

HARMFUL PRACTITIONERS

Pauline Baxter describes a week-end workshop in which the facilitator was oppressive and advocated that daughters lose their virginity to their fathers. Workshops of this type are rare but Self and Society would like to hear of any other bad experiences encountered by readers. Pauline's article is followed by a list of organisations that provide training in sex therapy of which we have heard good reports. Will readers please send us more information, so that we can add to this list?

The Sexuality Workshop that Advocated Incest by Pauline Baxter

"The way to worship the Divine Creator is through mirroring the act of creation"... *advertising leaflet.*

I introduced myself to the group saying that I had been sick on the way as coming to a group on sexuality was bringing up incest issues and I asked for the support of the group. Robert said: "We won't support you in your fear". I said: "I hope you will support me in love". He said: "Yes ..." (I can't remember his words).

The Contract

A sheet of paper was given out to everyone. Pens were brought round. Robert told us what to write on our paper. A series of statements:

"I am completely protected and safe in all that I undertake to do."

"I am a master, coming into my full empowerment."

"I assure myself that I will make it through each and every practice that we undertake to do."

"I start and I will finish."

"I am responsible for my well-being."

"I am responsible for my state of health."

"I am responsible for anything and everything which I create..."

At the end of the page Robert said: "Now sign it."

I heard a few gasps around me. I had imagined that these papers were for our own use. I was surprised when Nina, Robert's partner came around and collected them all up and we didn't see them again. These were returned to us by post about two weeks after the weekend.

Friday evening, standing in a circle, holding hands, Kundalini Workout - to open the chakras and to raise life energy, Kundalini energy. Breathing in, chanting one long tone on the outbreath, a "visualisation" was given for each chakra. This went on for quite a long time, during it I felt dizzy, sick and rather faint, but I continued. After this we were taught "firebreathing". In this you have to take a deep breath into the belly, then fill up the chest area, hold, expire two thirds and with the remainder of the breath do firebreathing, breathing in and out from the belly. I didn't find this easy to do, and had to keep stopping to get my breath properly. I found this gruelling. I told Robert I found it difficult and he gave hints on how to do it, e.g. just concentrate on either the inbreath or the outbreath.

At some point a bag was brought round from which we all took a circular "card" like a tarot card, Robert's own design. On them were designs and a name which was ours for the weekend. At some point we had to look up the meaning in one of his books and choose a partner and work out together a Play for portraying the meaning of these cards. Then followed yoga exercises, for better sex. Being unused to yoga, I found it difficult, although it was said to be beginners' level.

Struggle Under Pressure

Saturday morning, people were not supposed to talk upon arising. We could make drinks but no breakfast until after the group exercises.

Robert said that as some people were feeling faint, we would sit down to continue. It was easier for me when we were working on the higher-up chakras. When focusing on the lower chakras I had felt a lot of distress and discomfort, and pain in my body. When we were sitting down, I began to feel a bit better. I was expressing my sounds, and felt the simplicity of it, and felt good about it.

The Diet

We stopped for breakfast, which was around midday. The meal was rice, rye, millet, other grains, boiled together. On it you could have maple syrup, to maintain the blood sugar level, and shredded coconut, plus drinks, nothing else. The rice diet were the only meals we ate over the weekend. In the evening the rice could have pepper added to it (cayenne I think), and someone brought a bottle of Soya sauce. Saturday afternoon and evening, I can't remember properly the sequence of events. I didn't note them down at the time. At various points we were reminded to get together our Play with our partners, and to read up what it said about our "characters" in the book. The cards were supposed to represent where we were in our lives, and it had also to do with our sexuality. I couldn't understand what the book was all about, it was all so heavily symbolic, and to me it was so airy-fairy. I have language A-levels and a degree in Psychology but I could not make head nor tail of it. Nobody seemed to be able to understand what they were supposed to be doing. Robert and Nina said not to worry as it would all come out right at the time, we would be surprised at how it would work out and hidden meaning would emerge as we enacted our play.

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Saturday afternoon... All sitting in a circle. Robert was talking about sexuality, showing some exercises - e.g. a stance to take up to enhance the climax, a touch. Some people were asking questions which he answered. He discussed couples' need to ask each other lovingly if they can explore each others bodies in subtle ways to discover what gave them pleasure. He talked about energies and exchange of energies, and that he withheld his ejaculation, rationed it to one a month or something like that. Something to do with conservation of energies I think.

Then Robert began to say... (the following is as near as I can remember the words; whilst some accuracy may be lost, the meaning is clear and very accurate) ...

"You know, when a girl loses her virginity, it can be such a painful experience that the whole experience is unpleasant". At this a number of women agreed, saying that it had been painful for them. Robert continued...:

"Often the girl loses her virginity to a young, inexperienced, insensitive male, drunk, in the back of a Ford car. Wouldn't it be better, far kinder, for the girl's father to do it, with love and compassion!!!

Scapegoat

I could hardly believe my ears. This was incest he was advocating. All of my personal intensive psychotherapy for the last four years has been working on recovery from incest trauma. I sat speechless for a while, listening in amazement and horror to one after another of the group members agreeing with Robert, mainly men. I said that it was incest he was talking about and that I could never agree to that, that I knew from the inside the trauma caused by it. One man agreed with me, he said that he thought that what was being proposed was completely wrong. He was the only other person in the group of 20 people besides myself who spoke against it. The man



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speaking against it was argued with by many group members, men at first, and to my amazement women joined in, wholeheartedly attacking his views and supporting Robert's proposal. The sole man kept trying to make his case, saying: "Why does he need to put his penis in at all? He doesn't have to penetrate his daughter. If he has to do it why can't he do it with his fingers! Why does he have to use his penis?" There were heated arguments about fingers and penile penetrations. The sole man was against the whole idea but whatever he said was shouted down and dismissed. At one time, this man and one woman were very voluble, in heated conflict, and Robert said to the man: "See how you create conflict. This is how you create conflict in your relationships." I felt this was manipulation on Robert's part.

Other cultures do it

On a number of occasions Robert was interjecting, saying that this sexual practice was common and normal in some cultures, and it worked very well for them. He said that in some cultures it was common for the fathers to initiate their daughters into sex and for mothers to initiate their sons, and in some cultures the boys were initiated into sex by an older woman or aunt. This was supposed to be an argument for these practices being acceptable here. Another man argued with the sole man saying that it was "...a common practice in other cultures and it's now coming over here, in fact it's already here." I was horrified. The sole man was eventually completely put down and silenced.

" ... Why does he need to put his penis in at all? He doesn't have to penetrate his daughter. If he has to do it why can't he do it with his fingers!"

I spoke and said to Robert: "I find it very interesting that you turn all the older men, the fathers, into these wonderful, kind, compassionate beings, but you don't perform a similar metamorphosis on the young men. You leave them where they are, as insensitive, brutish, drunken louts in the back of Ford cars. (I heard a number of 'Yes's around me). I said: "There are millions of women, and men, in America and this country who have been incested and traumatised by it. Where are all these compassionate, loving fathers? Where are they? I can't see them all. It's not reality. You're not talking about reality. Where's the reality?"

Robert said, that in other cultures it was the norm for fathers to do this, and it worked well, and no harm was done because it was accepted, it was normal, and the feelings were not repressed. It is when these feelings are repressed that you get problems, he insisted.

But you enjoyed it ...

I was horrified and upset by what I was hearing. I said, that I had been traumatised by incest and that I knew of many thousands of others who had similarly suffered. I said that I had many clients who had also been traumatised by it. Robert negated

what I had said by saying that I couldn't help people in that situation, because I would hold them in the victim position. He held this view and I disagreed. I also said, that I was here at the group for that reason, to go beyond my present limitations, saying that I had been traumatised by the experience in my growing up years and that I had been handcuffed. Robert said to the group, that this was the kind of thing that could happen when these feelings were repressed! He said to me: "Are you sure that there wasn't one small part of you that felt pleasure?"

Shame

This was a really difficult area for me. He hit right on my shame (which I had been trying to look at recently, with great difficulty). I said: "Yes, I think maybe you are right". He told me to focus on that feeling and go into it, accentuate it... and to make a sound, let a sound come up from that feeling. I did so. I went into catharsis. He told me to let it come up and it may be better if I stand up, which I did and it was easier. He asked for a group member to volunteer to support me. Two women were willing to do this, one came forward and she held my hands and encouraged me. Later she put her hand on my shoulder. I continued letting out anger and pain and held my body as I could feel my emotional pain there. Robert told the woman to put her hands on my body where I had my hands, to support me, which she did. I did plenty of catharting (which I am used to doing in a group situation). At one point Robert said to the group: "She is doing this for everybody in the group" (an element I am familiar with). At another point when I stopped, Robert asked if there was any more to come out. He thought there was. I continued for a while more. At the end of it Robert gave a loud chant and then bowed. He said: "Look at all that power you've been sitting on all that time. You are cleansed now, you can carry on with your life (free of pain)". I was exhausted, but very aware that what he had said was not true. I had not been cleared of emotional pain.

He was talking as if I had been cleansed and healed by his interventions. He was claiming something that was not so. It is a very long and painstaking process. I was very much aware throughout of my pool of emotional pain residing in my lower back (which I am very familiar with), and also in my stomach area. Whilst I had siphoned a lot of this out, it had by no means been cleared. There was plenty more where that came from. He did not ask me for my feedback on my own condition, he was not interested in having that information.

I was exhausted by this time, my throat was very sore, I sat down and rested. At one point Robert said to the group: "This is the kind of damage that's done to a person when these feelings are repressed, and they come out in perverted ways which are damaging". He was, I am certain, advocating incestuous practices.

He was saying, that if incestuous desires has been freely indulged in, the perversion would not have occurred. Nobody pointed out that what he was advocating was itself perverted.

Forgiveness

In the whole group a woman told me, that in order to be properly healed I had to forgive my father. I told her that there was such a thing as premature forgiveness and that if there is anger or fear deep inside and you ride over the top of that to forgiveness, then it is not authentic. You need to work through the feelings first and that whilst forgiveness is an ideal, a goal, it is a very long range one, and is a very individual matter.

People reject their own bodies because they feel betrayed by their bodies. But bodies do what they are created to do, we were betrayed not by our bodies, but by our abusers.

There was some comment on forgiveness and Robert said: "You created that situation yourself in your life. Some part of you was asking for it, asking for him to do that to you, you brought it out in him in some way". I disagreed that a child had any responsibility. We argued around this point. A woman stated to me that we do create our own world and the experiences we have. I said I agreed with that concept, but could never agree that a child was in any way responsible for such situations. She said: "You have to look at the advantages you have gained from the experience". I agreed that the advantage I have is that I know from the inside; I understand people who have been traumatised in these kinds of ways; I know a lot that other people cannot possibly understand, my personal experience is of great use and value to me as I work with others. "Yes", the woman said, "so really it is an advantage". I disagreed, it is a trauma, but I can put my experience to good use to help others. The traumatic struggle to recover is character building. To say it is an advantage is to deny the fact that my losses far outweigh my gains. The losses have been, and are, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, sexual, and in close relationships in particular. I had been looking recently at the subject of my own shame. This is one of the most (if not THE most) difficult and traumatic areas of recovery. People reject their own bodies because they feel betrayed by their bodies. But bodies do what they are created to do, we were betrayed not by our bodies, but by our abusers.

Any pleasure that may have been felt at any one time is the source of the deepest shame. The victim does not feel any pleasure because they like what is happening, but because they have a human body, and abusers have no right to tamper with it. It is vital to receive this kind of feedback from a therapist/facilitator, and Robert had acted in a therapist role. I received no such feedback or support, in fact the opposite, in that he used my case to justify his assertion that incestuous feelings should be expressed freely.

Homosexuality

Around this time some comments were made about homosexuality. One man, the lone man who had objected to the incest concept, said he could never make love to a man. He was shouted down by comments such as "Of course you could..." "Why

not..." He restated his feeling that the idea repulsed him, he could never do it. He was shouted down by many people. at the same time, they were up in arms against him. Tolerance was a one-way thing in this group. The man tried to express his view but was shouted down all the time. Later various cleansing and energy-raising Yoga exercises were done in the group. Robert and Nina demonstrated first, then the group did the exercises in twos. One was to do with sonar energising and healing of the body: A lay on the floor on their back whilst B put their hand over each chakra (energy centre) in turn whilst placing their mouth on or near that part of the body and chanting the relevant chant for that chakra. B started on the base chakra (genitals), moving up to the solar plexus, heart, throat, forehead, top of head. Then in reverse. This was done in unison so that everybody was chanting the same sound at the same time. At the end of this exercise I felt very energised and light. Then the partners swapped around.

Another exercise was A standing and B placing their fingers on A's head and drawing them sharply down the body all round, after which the hands were flicked upwards around their back. Then-swap. This was also a very energising exercise for me.

Another exercise, I think it was called the Love Pouja, took quite a long time. The entire group of men and women took part simultaneously. For this there were two circles of people, one inside the other, facing partners. A and B put their hand on the partner's heart, their other hand was laid on the top of their partner's hand on their own heart. The partners looked into each others' eyes, and with each inbreath and outbreath were to give and to receive love through the eyes. The silence was broken only by the breathing in unison and gentle music. After some time the partners hugged and moved on to the person on their left. The procedure was repeated, so that each person move round partnering everybody in the opposite circle. This was a very intensive exercise for me, especially for my heart; I found it a profoundly emotional experience.

Saturday evening ended around 11pm. Some people retired for the night, some remained talking, some were preparing for their Plays the next day. Sunday morning was the usual arising with no speaking. At 10am Robert banged the big drum to let people know it was time to start the group. The morning began as usual on an empty stomach, with chanting in a circle, standing, focusing on the chakras in turn. Sunday Afternoon we performed our Plays in twos. People were trying to work out what they were supposed to be doing, and then working out their acts. The Plays were performed for about 5-10 minutes each, in twos in front of the entire group. The plays were to represent the messages contained in the cards we had drawn on Friday, and these had to do with elements of sexuality. About three of the Plays included simulated sex, fully dressed, apart from one couple, a man and woman who lived together, in which he bared her naked breasts and sucked them in turn.

Finale

The finale was the group in a circle saying what they had got out of the weekend. People spent time taking leave of each other.

On the way home, some of us stopped en route and talked about the weekend. I was asked what I thought about Robert and I said I thought he was no Guru, and that I was very seriously concerned about some of his views. At that one woman (who had remained silent in the group) said she felt I was very courageous to have said the things I did in the group and that Robert needed to hear them, and that she agreed with every word I said one hundred per cent. It is obvious that she did not feel free to agree with me or support me at those times in the group. Another person commented on my catharsis in the group, and my courage during that. He said: "You weren't the only one to experience that, others of us went through that during the week's course, and we were naked". At one point, he said, he was expressing anger towards his mother (working through a childhood trauma) with one of the women then present acting as his mother. She said: "He had his hands around my neck, expressing anger. I just lay there, I just trusted no harm would come to me, that he wouldn't hurt me. And he didn't, it was alright..." I was horrified. In my experience, one person expressing anger, catharting whilst having their hands around another person's neck is unethical and dangerous. I believe no facilitator should allow this to take place, or if it does, to stop it and divert the person's hands on to a cushion.

I returned home, only then beginning to fully register the events and feelings of the weekend, and feeling very disturbed indeed about what I had seen and heard.

The following Centres offer individual and group work on sexuality:

Training in Sex Therapy

St George's Medical School
Grammar Terrace
London SW17 0RG

Earls Court Square
London SW5 9UH

Relate : National Marriage Guidance Council

NMGC Training Officer
Herbert Gray College Little Church Street
Rugby CV21 3AP

Good Workshops on Sexuality are held **metanoia**

13 North Common Road
London W5 2QB
Tel. 081-579-2505

Edinburgh Human Sexuality Group

Family Planning Clinic
18 Dean Terrace
Edinburgh EH4 1NL

Spectrum

7 Endymion Road
London N4 1EE
Tel. 081-341-2277

London Inst for the Study of Sexuality

Flat C Langham Mansions

An interesting book:

Sex Therapy in Britain by Martin Cole and Windy Dryden (Eds), Open University Press 1988