

Arica. Week Two.

234 East 23rd Street
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

I first heard talk of Oscar Ichazo, the Chilean Sufi guru about two years ago. All I knew about sufism at the time was that it was a religion in ancient Persia, that it eschewed the establishment of any permanent institutions and, in so doing, preserved a mysterious anonymity analagous to that of the Rosicrucians who maintain that anyone calling himself a member of their order cannot, by definition, be one.

The notion that a permanent institution which maintains a codified system of belief is doomed to obsolescence, and the idea that a given message is only valid for a specific time and place, struck me as reasonable--perhaps even true. I was intrigued by Idries Shah's assertion that there had been a thousand-year proscription against writing down the Sufi teaching-stories, and that the thousand years had just ended, thus clearing up any contradiction involved in the appearance of these ancient, orally preserved tales. It was not surprising. A new age, after all, was being initiated: we were watching the widening of another gyre.

My own experience with abstract philosophical systems is that my faith is given impulsively and becomes sorely tried when I encounter them in manifest forms. It is inevitable to identify the teachers of a system with the system they teach--to want to see them as models of behavior, and, invariably to discover that for all their arcane wisdom they are still caught in the meshes of their individual personalities; trying to balance their lives, their relationships; being, in fact, people and not models of behavior at all.

Last July, the Sat-Guru Maharaj-ji visited one of his ashrams in the desert just south of Tucson. I spent about eight hours at the house waiting to be "given the knowledge" which I discovered I could not receive, since it required total submission to the Sat-Guru, whom I'd never seen. I was then taken to him. He was surrounded by radiant, white-robed disciples--tall, golden-haired Arizonian youths. It was night; the room was filled with people sitting re-

spectfully in half-lotus on the floor. The little guru was having a disagreement with an irate, irrational sixteen-year-old girl. She did not understand how a guru could be more important than God. It was ridiculous, she said. The plump, thirteen-year-old Indian holy man spoke incredibly quickly, citing a rather innocent metaphor involving a door and a house. Later, when I heard similar comparisons from the disciples doing sat-sang in the garden, I felt annoyed--embarrassed by the obvious mental contamination.

Later, while I was living briefly in Guatamala, I received several letters from a close friend who was entering the final month of the second New York Arica training. I was impressed by the depth of her commitment, by her involvement with the group effort. She seemed to have had no trouble making the initial leap of faith into the new ideology. Her experiences seemed intense, even profound, and her life had been given (if only temporarily) a structure within which these experiences might be internalized; processed in such a way as to effect real changes in her personality.

I was in something of an emotional trough at the time and I felt a strong urge to take my friend's advice and do the next training. The main impediment, it seemed to me, was the cost (three thousand dollars, U.S.), as well as my initial assumption that anything so expensive would attract a class of people I didn't want to be identified with. The issue of the money, with all its implications, became the central focus of my ambivalence.

Upon returning to New York I discovered that the tuition was payable in fifteen hundred dollar installments. I told myself, again, that a true master never takes money in exchange for enlightenment. My publisher offered me a two thousand dollar advance on a children's book. I decided to keep an open mind.

"Everybody," Arica asserts, "as a natural corollary to learning, becomes conditioned into fixed patterns of perception and behavior." They call these patterned responses "ego" or "personality" and perceive it as a sort of grid laid over, and obscuring, the "Essential Self" in which resides five million years of cumulative instinctual evolutionary knowledge. Their "ego" resembles, more or less, Freud's Superego. It has been conditioned to be energetically reactionary. It has a strong aversion to change. My own experiences during the second week of the training bear this out. They have been relatively negative. My resistance, I realize, is great, even depressing at times. I have been clock-watching; feeling distracted and irritable. I am confident, however, that it will pass.

One of the exercises we are currently performing is called the "Free Mantram" and entails making lists of five hundred names, five hundred places, and five hundred ideas from the past. To each of these fifteen hundred words, the student

assigns a number of descriptive adjectives which, we were told, might very well tend to be negative. We should not be alarmed. It would be merely the anger of our newly emerging Essential Self expressing itself--our "Essential Anger" against the stifling grid of programmed responses and conditioned behavior patterns which are an inevitable by-product of growing up in society. After completing the lists, we are to read them over, assimilate, and then destroy them.

Arica. Week Three.

June 4th 1972

I should begin by admitting that I have not yet become a True Believer. My doubts have less to do with the exercises themselves than with the way in which the information is being passed; with the personalities of the trainers and the Arica organization. I have a strong sense that our work is based on valid assumptions, on workable theories. But I am disappointed with the way in which this information seems to have been assimilated by and integrated into the personalities of the teachers of the system. Expressions of doubt, resentment, resistance, meet with a single predictable and maddening response: "it's working." For the moment, at least, I am willing to try and believe it. But it's not so easy.

In some respects I was more comfortable with the suggestion that we do the exercises because "they work" than I am now with the theories of how they work. Recently I had a discussion with someone who asserted that she had a "commitment to logical, Aristotelean, non-teleological thought," and though I have no such commitment, I am still sufficiently attached to my intellect to require intelligent explanations and to reject mere wish-fulfilling assumptions based on quasi-magical notions. There is no doubt that I am, as they say, "in ego;" overly-obsessed with the personalities rather than the essences of the trainers. But I have the irrepressible suspicion that the trainers are not themselves "in essence" but rather have achieved a state of extreme, group-supported narcissism. I find this disquieting.

One of the most interesting and, I think, potentially viable techniques of the training involves learning to do "Mentations." A "mentation" is a non-verbal thought which occurs throughout the entire body and uses, not merely the brain, but the whole nervous system to process information. Each section of the body is correlated with a specific kind of awareness. It breaks down in this manner:

Part of the body:

Hands and feet
Calves and forearms
Knees and elbows
Thighs and upper arms
Genitals

Kind of information processed:

Goals
Means
Charisma
Capacity
Orientation

Colon and kidneys
Liver
Heart
Mouth and stomach
Nose and lungs
Eyes
Ears

Elimination
Method
Impulse
Needs
Possibilities
Form
Substance

According to this system, it is with our hands and feet, for example, that we sense or recognize our goals. Our thighs and forearms, in which reside our greatest muscular strength, evaluate our capacity for performing a given task. The liver, which breaks complicated molecules down into simple structures which can be assimilated by the body, governs our choice of methods. The eyes perceive the external forms of things; ears receive the vibrations which emanate from all objects, and thereby give us information regarding the nature of their substance. This is not a process one thinks about. It occurs more rapidly than thought. It is going on all the time and constitutes the link between the energy in one's body and that of the cosmos. We are microcosms consisting of the same elements working in accordance with the same principles as those of the universe. The problem is that we are usually not quite in "sync" with the flow of universal energy--not in proper harmonious balance with the way in which it is all rotating out there in the macrocosm. We have deviations. Our genitals, for example, instead of orienting us by sensing what objects have life-giving potential, might be trying to figure out our goals or assess the means by which to attain them. Deviations create contradictions. To be in contradiction is undesirable, which is why the course of one's life is a sort of tuning process in which one's deviations are naturally brought into balance and the contradictions resolved. This process, however, can be accelerated. We are about to begin a series of specific exercises designed to correct our individual deviations.

Last Monday, before commencing "Kine Rhythms" we were instructed not to pass any exercises to people outside the training. The final indications for this exercise, designed to "clean the cortex" are: "Don't do Kine alone. Don't miss Kine. Don't do Kine--let Kine do you." It is the most difficult exercise we have learned thus far, the one with the greatest potential for altering basic mental patterns. It involves the simultaneous performance of several physical and mental activities and requires great concentration. A complete Kine rhythm takes about fifteen minutes to perform. They are done continuously in silent, two-hour sessions. We will do sixty hours of Kine Rhythms, devoting ourselves to them for four hours each day beginning next week.

I am about two-thirds of the way through the Free Mantram exercise. It is extremely difficult and time-consuming (just try writing down the names of five hundred people from your past some time). Lately I have been feeling less and less anger towards those long-lost friends, those out-moded ideas, the places associated with a past I am supposed to want banished from my memory. I have an impulse to keep the list rather than consign it to the flames. However: one of the Sunday prayer rituals entails climbing slowly up a long hill while repeating the mantram: "I listen and I obey." The men need only climb the hill once. The women, however, must perform the ritual three times, because although they are attentive listeners, they do not obey. I hate to admit it, but they've got my number.

Sincerely,

Winifred Rosen
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