

BODY AWARENESS, EMPATHY, AND PSI

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MAUPIN: The kinds of experiences that we generate in the area of states of consciousness come, to a tremendous extent, from the kinds of assumptions we make. Among the important assumptions are those about what is normal and what represents a deviation from normal. Is the conventional state of consciousness a normal one, or does it represent a markedly depressed one in which large amounts of feeling and sensitivity are sacrificed to cognitive order?

Another important assumption has to do with the border between self and other. Is the experience of union a return to a fundamental and primary human experience, or is it a regression? A particular assumption will influence how we understand experiences of union: whether we understand the ego as a separate self, as an experience of reality, or as an illusion; whether we understand dreams as productions of our own deeper mind, or as a reception from a larger collective unconscious; whether we understand ESP as a special ability, or as tapping into a true collective mind. Is our present understanding of what constitutes subjective and objective a useful discrimination, or do we need a more encompassing theory of multiple levels of reality?

With this in mind, let me tell you the kind of work that I am doing. I am not working in parapsychology. I work at Esalen Institute in California. We organize seminars and workshops. Our seminars can be defined as inquiries into a variety of techniques and studies that have to do with human potential. Our workshops are mostly encounter groups dealing with body awareness, imagery, meditation and related topics.

The people attending are middle-class people, not presenting them-

selves as sick. They are just willing to say that they feel distant from other people; that they suffer from alienation in their ordinary relationships, but that they are functioning as well as or better than most of their peers.

In an encounter group, 12 to 15 people get together, usually with a facilitator, and are supposed to talk freely about their "here-and-now-experience." They are to talk about feelings in preference to thoughts, and to try to be as honest as they can, within their limits. The first step in the development of emotional communication in these groups is the return to this more direct form of communication about their here-and-now-experience. They get a marked sense of participation in other people's experience. This seems to be widely satisfying as an antidote to alienation. Many when leaving the seminar or workshop are capable of much more profound contact with their own feelings. My interest has been in trying to alter this fundamental format. It is possible to introduce into the group a variety of different assumptions: one of the most fruitful is to have the group assume that they are all members of a single organism, having lost full communication between them, and that everything occurring in the group is an event in the present life of the organism. People begin communicating their own present experience, how they perceive the present life of the group. Things seem to happen according to a process that transcends the individual person's choices or decisions. And the reported feelings from the people who participated in both kinds of groups is that, by adding this assumption, they felt in deeper empathic contact with each other.

Encounter groups tend to take on a fearful seriousness, so we have experimented with another assumption that everything short of the deepest "I-thou" encounter (which is totally silent) is a game. The task of the group is to manifest the game, to give it the script, to bring the game into whatever reality is necessary for the transformations of the group reality to take place. These assumptions are constantly reinforced in the course of the sessions, and people report increasing amounts of empathic contact with each other.

In this second type of group we had difficulty with middle-aged, middle-class people because of their deeper investment in the "who I am" games. The freest and most exciting group experiences along these lines have been those involving college-age participants, who do not seem to take their personality roles as ultimately serious.

When participants in a group are in that frame of mind, when they experience empathy, they get rather specific feelings that might reflect physiologically measurable variables. They are reminiscent of

what Trigant Burrow reported about subjects who were in a state of relative identification with other people, as opposed to the separate ego state. For example, eye focus tends to be softer, and electrical potential measured near the eyes reflects less muscular tension.

This brings me to the second general area which has relevance for emotional empathy and, perhaps, ESP. This is training in body awareness. The original sources for this work are various: Yoga, recent developments in movement and dance, procedures which restructure the body itself, such as Dr. Ida Rolf and the students of Wilhelm Reich have developed, and the very meticulous "paying attention" to simple states, such as Charlotte Selver teaches. One of the ways to apply these concepts to a group is to make them pay prolonged attention, in a very quiet situation, to different parts of their body, considering it as an experiential space rather than a collection of organs.

The opening up of attention to different areas of the body seems to make it possible for the subjects to realize that the kind of experience they are having depends to a very great extent on which area of their body they are centered. Its most obvious application for the development of emotional communication in groups is to show people the possibility for body identification. The most readily accessible empathic experience is to imagine what it would be like to feel the way your shoulders would feel if they were mine, and so on through the body. Many report that this technique makes them more sensitively aware of other people's moods.

We are only beginning to see the relevance of this work to psi phenomena. The yogic literature mentions special abilities which emerge after a student has made extensive progress. Of course the yogi is warned against using these abilities lest he be diverted from more profound spiritual goals. In my own experience and from contact with an avowed psychic, highly developed awareness of one's own body makes possible quite remarkable perception of other people's feelings. And then little amazing additions occur: in the midst of feeling how a person is experiencing now in his body, come little flashes of intuited information about the past or perhaps the future.

The ability to feel into another person's subjective body space naturally leads to trying it at a distance. We think, on the basis of very preliminary experience, that a person who is quiet and receptive may respond as if he had been signaled by the person feeling into his space. We have come to expect that in any group of people in a week-long body awareness workshop, a few will be able to perceive auras at the end. Others will become sensitive to differences in the "feel" of other

people's bodies. We think this has potential implications for paranormal communication, and even healing.

Our present plans are for an intensive four-month program of training for 12 men and women in Esalen's 1969-70 residential program. The focus will be on the deepest kind of body awareness, in hopes that the participants will then be prepared to take a phenomenological body orientation back into their own vocations. Some of their new material should certainly be of a psi nature.

MARGENAU: Thank you.

TART: May I add that I have observed the same sample of people, and it is my impression that the incidence of spontaneous psi occurrences is very high.