

- 2) HOLY BIBLE - 'Gospel according to John' (rev. auth. version)
(Samuel Bagster London 1982)
 - 3) TIME - Alan Watts: 'The Essence of Alan Watts', et al. (Celestial
Arts Millbrae Cal. 1974)
 - 4) 'Otto Neurath'
 - 5) TRACTACABUS LOGICO PHILISOPHICUS - Ludwig Wittgenstein
(Routledge & Kegan Paul London 1961)
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CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP 1986

A Glimpse behind the Curtain

Szeged is a town in Hungary two hours or so by train south of Budapest. It lies in rich agricultural land where the corn and sunflowers grow freely in the warm summer sunshine. It was the setting for the 1986 Cross Cultural Communication workshop attended by some two hundred people from East and West Europe, the USA and South America. This was the second time the Hungarian Psychological Association had played host to this event organised by Chuck Devonshire of the Center for Cross Cultural Communication, and the warmth of the welcome of the Hungarian people was for me a major factor in the success of the workshop.

It is hard to put into words how exciting and hopeful these events are. Eastern Europe remains something of a mystery to most of us

in the West, and it is hard to understand the daily lives of people who experience such a profoundly different political and social system from ours. I had a real question to answer: would the Person-Centered Approach, being so firmly rooted in western democratic ideals, have any meaning in a decidedly contrasting political and cultural environment? It seemed to me after just a few hours at the workshop as I listened to the difficult and sometimes painful struggle towards understanding, that the Person Centered Approach, although rooted in a particular culture, is not dependent on it. Somehow, the sincere attempts being made by people to communicate with each other on a personal level both highlighted the cultural differences and transcended them. It became clear that peoples' understanding of words like

'democracy' and 'freedom' served at first to confuse discussion. But then, as people began to give personal 'shape' to these concepts, the process of understanding began to mature. I began to understand in an entirely new way some of the personal, emotional meaning that lies behind words that are often glibly used. Although my personal meaning of the word 'freedom' is substantially different from the meaning it has to someone living in East Berlin, nevertheless at an existential level there are similarities. Things which to me are taken-for-granted freedoms have an entirely different meaning to others, and this is true also for the things that I feel constrict or imprison me in some way. The opportunity to hear those things and to think about them afterwards was for me a real privilege.

One thing that was brought home to me again at this workshop was the notion of what can be called 'intentionality'. So much of our daily experience of what passes for communication is that we feel manipulated, that others are continually trying to persuade us that we are wrong and they are right. Advertisers and politicians claim an insight into 'reality' that is denied to the rest of us. If we only would do what they said, things would be OK. In the west, our freedom to make informed choices is continually being undermined by distortion, and by so-called conviction politicians for whom 'there is no alternative'. If the intention of communication is to hide the truth, to present only a partial picture and to manipulate our audience, then I guess our

Freedom to choose a way of being for ourselves is severely limited, those in our society who have a need to control and manipulate others will do so if the rest of us let them. If, on the other hand, our intention in our communication is to present ourselves and our ideas openly and without the need to force others into accepting them, then honourable people can have an honourable disagreement and discussion.

The need to control and manipulate is not confined to politicians. To some extent we all have it. As parents we have it, as teachers, as social workers, as counsellors, as people. Many of us have learned to be afraid of the truth, to substitute some fantasy for it and to behave as if the fantasy were true. In many respects our environment teaches us that the truth is dangerous and that it is better to conceal ourselves than to be open. In Szeged, as in Dublin last year, I discovered that people can create for themselves an environment in which the truth (or rather, many truths) can be respected and understood, that it can be OK to communicate on a direct, personal level to others even in situations where this at first seems impossible. Imagine an encounter-type group of two hundred people speaking perhaps six different languages and you will have some idea of just how impossible it all seems. But where value is placed on listening and understanding, no respect for others and on personal authenticity, anything seems possible.

Carl Rogers, who participated again at this year's workshop, Chuck Devonshire, and their colleagues

have shown, on a small but significant scale that cross cultural understanding is something that has to be worked for, and is achievable among people who genuinely want to understand and be understood. Perhaps this is the most important lesson that we need to learn in this age of high international tension and potential instant annihilation.

Next year's workshop will be in Greece, from the 4th to the 12th July. It is expected that nine days will allow for a comprehensive introduction to client centered psychotherapy for those interested, as well as the experience of cross cultural work. There will be meetings of the entire workshop community and opportunities to meet together in smaller groups around needs expressed by participants; education groups or political interests, psychotherapy or business and industry groups for example, and of course small encounter groups. Carl Rogers intends to make a full commitment to the workshop, and the opportunity to meet and work with him again is one that I personally look forward to.

If you want some information about the workshop in Greece, you can write directly to the Center for Cross Cultural Communication c/o Chuck Devonshire, 1039 Coast Blvd. South 38, La Jolla, CA 92037, USA, or you can write to me at 26 Huddleston Rd. Forest Gate, London E7. I will be glad to send you details and a brochure once they become available.

Finally, I have brought back from Szeged a fuller appreciation of the impact of the Person Centered Approach, and a renewed confidence in peoples' capacity for understanding and acceptance where a psychologically conducive environment is developed. I don't in any way underestimate the difficulties facing us all in this process, nor do I underestimate the importance of continually working towards a greater degree of interpersonal and inter cultural understanding. See you in Greece?

Tony Merry

The Institute of Psychotherapy & Social Studies

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