the room, to find one quartet having a discussion. The subject seemed to be quite heavy. People were talking about the somewhat schizoid sensation of being a 'person in the centre', surrounded by friends and others, and yet feeling that **you** as a person did not exist, - i.e. you were the sum-of-those-you-related-to. Without a centre, a Self.

In one of the pairs, the free-association had apparently not gone according to the norms, but seemed to be one person interviewing the other. The cause seemed to be that **questions** were being asked. The effect of this is to push the person who is questioned towards rationalising and using the intellect. This would be fine in any other interaction, but since the goal is 'unconsciousness-raising' it is not useful in a Zenalys group. I would therefore add another norm as follows:

13. **Don't ask questions.** Try to avoid questioning the other person because it will tend to push towards rationalising and conscious thinking. It may also make the person feel that she is not being allowed to 'be what she is'. You can reply to a question with a 'Judo' by free-associating instead of answering the question.

We settled down as a group, sitting fairly close, some on the floor, one or two on chairs. It was then that the strange atmosphere seemed to descend on us. The themes that emerged from our associations, were about death, suicide, monsters, religions, witches, Objects in the room were examined. A plaque on the fire place seemed to have a deathly quality. We became very quiet and a bit jumpy. Noises from around the house seemed to be magnified and somehow sinister. People spoke about Death in the external world, close friends and others. One person discovered what the rest of us already knew, that one of our colleagues had died and he had not been informed. Another person reported feeling extremely withdrawn and autistic. She was asked if she wanted to be helped out of it. She did'nt. And, I am pleased to report, the group 'let her be what she was at the moment' although we all felt the urge to help her. (Later she said she preferred

it this way). Suddenly, just as though a poltergeist had joined us, the french windows started to hum with a strange buzzing noise (caused by the wind against door joints). A woman sitting close by leapt into another woman's arms in panic. We all laughed nervously. Someone said it was like one of those classic horror movies, and we joked about a peasant coming to warn us about the terrible murder long ago, and the ghosts that would haunt us. Then a long, thoughtful silence. The time we had agreed the work was now over. I also felt that it would be good to get out of this dynamic for now. I tried a number of 'Judo's' like, 'going to the pub', asking for feedback. But it was extremely difficult to move out of the dynamic. Each discussion of process led back into the earlier Zenalys. It took more than half an hour to change to 'normal'. There was not only a fear of the process but also a fascination. We wanted to go on exploring this strange territory. Perhaps there was an unconscious desire to reach the creative equivalent of the 'Death Group'. I had made one attempt at using the Zen cushion; I said something like 'the themes emerging are Life and Death, and it seems that this reality is with us here-and-now.

In the feedback discussion, one member pointed out that I was the only one to use the Zen cushion. We discussed the methods and difficulties of doing it. What came out of this discussion is that one needs to take the particular associations etc, and make them into a general or universal statement. I suppose this may take some practice if you are not used to such a process. Another interesting feedback concerned a woman who was asked whether her peristalsis had 'rumbled'. She said at the time that her thought was not very important. In fact it turned out that she was thinking about some very profound matter about a friend who had died recently. Another comment, and one which I think is very significant, is that two of us agreed that we had only ever been in this kind of dynamic in very large unstructured groups (50 or more members). Yet here it was in a small group of only 9 persons.

In the light of this experience, perhaps a cautionary note should be sounded. Maybe people should keep their earlier sessions to something short, like an hour. It does seem possible to reach quite regressed and unconscious parts of each person's self. However, this is based upon the experience of one particular group. Others may work out quite different.

In later parts of the workshop, we were looking at each others life histories. What was interesting, was how the events of the Zenalys group made more sense when we knew more about the 'life and death' struggles of each individual.

As I said originally, I will be very pleased to receive information from anyone who experiments with a Zenalys group/pair.

(John Southgate is co-author (with Rosemary Randall and Frances Tomlinson) of two do-it-yourself cartoon books: 'The Barefoot Psychoanalyst', (£3.50); Co-operative & Community Group Dynamics, or your meetings needn't be so appalling, (2). From booksellers or from 12 Nassington Road, London NW3.

MY FIRST POEM

I feel the grief and the pain of saying goodbye
Goodbye to my old self, my old image, my old familiar world
Grief at the loss of my menstrual blood.
I fear the emptiness of that loss, fearful of the new growth within,
Fearful of the frailty and tenderness of new life.
How do I nurture it and let it thrive?
Why so much pain and struggle and dying to find the simplest -
- most beautiful part of me - my womanhood!
I feel my love - and my tears flow, my love for the child within.
The love that connects me with the universe,
The love that know, sees and understands, the love that heals.

And I feel anger too, anger at the struggle and pain.
Anger at being crushed and humiliated,
Anger at not being seen, not having time and space to grow and thrive.
Anger at the male world, its destructiveness and ugliness.
Anger at its arrogance and inner cowardliness.
As I mourn my old self and nurture my womanhood
I show the world my anger and my love
I feel my power, my fertility, my understanding and creativity
I feel the beauty of the universe and creation
And I must weep again, at its perfection and enormity.
And once more I am afraid, afraid of my new self, of my womanhood,
afraid of trusting that enormity
afraid of what lies ahead
afraid of expressing myself
afraid of the chaos
afraid of my love
afraid of my healing
afraid of my knowing
afraid of being ME!

Rosylyn Madden