

## THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GROUPS

### I, Thou and We

*Elaine Waldman*

#### **The Energetic Connection**

When the Guide says, “Life is relationship,” (Lecture 106) it is not an injunction. It is a statement of truth or a law of nature. In a Core Energetic group, this law is manifested.

Like a womb, the group creates a placental environment of relationship that guarantees the incubation of experience and its transmission. It activates both the powerful urge toward unity and the forces of resistance to it. Both sides are in a continual dialogue.

By containing conflict, the group holds the mirror of relationship up to personal growth. By providing the tools of intimacy, the group helps the individual to embrace the self in the other and accept feelings as natural or only relatively crazy.

Working with the group opens the door to the innate bonding urges of the life force. The release of vibrations generates a warmth that is contagious. The vibrations penetrate the tissues and melt the frozen past. Through the contact environment that the group sets, the heat is allowed to flow evenly so as to *sustain* the release and allow for real transformation.

In this environment of contact, polarities function as continuums. Hormonal activity galvanizes highly charged fluids which penetrate the tissues with an immediacy of polarities that give a simultaneous sense of self and other. This release of hormones permits the organism to actually change shape.

Solidity moves into liquidity. Hardened cells break up. As loosely structured liquid flows more and more into the patterned hardness of forced role assignments, rigid roles soften into bonding regulators. The sense of visceral movement is restored. Rather than identifying with the muscular-skeletal (executive) system, the group evokes the liquid systems which make up the universal medium in which everything exists.

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The internal experience by which you know yourself makes the cognitive process irrelevant. The quality of experience in the hollows and passageways of the body differs from the quality of sensation in the dense mass. Where is the location of yourself? Where is the voice of light coming from? What kind of hormonal bath has the brain gotten?

In the environment of contact, liquidity is the connection. The bioelectric currents set up pathways that end up as structures. Liquidity—the hormonal flow, the flow of electrified heated fluids—carries fire from the ductless glands, and literally enlightens the personality.

Thus feeling and anatomy become one and the same process. The nature of feelings can be deduced from the anatomical structure. Armorings, then, are not only blockades but facts that have to be used differently. In the release, consider what kind of feeling is emerging. The rhythmicity of that feeling must be sustained so that the organism will feel and fill itself with its own substance. In fact, the intent of sustained excitement is to create bonding, both within and without. When excitement is sustained, caring is created and the blockades are transformed into stepping stones for growth.

Through sustaining and globalizing movement, the group teaches this process of buildup. As more organs and organisms get involved, excitation builds. Surfaces have a way of communicating and being imprinted by that communication. The group proliferates and codifies these imprints of excitement.

#### **Building the “We” Consciousness**

“Group consciousness means finding the oneness between self and others,” says Eva Pierrakos Guide in Lecture # 225. There is no either/or—either the individual or the group—but rather a unitary process of relationship that enriches the autonomy of the individual who, in turn, enriches the group.

The essence of oneness is the pulsation of life energy with its continuous expansion and contraction, charge and discharge, reaching out and taking in, giving and receiving. Thus, the pulsatory process couples the excitatory and inhibitory in a functional unity. The living organism can function only if there is a balance between energy charge and discharge.  
Experiencing

this flow of excitation takes us beyond our anatomical boundaries into interaction with the world.

Thus we become aware of the functional identity of ourselves and the world at the same time. In the pulsatory flow, the presence of the opposite is implicit: opening and closing, exhaling and inhaling, charging and discharging, connecting and separating, etc.

When this oppositional dimension is received and energized, it makes contact with its polar opposite, e.g., individual and group, group and individual, and moves into a new integration of life force at a higher energy level. Without losing uniqueness and separateness, the inner reality and outer reality are united. There is no intrinsic duality.

The keystone of this unitary arch is the I-Thou vision of God as presented by Martin Buber (*Dialogisches Leben*, Zurich 1947) and its application by Joseph Moreno, founder of Psychodrama, to group process. In his "Invitation to an Encounter," (*Group Psychodrama*, Vol. XXII, 1969, pp. 7-16) Moreno writes:

**A meeting of two, eye to eye, face to face. And  
when you are near.....I will look at you with  
your eyes and you will look at me with mine.**

Thus the group becomes an energy body that makes a "we"relationship possible. The I-Thou relationship is borne upon the waves of its alternations, not in a straight line but in spirals of ever-deepening movement that reveals three major phases of group development.

#### **The Three Phases of Group Development**

The first phase of this relational process goes back to the pre-personal journey of the embryo that turns undifferentiated cells into an organism that divides itself from the being that gave it life. The ground of relationship is in the fertilized egg and uterus. Two different rhythms are engaged in this process of relating. From the one comes the two. In this expansion of the reproductive cell and its division arises the principle of differen

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tiation. The task, of embryonic survival is the integration of the different parts of the self to become one being. Here is the birth of the "I". And, as Margaret Mahler pointed out in *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, the "I" feels fear—the fear of separation on the one side and a fear of merging on the other. Wholeness and separation and then the longing for union enfolds the infant organism even after birth.

The second phase of this relationship process occurs in the personal journey of the organism that seeks to build bridges between the self and others for cultural bonding and community. Relationship is created through the interplay of biological and cultural roles. A woman, for example, cannot thrive as a dedicated mother in a society, like our own, that humiliates women by images of mothers in their teen and twenties with underfed adolescent bodies skimpily clad in blue jeans. In these mass images appearance is everything and popularity (among men) is the *Sumum bonum*. "M is for motherhood.... M is also for *McCall's*," read an advertisement for that magazine in the *New York Times*, October 10, 1959. This exploitation of the woman's need for connection pushes the early buttons of loneliness. The pecuniary path distorts the biological urges. Power interferes with love— competitiveness with parenting. Liberated women have tended to identify with men.

Men, on the other hand, are inundated with images of machismo—exaggerated versions of aggressiveness. If controlled and tyrannized by his mother as a child, the man will recreate his struggle with his female partner. Driven by a culture of materialism and competitiveness, the man will disconnect from his own vulnerability. Our technological culture has split family and work. And work has violated the human spirit. So the man who is alienated from his work finds himself powerless and tends to take out his humiliations on his woman, the nearer and weaker oppressor. The demons do not go away. But they can be managed by our innate urges toward connection and love found in the vital rhythm of our life force.

The third phase of this relational process comes from the impulse that forgets self-preservation in the realization that the self is one with all being, without loss of consciousness or separateness, that divine energy is immanent in every particle of

experience, that each of us is made of multiple particles of the single being, and that our task is to find divinity in the self and become one being. This transition to wholeness comes from the fruition of the self—self-responsibility—and the desire to share the experience of the self with the other.

These transitions release energies within the organism that open up new consciousness and transparency and transcendence. When these energies are resisted by muscular armor born of hostility and fear, transference and countertransference, defense and habit, there is distortion. There is conflict. There is duality. When the flow is unbalanced and the energies of alternation are not received, the process of relationship is reversed, and the self is endangered.

Group consciousness, as Eva Pierrakos' Guide states in Lecture 225, is then distorted into mass consciousness and individual consciousness into separatism. Mass consciousness submerges the individual into the service of the group while separatism isolates and alienates the individual from others. Dependency can distort longing and rebelliousness can distort independence and integrity. Differentiation can become duality and oneness can become tyranny.

All these phases and their distortions tend to coexist within each of us as defenses that harden in our bodies. When these resistances are unmasked and energized, pulsations fill the deadened areas of the group consciousness. Polarities are released into wholeness. Relationship, a feeling field of energy, takes precedence.

#### **A Group Experience**

Mariane, a new group member, expresses her "uncomfortableness" with the group. In her early thirties, she has a shapely, slim, and harmonious body contained in a rigidly tight structure. She feels "different" from the others—"special." When another group member tries to divert her from her anger by tickling her, Mariane feels thoroughly "invalidated." Masking her humiliation, she tells the group that she does not need them and can stand on her own. Her mask breaks as she begins to shake and cry. Tears come to the eyes of others in the circle. I ask Mariane to come to her feet and use them like hands to feel the ground.

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Her body is vibrating. As I suggest that she put her weight into her feet, she begins to stamp. She cries out, "I am." One by one, the entire group rises in a standing chorus, echoing, "I am." The pulsation of "I am" penetrates the separateness and unites the individuals in a circle of fire. Their sustained stamping opens up the ground. We could feel the energy of the earth in the soles of our feet. With this surge of earthly support, the energy of the group took off. Through open throats, the vibrations of anger, pain, and pleasure blend in a chorus that spirals into a crescendo of sound—ode to joy, to the joy of life—.

Like a magnet, the "I am" chorus pulls the stamping into jumping. They fall into themselves. Impelled by a mutuality of movement, they surrender to the law of gravity, and the law of levity. Their energy is self-controlled. As they follow its rhythms, they find joy, connection, and satisfaction. Filled with overflowing, the joy is shared. Everyone is moved to give and receive, holding each other and then separating into a circle. They sing, each to each:

**How can anyone fail to tell you That you are anything less  
than beautiful How can anyone fail to tell you That you're  
less than whole**

**How can anyone fail to notice That you're  
loving is a miracle How deeply you're  
connected To my soul.**

Thus, the energetic process becomes a communal event that is ongoing, without beginning or end. In this environment of ongoingness, longing functions to generate new images of possibility rather than despair. In this primary process of being, there is no need to articulate dualities. Inner wholeness, completeness, and contactfulness come together and permeate the consciousness with the seeds of a new energy force. The group enables the individual to get inside of the energetic process and participate in the eternal now of relationship.

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