

*Is It possible
to be human
in
an inhuman
world?*

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Philip Rogers

By describing ourselves as humanistic we have important things to contribute to creating a more humane world. I would like to suggest that it starts within, within us as individuals and within us as humanistic organisations. In our conference, 'To be or not to be Humanistic', one thing was said that has stayed with me: 'If we say we are humanistic, could that subtly imply that others are inhumanistic!' We must take care to prevent this happening.

One of our contributions to a more humane world could be to acknowledge that the inhuman world is not 'out there' but 'in here', in each of us, and then act on that knowledge and demonstrate the usefulness of it.

I'd like to illustrate with an example from my own life. It's not pleasant; in fact it's about inhumanity and corruption. I hope that it is also about hope.

In the early 70s, like many people, I dreamed of a utopian life in a loving community. Not for me the life I'd known, the dreary, painful, suburban middle class England, the Tricky Dicky politicians and uptight hypocrites that John Lennon sang straight to my heart about. No, I would live differently. I preferred 'Imagine', the song that says 'imagine all the people living life in

peace'. I turned these dreams into reality and for almost fifteen years I lived in a spiritual community, first in India then America.

I loved living in this community. I gave my whole life to it for that period, willingly and mostly joyfully. I had my ups and downs. It's not easy trying and failing to give up the ego, but basically I was happy. I was in my right place. I was sharing my ideals with others who also shared them. We were living out our values of living from the heart, or so I thought.

This community was the Rajneesh Ashram, and you may know something of what happened. This is a complex affair, which I am writing a book about, but I'll give some brief details. The first I knew of the inhumanity that destroyed this community for me was when

Rajneesh himself accused his secretary, Sheela, in a public discourse, of tapping phones of people living in the community in Oregon in the USA. Within a few hours she had fled the country with a few close associates.

The FBI treated this as an invitation, not surprisingly, and many people were arrested over the next weeks. What emerged from their investigations was and is sickening to me. Sheela and the people close to her had lost their humanity and fallen into paranoia and a reckless disregard for the law and the people around them. They organised terrible things to try to hold onto and increase their power.

Some examples are:

Attempted murder by poisoning. The victim was rushed to hospital in a helicopter and survived.

Cultivating Salmonella bacteria and spreading it in salad bars in restaurants in a local town. Many people suffered from food poisoning; fortunately no-one died.

Conspiracy to murder the Oregon State Attorney General, a political opponent.

These and other crimes are well documented and proven in the US courts. Sheela served four years in jail after being extradited from Germany. She didn't do these things alone; many people helped her and were also jailed.

The point I want to make is that this community was my home and mostly I was happy there. The people I knew I mostly loved and respected. There were a few I thought were on power trips, but what's new there. Right up to the moment I heard about it, I would have laughed at any suggestion of such madness in our community. We were

creating what we called a Buddhafield, an energy field of growing consciousness. We were not wierdos like the Moonies looked to me or some other strange cult like the poor people who died at Jonestown in Guyana. Many of the early leaders of the human potential movement came and stayed in the Ashram. We were intelligent, loving, aware people, into meditation and a modern style of spiritual life. We thought we were the living proof of humanistic life.

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We were also fools. We were fooled by people who lied to us, but that is not the part that troubles me the most. More important than that is, that what we did, made this possible, I would

say now, even likely? What we did was to fool ourselves by thinking we were different, special, better than, more conscious. Basically we denied our shadow. We did this with some sophistication, we knew about negativity, we had therapies and meditations to help us express it and be free of it. And there's the rub; we thought we were free of it.

That's a dangerous state to get into. You may not see the shadow, you may not see the inhumanity, it may be hidden, but assume it's gone at your peril. Especially don't do what we did and assume it's gone from here and can be seen, oh so easily, over there in some other person or group. We did that and paid a heavy price.

This brings me to the hopeful bit. I hope I learned from this very painful experience. I now believe that we created this inhumanity by projection.

Because we, as individuals and as a community, failed to acknowledge our shadow; because we preferred to think the comfortable thoughts that go with that denial; then this shadow had to emerge where it could, which is in the weakest links, that is those hungry for power and willing to do whatever it takes to retain it.

Part of the lesson for me is that, first, I have to acknowledge the shadow in me and also in any groups that I am involved with and then, second, use that knowledge to inform my own behaviour and to influence the actions of those groups. That way I hope to include the inhumanity and through that inclusion avoid unwittingly helping to create it. I'm not very good at doing this and it's not very popular, it can be seen as being negative. I hope that talking about it here will make it a little bit more possible, for myself and for you, too, if you so wish.

