

Arica. Weeks 11-13.

234 East 23rd Street
New York City, 10010
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Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York City, 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

I have been avoiding what is from my point of view the most abstract and elusive aspect of the training-- the formation and gradual cohesion of the working group. Various excuses come to mind, like how difficult it is to describe the exterior contours of a thing which is known only from the inside. I feel myself pressing against the rubbery interior of a balloon; it expands, grows thin, becomes translucent. But however far I crane my head around (distorting, incidentally, the shape) I cannot get a look at the whole balloon, and my efforts succeed merely in giving me a stiff neck. I step back and remind myself that "inside" and "outside" represent an apparent dichotomy constructed by my mind and do not, in reality, exist. Lao Tzu says:

. . .
In the beginning of heaven and earth there
were no words,
Words came out of the womb of matter;
And whether a man dispassionately
Sees to the core of life
Or passionately sees the surface,
The core and the surface
Are essentially the same,
Words making them seem different
Only to express appearance.
. . .

The Sufis say that nobody can awaken himself. Alone we will either turn off the alarm clocks we have so diligently set, or simply condition ourselves to their buzzing, integrating it into our dreams. Eventually we reach a point of utter disillusionment with ourselves and with all the mechanical means we are capable of resorting to. And though we try to forget about waking up, our dreams are increasingly threatening, the sleep no longer peaceful. We have no choice.

Discouraged by the failure of our individual efforts, we form a group and agree that whenever anyone wakes up he will rouse the rest of us. Some people sleep less soundly than others. But even the best-intentioned, most highly motivated group requires a teacher, someone who is permanently awake and who has an interest in awakening others.

It is important to remember that the individuals forming a group and enlisting the aid of an enlightened or realized master are sound asleep, dreaming. They have strong expectations regarding the experience to come. These expectations may be encouraged, initially, by the teacher, for it is only after the process of awakening has begun that its true nature and the real intentions of the master can be revealed.

Most of us who took the Arica training did so for purely personal, even selfish reasons. We were willing enough to lend our energies to a group effort but only because we believed that the investment would prove personally profitable, and that each of us, as individuals, would get high. Imagine our surprise (not to say indignation), when we realized--two months into the training--that Arica's expectations were different from, and in many ways even opposed to, our own.

Oscar believes that the planet is in peril. It is not merely humanity's way of life that is threatened, but life itself. The signs of crisis are so numerous, so unmistakable, that it hardly requires a prophet to point them out. In addition to the ecological threats, he reminds us that within the next ten years the number of people on the earth will equal that of all the people who have ever lived in the past. Oscar interprets this to mean that humanity is about to be judged. We are, he says, all here now.

Arica is not concerned with individuals. It is dedicated to no less a task than raising the consciousness of humanity in order to preserve organic life on earth.

. . .

A collection of individuals is not, technically, a group. Group consciousness depends upon a common perception of reality and the fusion of each individual's separate energy into a single will. A group, we are told, is as high as its lowest member, as strong as its weakest link, as on time as its latest arrival. Everyone is therefore responsible for the progress and well being of everyone else.

The way in which people experienced the process of--or attempt at--group cohesion varied considerably and was influenced by the fact that when the training began many of us were identified with a sub-group or social clique that tended to arrive at a consensus concerning the nature of reality (i.e. what was going on in the training). There were, for instance, 13 people from Big Sur, California, many of whom had been living on a collective ranch for several years. The Big Sur contingent, mostly musicians and friends of the original Chile group, arrived in New York with their families and virtually no money for either tuition or expenses. After some controversy they were accepted into the training in exchange for their musical talents, but for some weeks many of them subsisted on small hand-outs from day to day before the school undertook their complete support. Then there were the six of us from New York, writers and intellectuals, who quickly came to be known among the trainers as "The Critics." While the blond, sun-tanned deities from Big Sur abandoned themselves during the breaks to their music and dancing, The Critics exchanged opinions, pointed out inconsistencies, and generally maintained a pose of amused detachment from which to observe and analyse the unfolding drama. Contrary to the predictions of the trainers, both groups retained their identities throughout the course of the training. The six of us from New York who had been friends before the training were among the few people who lived apart from the group. This fact seems to have defined our experience to a great extent, and to have influenced indirectly the character of the group as a whole.

The training group consisted of 70 people, 39 men, 31 women. There were only six people under the age of 25, while 26 people fell between the ages of 25 and 30, and nearly as many between 30 and 40. Approximately a dozen people were over 40. There were twelve couples, eleven of which remained intact.

Although the vast majority of the group occupied communal apartments in the Orwell House on Central Park West and had virtually no contact with the outside world throughout the course of the training, my suspicion is that everyone felt equally alienated from the group as a whole; that we all tended to see ourselves as special in some way and to define our experience as different from that of the rest of the group. This universal sense of alienation abated somewhat during a ten-day exercise known as "The Line," but my own feeling is that the sense of connection that The Line encouraged was both incomplete and temporary.

In the long and intense Line exercise, each member of the group has two twenty-minute "interviews" with every other member assuming the two positions of "Yin" and "Yang." The person in the Yang position conducts the interview which is held in private. He tells the person where to sit--usually cross-legged with a meditation cushion jacking up the rear to help straighten the back, keeps a candle burning, and leads a salutation, some chanting and/or breathing exercises before commencing a Trespasso--the deep eye-contact exercise we were introduced to in The Desert. During the Trespasso, the one who is Yang tells the person in the Yin position what is keeping him out of Essence and preventing him from experiencing the reality of the moment. The interview functions as an ego reduction, although this is not its primary purpose. The Yang's goal is to make contact with and reach a total acceptance of the Yin as a member of his working group. If the contact is incomplete and acceptance cannot be reached, another interview is required.

The mechanics of the exercise were a bit complicated. First the group was divided in two, half Yin, half Yang. After three days we switched positions, the Yins becoming Yang and vice-versa. When the interviews had all been conducted in reverse, the two lines turned in upon themselves, dividing and sub-dividing until everyone had again assumed both roles. When The Line got underway we were working nine hours a day (not counting the morning work), six hours in the afternoon and three at night with an hour for dinner. After each twenty-minute session there was an interval of five minutes for the Yins to travel.

The Line is an exercise in Trialectics. The Yang represents the active principle, Yin the receptive. The function, symbolized by the candle, is an exchange of energy, baraka, or holy love, and the result is better understanding, closer contact, a clear recognition and acceptance of each person's essence.

It was grueling work. I began in the Yang position and was exhausted, hoarse and crimson-eyed by the end of the first three-day round. Being Yin was a relief, but it had its tedious aspects as well. People tended to ramble, to lose their objectivity and take wild flights into incoherent fantasies and projections. Some were gypsy fortune-tellers gazing rapturously into crystal balls, seeing into the past, elaborating prophecies. Others became self-styled proselytizers for the Arica

system, expounding its merits, trying to draw reluctant lambs into the fold. Many of the interviews were boring, some weird, others helpful. One of the best descriptions of my non-essential behavior came from a Big Sur musician who informed me in his characteristic funky-poetic style that I related to the training with the detachment of a newspaper woman, and made him think that when the three months were over a chauffeured limosine would pick me up downstairs and whisk me off to Kennedy Airport just in time to board a private plane to Canada, where I would write and dispatch my story to the N.Y. Times.

After completing our Line, the peak experience of the training for most of us, we returned to Arica headquarters on 57th Street with seven working days to go and immediately began doing more Trespasso exercises with the rest of the school (New Yorks I, II, and the Chile group) in order to form "The Big Body" --a working group compsed of all the people who had been trained thus far.

On the last night of the training, Oscar materialized to talk about The Mission and inform his staff about the future. He had told us, back in the eighth week of the training when our spirits were low and the group fragmented, that the New York III training would move directly on to the next level--"The Temple" without a "Water Period" or interlude of rest in which to adjust our perspectives. Later, several trainers referred to the three-month "emergency" trainings, and I noticed that a scent of dedication, always in the air, had slowly intensified into the smell of blind devotion.

The whole school was present, almost 300 of us seated on the thick green carpet, a small armory of tape equipment filling the space between Oscar's chair and the assmebly. After an Om he informed us in his heavily-accented English that the whole school would, as a single body, begin to learn "The Open Path" as of September 1. The Chile group and N.Y. I were to have a week's vacation (gasps of joy), and N.Y. III would have two weeks off (sighs of resignation). There would be no more three month trainings. New York III would enter The Temple in November, but until then they would be in training to teach The Open Path, which would commence on October 1. All those present were to consider themselves on the Arica staff, trained to serve as the "muscle" of the school.

I was experiencing acute contradiction. There was, on

the one hand, Oscar's emphatic promise, made five weeks before, that everyone in the training would have achieved a permanent, base-level satori by the end of the three months. Not having attained anything remotely resembling satori at any point during the training, and seriously doubting that anyone else had, I was trying to figure out whether our training had been a failure or the promise a lie. Since Oscar lies with notorious impunity, anything was possible. On the other hand, the whole issue of our highness or lack of it seemed suddenly to be irrelevant. Nobody had an empty mind, but nobody cared. Oscar, I told myself, is a sorcerer.

In the three weeks since that night my feelings have seen-sawed, sometimes radically. There is a kind of faith, state of mind, or level of consciousness which enables one to see through apparent contradictions to the perfection of all things. Being at a lower level, still caught in my "associative mind," I am experiencing everything in terms of paradoxes that need to and cannot be resolved.

We are now being trained to teach The Open Path, Arica's next project, or product, which is designed for people who must remain in the money-earning world while raising their levels of consciousness. Everyone from all three trainings has been put on salary (approximately \$200.00 per week, depending on need). The work began with a series of three-hour lectures by Oscar in which he systematically shattered everyone's illusions and thoroughly reduced their egos. Everyone, he told us, without exception, is asleep. Not only are we totally out of reality, but we are sleeping so soundly we don't even know we're out of reality: we are dreamily orbiting the moon.

This revelation, coupled with a great deal of new information concerning the negative states of consciousness (the levels below "48" which go from 96 down to 6,000), caused a kind of convulsion in the school. Nobody doubted Oscar's diagnosis, and everyone seems to be simultaneously depressed and relieved.

The relief far out-weighs the depression. Oscar is an adept sorcerer. His timing is exquisite.

Realizing that we have played the game of believing we were awake forces us to look at the state we are in and see the dreams for what they are. Oscar has succeeded in undermining our beliefs. Beliefs are not in reality. Particularly beliefs about Oscar. For it must be admitted that he plays by his own rules.

And so we continue . . .



Winifred Rosen

Received in New York on September 18, 1972