



## ***How I Knew . . .***

***Ron Kurtz***

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I'd like to tell you about how I knew God wanted me to be a psychotherapist. It has to do with a guy who was breathing a certain way.

I'd never done psychotherapy. I'd been in encounter groups and stuff like that on the West Coast. One time, after I'd been in therapy with Arthur Janov for two weeks and nothing had happened, I was broke, I owed money and I was in a bad way. I was thinking of going back and getting my old job at the bowling alley or something equivalent. I was passing through Albany, New York. (You wouldn't think a man's whole life could change in Albany, NY) I stopped there to spend a few days with an

old friend of mine who was the staff psychologist at Albany Medical College. This man, who was a great lover of God, one of the true faith, a lover of Meher Baba, said to me, 'Why don't you come up to the hospital and be a guest therapist?'

As I said, I'd never done a lick of psychotherapy in my life, so I said, 'Of course. Yes, I'll be glad to.' Being a psychopath, I assumed I was a psychotherapist. (You can almost feel invisible hands at work already.) My first day there, my friend introduced me to a group of people from the locked ward and the staff, who were sitting around in a circle waiting for group psychotherapy. He introduced me as guest

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therapist. That's it. I'm on.

I looked slowly around at everybody. I was looking for where the energy was. I'd been in encounter groups and that's what you did, so I did it. You don't want to work unless there's energy around. So, I'm looking around, stopping to look at each person and I come to this one guy who's staring intently at me. I figure he's got it. He's got the energy. So I say to him, 'I sense that you're angry. Is that right?'

He answers. In my whole life I never heard such a voice. This guy's voice sounds like it's coming out of an empty, fifty-gallon oil drum. It's totally hollow and deep. He says, 'Yeaahs.' Suddenly I realise . . . I'm in cuckoo land! I tell myself, 'Go ahead anyway. What's to lose?'

So I ask him, 'Would you like to work with that?'

Again, 'Yeaahs.' I decide I'll do what those encounter group guys do. I motion with my hand and tell him, 'Why don't you lie down?' Then I look at the floor. It's linoleum. I want to get him kicking and banging but the floor's cold and hard. The staff and I talk about the floor for a minute till someone runs out and gets a rug, about one foot square. I'm not impressed by the rug but I am by the person's running out and getting one. These staff people have been in the hospital longer than the patients and they have heard that a new age is dawning and here's a guest therapist from the magical coast asking a patient, the first in the history of New York State, to lie on the damn floor. Worth watching? Worth running out for a rug? You bet!

The guy lies down on the little rug. I'm planning to get him kicking and banging and yelling. Get that angry stuff out. That's the policy. Well, first thing I notice is he is breathing backward. He tightens

his stomach when he breathes in. So I figure I'd better fix that first, before we kick and bang. Now this is a room of maybe twenty patients on a locked mental ward in a big hospital with nurses, doctors, psychiatrists and residents, fifteen or so, all gathered around. I kneel down next to this guy on the floor. I get one hand on his belly and with the other, I stroke his head. I'm going to get him to breathe right and I'm using one hand to help him feel the movement in his belly and the other to soothe him.

I'm not thinking at all about how this might look to these people who don't touch their patients and definitely don't get down on the floor with them. I imagine they were saying to themselves, 'What kind of mumbo jumbo is this?' But I'm not thinking about that. I'm tripping gaily along thinking, 'Isn't this nice, being a psychotherapist.'

So, I'm leaning over this guy, whispering in his ear, nobody able to hear a word I'm saying, except me, and I guess him. I tell him, 'Listen, try to get my hand to go up when you breathe in. Okay?' It takes about two minutes. Finally he gives a big sigh and starts breathing right. I say, 'That's wonderful. That's right. Keep doing it.' And he keeps sighing and doing it. After a while he's breathing nice and easy and I'm whispering encouragement. I feel like I'm on top of everything now. Except he isn't talking. He doesn't answer my questions. He hasn't said a word for three or four minutes now. In point of fact, he's asleep. He's sleeping! I want to say something like, 'Are you awake?' but I'm afraid of what all these people will think. I'm supposed to be doing therapy and the patient has fallen asleep.

So I decide to get up, sit in my chair and

look like I know what I'm doing. I figure that's my best shot. I get back in my seat with a look of confidence, as if to say, 'This is what is supposed to happen, folks. I was going to get him to kick, but he fell asleep and he can't hear me any more. Happens all the time.' Confident, you know. Then I look back at him and see that he has peed all over the floor. He peed on the floor. I guess while we were down there together with me looking close at his eyes and whispering in his ear. And I never noticed it. There's a long silence. Believe me! I'm not going to say anything because I haven't the slightest idea what's going on. Beats me. They're not going to say anything either. Maybe they're figuring it's a new method — pee on the floor therapy. More likely they're wondering if they should let me out or not.

The long silence is broken when he cools off a bit and wakes up. He pops up on his elbows and looks around. Without saying anything he looks steadily at me. Words simply fail me. I'm in shock. It could have ended right there, my whole career, I mean. Some nurse had the presence of mind to ask him if he wanted to go change his clothes. He nodded, yes and left the room silently. I'd been saved. I still think I'm in charge, so I ask, 'Any questions?' Give me a hint, right? I need some support here. The whole group, everybody, in one synchronised movement, turns slightly away from me. Their eyes keep looking at me, but their heads and bodies turn away. No questions. Not one. Thirty-five people in the room and none of them has a single thing they want to ask me. I figure, 'That's it. I bombed. I don't need to be a psychotherapist. I'll be a writer.' It's very quiet.

Right then he comes walking back in. Maybe he'll talk to me. He sits down and I say, 'How are you doing?' And, in a perfectly normal voice, a beautiful, soft, full-bodied voice, he says, 'I feel wonderful.' *Boom!* An electric ripple goes through the people there. I can feel it. 'Wow, look at that!' That's what they're thinking. 'Look at that. How did that happen?' I'm back. They had been trying to turn this guy around for weeks and me, with my quiet confidence and magic hands did the job in fifteen minutes. Of course, I know — a little miracle has happened. If not in the patient's life, then certainly in mine. I begin to feel the angels around me. I imagine they have strict orders concerning my career development. I hear the commands coming down to them, 'Get Kurtz out of there! Get him out!' Somebody up there, as the expression goes, wanted me to be a psychotherapist and He had bailed me out.

So, that's how I knew. I mean if He got me out of that one, He must want me to be a psychotherapist. So, I knew. Once in a while, after that fateful development, while I still lived in Albany, I'd run into the guy who headed the psychiatric part of the hospital. The first thing he'd always say was, 'He's still out.' He was referring to the guy who peed on the floor. The guy had gotten out of the hospital a week later and never got put back in. In fact he went around telling people how I'd saved him. Well, we know who saved whom.

Sometime, I'll have to tell you the story of the next day when I tried to repeat myself and blew it completely. A real disaster. But that didn't affect my career. I was already sure I was going to be a psychotherapist.