

Hazel Guest

The A.P.T. Conference in California, July 1979

It was back in January that I decided to attend the seventh annual conference of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology, to be held at Asilomar, near Monterey, California, during a weekend in July. I had booked a Laker return flight to San Francisco, and owing to the grounding of DC 10's the outward flight was delayed by thirteen hours. Having missed my connections I arrived in Carmel-by-the-Sea twentyfour hours late, feeling in need of the next three days of relaxation, sunbathing on the beach, before beginning the serious business of the conference.

On Friday I travelled a few miles along the coast to the state-run conference centre at Asilomar. This consisted of several modern purpose-built blocks. There were an administrative centre, dining halls, lecture theatres, and separate residential blocks, all set in a deer park flanking the beach; however it was in vain that I looked for deer and the ubiquitous racoon. It did not take long to discover that I was the only one from Europe out of a total of some four hundred people attending the conference, a fact which my accent made immediately obvious.

The weekend's programme contained nearly sixty different presentations offering a wide choice, and causing the usual frustration at the impossibility of attending two different presentations simultaneously. The opening address by Willis Harman of the Stanford Research Institute, was on the value of making decisions by 'tuning in to the transpersonal'. This was in relation to personal decisions, and to those on a group, national or world level. He warned of the obvious dangers, and spoke of the way in which western science has avoided these dangers by going to the other extreme. 'Science has been looking into only those areas of reality where we won't be upset by what we find'.

I attended a talk on ESP, an experiential session of guided imagery related to the New Testament parable of the sower, a talk and discussion on the value of having a teacher or guide for one's own spiritual growth, and a panel discussion on 'Psychopathology and the Spirit'. This last proved to be a popular choice, the members of the panel being well known. After the subject had been introduced by the convener Daniel Goleman, Stanislav Grof gave a very brief version of his theories derived from his LSD research which relate human experience to four stages of the embryo before and during birth. Then Kathleen Riordan Speeth, psychologist and authoress of 'The Gurdjieff Work', quoted cases from her own practice to illustrate the pathological pitfalls of which the transpersonalist must beware. I now regret not attending what must have been a fascinating lecture with slides on the symbolism and archetypal material in Disney's 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs'.

The evenings were devoted to functions of more social nature. Friday night saw us dancing with gusto to a great variety of styles of music, and on Saturday we gathered for a large group meditation with music and movement, guided by Emmett Miller. I recommend his two tapes of guided meditation, 'Rainbow Butterfly' and 'A Healing Journey', which are quite a trip the first time you hear them.

At mid-day on Sunday the closing ceremony, like the opening ceremony, consisted of chanting led by David Zeller, whose soft guitar-playing and gentle voice inspired us all to feel a new warmth and radiance. I left the conference feeling that the journey had been well worth while and knowing that I had made a number of new friends. Being an academic myself, it was a wonderful experience to meet so many people who are both transpersonalists and professionally related to the academic field. In Britain the academic world is still in the dark ages as far as most branches of personal growth are concerned, and especially branches like transpersonal psychology which place an emphasis on spiritual growth. I was delighted to meet so many people whom previously I had known only as names from their books and papers; and I was impressed by the youthfulness of those present regardless of age.

I think I shall go again.

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