

SUN BEAR INTERVIEWED BY VIVIAN MILROY

- V. *As a starting point let me just say that we are committed to the idea of the development of the individual mainly through the emotional and psychological aspects although we have always been saying that we are dealing with the whole person, that mind, body, spirit is all one integrated unity. But we have tended I think somewhat to forget the body. Some of us in terms of therapy are now beginning to say "All right you have these worrying emotional problems but are you taking enough exercise and what's your diet like?" This is why I was excited when I heard that you were coming over because I very much wanted to know about your approach to this which I take to be more from the body to the mind rather than vice versa. Or am I wrong?*
- S.B. Well, a little bit of both. Our own philosophy and thinking about this is that I tell people that I am teaching not holistic health but holistic life. But I feel that the whole way you live, the whole way you relate to life, sexually, mentally, physically and spiritually, if people don't have a sense of balance with the earth and the things around them, then they are otherwise out of balance too. I feel that what is happening is basically that man has alienated himself from nature and from the earth and as a result of this is having other major problems. If you have a situation where you are impure, or out of touch with nature, then you start getting sick. And I believe that 90% of the illnesses of humanity start in the head. When I think of the guilt trips, the anger, the pain, the suffering that we put on ourselves: they are what cause our illnesses. If up in your head you start feeling jealous, angry, uptight - then that starts going down into other parts of the body. Goes down to your stomach and causes an ulcer to it. I think if we are really going to survive, then we ought to look at the way we relate to each other and the way we relate to the planet.
- V. *So far I must say I totally agree with you. Though I would say that 99% of illnesses start in the mind, but what do we do about it? Or rather what do you do about it?*

S.B. One of the things I tell people is that if they are going to fill up with something new, then they have got to get rid of something, and I tell them the doctors, the psychiatrists, the garbage collectors, they are the people in this society that people go to dump on and the native way of my people - the way that I subscribe to - is this. I tell people to go out and find a place in the ground and dig themselves a hole there and then pour out all their anger, all their fear, all their frustration, all their jealousies, all their kill trips into that hole and cover it over and leave it there and make a blessing over it and let it turn to what it is - fertilizer. A friend of mine who was a psychologist in Los Angeles when I was doing the book about this said to me, "that's a very good idea, Sun Bear, but what do I do with my patients? I am on the seventh floor of Sunset Wiltshire Boulevard", and I told him "why don't you bring in a kitty litter box and just dig it in there. If we can get rid of our old stuff, then we have space to put something new into us - new perspectives and ideas and feelings. The guilt thing is probably one of the heaviest and it's one of the reasons why we are alienating and continue to alienate ourselves from nature. And while we do so, the more guilty we feel. People are afraid of the dark. When we are little children growing up we are told to beware the deep dark forest and all these horrible things and fierce dark beasts waiting to destroy us out there; and children are told not to play on the ground because they get dirty, because it's dirty there and there are bugs there and all this builds into guilt with our relationship with the earth.

V. *About this hole in the ground technique is this verbal or emotional . . . Are you actually shouting into it?*

S.B. Yes, you shout your anger, your pain, your fear into it, in a literal way because I feel you have to get rid of it, and if it comes back at you, then go and dig another hole. Like, one of my friends said he had to dig awfully deep because he had an awful lot to get rid of.

V. *And if you are in the middle of a city, a litter-box might do but ideally you are in the middle of the forest.*

S.B. And the other way of finding your energy, rebuilding your energy is to find a tree and just put your cheek against it: hug a tree. Because trees are transmitters of energy between the heaven and the earth and you can draw all that energy into you. Like I tell people that if they have nervous or tension problems,

a pine or fir tree is best. It has a calming influence. If you need strengthening, or if you feel weakened, then find an oak tree or one of the hardwood trees because they can give you the strength and energy.

V. *Castaneda in the Don Juan series mentioned finding the exactly right place in the earth. Is this important?*

S.B. Yes, the power centre. This is another thing I teach people about. The first thing is this dumping, getting away with the bad stuff. Then you have to acknowledge that this society is taking your power away from you. It takes your power from you in many ways: it takes the power from you to go and speak to the Great Spirit - you give that power to clergymen, to politicians. You give your power away in many ways so that you become powerless. You give away the power to grow your own vegetables or butcher your own meat to the Safeway store. To raise your children - you give away the power to the schools, to TV sets and the neighbours.

V. *And parents?*

S.B. Yes, and to parents. Till finally you don't have any power left. This is one of the things I experience more than anything else. Like just now you have 14½% unemployment. And these people are completely shattered because they don't have a job. I haven't had a job since I was 39. I'm 53 years old now, I have created my own job. I've created my whole way of life. Because I knew the system wasn't going to work. You have to free yourself from the dinosaurs. We weren't around when the last dinosaurs passed on. - These 120 ton giants that roamed the earth, the dinosaurs today are General Motors and US Steel and British Railways. People go to these dinosaurs and expect them to support them. And all of a sudden these poor people come like rats to put their noses against the trapdoor that feed them each day - all of a sudden there is nothing to feed them anymore. They have given away their power to these things. And business, industry all the way through is permeated with the same kind of thinking - they're trying to manufacture last year's products. And they don't have the courage to move into anything else. They're locked into it. Maybe they are afraid their peers will make fun of them if they try anything innovative or new.

V. *This sounds very much like the flower power and hippy movement of the 60s which was a kind of complete dropping out and rejection of all social norms. You say no?*

S.B. I say NO. Very much so. Like we started the community 12 years ago. This community has been completely self-sufficient, we produce 80% of our raw food. We grow our own fruits and vegetables. We have a self-sufficient community. We produce a magazine. We have books that we publish. There are some of them on the table. We have livestock. We have a large mail order book business and all this is part of our total operation. I travel and lecture. And we've had 100% employment where other societies had major unemployment. Like now we are looking for more people. We are creating an economy and a way of life that can stretch out across the US - and across this country too. Of people working and sharing together and learning how to share. One thing - I don't believe that the 5-day work week is a sacred emblem for everybody with a 2-week holiday every year. I feel that if 15% of the people here would be willing to accept a 3-day work week and make up their budget by doing gardening, fishing, doing things themselves that otherwise they expect other people to do - then you could get total employment in this country. And I think a lot of people would be sympathetic to that idea.

V. *It sounds a very attractive approach and I think probably an inevitable approach given the progress of modern technology. Your communal group is I presume in America. Do you have any practical plan for doing something like that here?*

S.B. I am trying to open up to people the possibility of doing things here. I'd like to see communities forming up here, I'd like to see a network of communities. And a community doesn't necessarily mean people living in the same household but rather a group of people who work and share together, who share ideas and help each other. I feel this is what we have to do. We have to start rethinking how we relate to each other, how we relate to the planet in a real way. I am a medicine man, a practising medicine man, a medicine chief of the Bear Tribe Society. They say knowledge is healing and I feel if I can help the people to get a better perspective on the way they relate to each other, than that's the healing. To me healing takes on very simple proportions. Like if I am walking down the street in a city and I see an expired parking meter there, I'd put a coin in it so that that person won't get a ticket. I understand that's from £6 to £10 in London - and that's a healing. I've saved that person from getting something that could cause him a lot of pain. I call it a healing if I am walking along the path and I pick up some of the garbage that would otherwise be causing

a litter upon earth mother's surface. And I believe that by taking total responsibility in my life on an everyday basis, I relate to the earth. And I believe that's important on an everyday basis rather than sometimes having a surge - protesting against something done to the earth. It has to be an everyday relationship. I turn off extra light that I see burning so as to save energy. And if I go to the potty to do wee-wee, I don't flush it, I leave that for rather more drastic purposes.

V. *So far this is obviously all O.K. for healthy people and fairly healthy people being a bit healthier. What about people who are really sick. Someone comes to you and says "I've got cancer, what do I do about it:"*

S.B. I will work with them with what feels best for them; something I can help them with if they come for just that brief period of time. A recommendation for chaparral tea and things like that. I encourage them to better their diet. To look at things that they are doing that are causing it. And also the emotional aspect - I believe cancer is an emotional disease and again I would tell them to go out and dig a hole and get rid of their anger and their pain, working with trying to heal themselves.

V. *You mentioned earlier jealousy as being one the most corroding emotions, and I agree, and at the same time it seems to be one of the most resistant emotions. How do you deal with someone . . .*

S.B. I try to help them to break out of it by telling them that the only person who can give them things is they themselves. If they are suffering pain, it's them that are suffering pain and not the other person. They are creating the pain for themselves. That's a hard one: it takes a long time for people to grow out of that. I work with a lot of people on that. I have very dear sisters, ladies who have been with me in the tribe, that had a problem with that. And they have to work through it themselves. You can give people words. But they only become power when they start using it.

V. *This I suppose ties up somewhat with the sexual mores in your commune. Do you still operate a monogamous system or are people free?*

S.B. There are people who are monogamous and there are people who are not. The thing I feel about it is that the relationship

between two people is between them and the Great Spirit. And if people come together and share time together and make love together, I feel that's good, that's good energy. That's what the Creator has put us here for. I feel that each person has what is good in their heart this way. I don't believe in celibacy. I feel that each person has what feels good in their heart and in this way they relate. And I tell them that they don't talk about it, they don't boast about it. Like I spent time with so and so or I got this or that. Rather that it should be between the two people and then you don't generate jealousy.

- V. *This journal as well as going to academics, people in medicine, health care and social work generally, and people interested in human potential, is also going to a lot of fairly normal middle-class English people. What would you say to them?*
- S.B. I think they are going to have to start looking at life, they are going to have to start rethinking life if they are going to survive. What is interesting about this is that in the U.S. when I started, it was the long hair people who were listening to me when I was taking them out on the earth and teaching them how to grow gardens, how to be self-sufficient. Well I've continued that but the people who are coming to me now are the middle class, the upper middle class. And they are coming to me in droves. They ask me what I think about Ronnie Reagan and I say well Ronnie Reagan's brought me more business than anyone I know. You see the more he is doing, the more they see his thing, the more they say well this is totally crazy and they ~~are~~ trying to bring themselves back into something healthier. Like when I go to Houston in Texas, and these people are definitely not poor people but they are seeing the need for change, the need for rethinking. I think that it's time people put their spirituality to a more practical direction. My own approach to life is that I tell people I want a philosophy that grows corn. By that I mean it has to be something that works on an everyday basis for you here on the earth mother. You don't have to wait to get to heaven, it should help you to live your life in better balance with your fellow human beings and with earth mother as well.
- V. *I suppose it will be true to say that the middle class people can in the first place understand what you're saying and in the second place can afford to change their life styles but, going back to the unemployed, who are also more likely to be under-educated and more conservative in their thinking and therefore less able to change, how would one approach them?*

S.B. Well, in my own country I work with native and non native people and a lot of the native people are slower to understand what I am trying to do than some of the non native people but it's something I feel for the people that are unemployed, that they are going to have to look around if they are going to survive at all. They are going to have to find ways they can work together. And they're going to have to start drawing their sustenance so that they are not dependent. To sharing with each other, sharing their feelings with each other and towards the earth.

V. *I see that, and you see that, but how do you reach someone who doesn't see that?*

S.B. You can't tell someone who doesn't want to see it. Knowledge is a beautiful thing; but wisdom is an amplification of it, so people who read this in your publication, they have to weigh it up. They have to start somewhere. And they have to start because the present way of relating to the earth is not satisfactory. In the U.S. for example they say that one out of every three people has cancer. And also one out of three people has emotional or mental problems and I am sure England compares very much with that statistic. In the U.S. the greatest cause of death for children under the age of 12 is child abuse. And the greatest cause of death for young people from 12 to 27 is suicide and the last time I was in England I read of hideous crimes committed by parents against their children here. And when you get stresses caused by unemployment and things like that, then that increases the tension. So we just have to look at different ways of relating to the earth and to other human beings.

V. *That's sounds like an almost perfect conclusion. Is there anything else you would like to add to it?*

S.B. No, except perhaps to say that we are very open to being in touch with our British relatives, and - relatives include all human beings and also four footed animals and winged creatures. So if any of your people want to get in touch with us, I'll give you the address. It's Bear Tribe, P.O. Box 91627, Spokane, Washington 99209.