

AHPP CONFERENCE

PATHS OF AWARENESS

APRIL 1992

What can one expect from a conference called 'Paths of Awareness' that explores the relationship between psychotherapy and the development of the human spirit? nearly ninety of us gathered, the evening after the General Election at Gaunt's House mostly exhausted and dispirited and needing some spiritual input. Bach's wonderful cello suite no 4 certainly spoke to my soul and Alix Pirani's plenary talk, posing the question "is the psychotherapist the cellist and the client the cello - or visa versa in the therapeutic relationship?" set the tone for the varied workshops on offer. They included the Buddhist philosophy from Karuna, as Maura Sills was unfortunately ill; the Sufi traditional tale and working with it from Kunderke Kevlin; The Rabbinical teachings of Howard Cooper; and Lilith, the dark goddess of destruction and rebirth, a workshop led by Alix and described to me by one man as 'churning'. I attended the Karuna workshop, one on the Mystic Kabbalah again with Alix, which uses the tree of life as a model for contemplation, and also living Magically with Gill Edwards, a metaphysical view of creating your own reality, a concept which I,

personally found difficult. Courtenay Young looked at spiritual emergency, & its closeness to psychosis, while Charles Bentley on Archetypes, Sandie Ritter on the Enneagram, & Ros Langdon with Methods of Awareness Expansion gave a wide choice of sessions. John Rowan went round most of the workshops, and ably summed up at the close. I've talked to several people since, and our conversations served to confirm how difficult it is to grasp something so abstract and essentially personal without becoming either too heady or too airy, and to work with this in therapy or counselling is an immense challenge. It was all very serious stuff, and for many of us the truly joyful aspect of the Human Spirit was expressed in our home groups, and especially in the peace dancing and chanting led by Jen Turner, and for me most of all in the still of midnight under the moon down at the lake - the tiny rustlings and callings of animal life, the stars, the balmy silence, the reflection on the water - that's when I felt part of the earth and beyond. To describe it is difficult enough, to try and work with it almost impossible.

Elizabeth Collis