

THE CORONA PROCESS: GROUP WORK IN A SPIRITUAL CONTEXT (1996)

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe an approach to group work that has developed over the last decade from the collaboration of a number of friends and associates of the Concord Institute. The approach has emerged slowly, much like a photographic print, from the unknown of asking the question, how do we work with groups if we take the spiritual dimension seriously and posit its existence and influence at all times in a group's life? In the beginning we had very little to go on except an intuition that there was something there to be learned and the desire to discover it. And I also had a dream that helped get us started.

This dream occurred in early October 1989, after attending a lecture on "the Dialogue Process" by David Bohm at MIT.¹ I was intrigued by both Bohm's notion of a "common consciousness" that could develop in groups to hold many differences within it and his idea of groups as "coherent micro-cultures" that could contribute by their presence to a macro-cultural coherence and world peace. I came home, went to sleep, and in the early hours of the next morning had a dream. The dream had three phases. The setting was a mountain cabin where I was staying with some friends. It was winter and the sky was very black, the stars brilliant. My friends were gathered near the wood stove, but I moved to the window to look up at the stars. While standing there, I noticed a very bright constellation—the Corona—forming a circle of stars in the heavens, brighter than the actual constellation we see, and I called to my friends to come view this beautiful sight. They were slow to leave the warmth of the stove, and, as I watched, the stars began to emit sparkling light in all directions, while the circle held its form. I was very excited to see this, and called them to come quickly. Then, from deep within space came a flash of light that illumined the whole sky for several seconds, like a cosmic lightening flash. This light had a different quality than the stars' light—more like laser light—and it flowed both through and around the corona of stars. It was beaded into rays and one ray struck the iris of my left eye, burning an equilateral, three dimensional triangle in it. It was this sensation that woke me.

I held this dream in my mind, reviewed it, and then got up and wrote it down. As I was writing, I began to realize I had been given something very useful. My intuition said, "I thought it would take twenty years to get this." Yet I did not understand clearly at the time what had happened, or what this really meant. I only knew I had touched something important for working with groups, and so, trusting this, I decided to begin my next seminar on group work by telling the dream and beginning to work from its teaching, as best I understood it.

This paper describes how this understanding has developed and how it resonates with other similar experiments in group work that we have subsequently discovered. It also points to still unanswered questions, in the hopes that exploring these over the next years can lead to further development and application of this approach. And, to honor the origins of this way of working with groups, I have called it "the Corona Process".

¹ See Bohm, D "On Dialogue". (Ojai, CA: David Bohm Seminars, 1990).

Background: The Three Dimensions

Before focusing on the principles and practice of this particular kind of group work, I want to give the reader some background that will help understand the context in which it emerged, has grown, and now exists. This is the framework of the theory and practice of Spiritual Psychology, and, within that, the idea of three dimensions of experience that one works within when you choose to work within a spiritual context. The basic premise is that there are three dimensions of a human being's inner experience—personal, psychical,² and spiritual. These dimensions are totally interdependent, much as height, breadth, and depth are, and differentiate our experience at whatever level of organization we are observing it. They are aspects of one whole, but making this distinction of dimension gives us a means to see more clearly the richness and complexity of the human growth process, to discern which dimension is foreground in experience at any particular moment, and so to cooperate with this process more precisely, both in ourselves and others. Within Spiritual Psychology this concept of dimensionality has been most fully developed in relation to individual life and development, but it applies also to groups, as well as to cultures, nation, and the planet as a whole, and may give us a way to see more clearly dynamics of development at those levels too. The premise is that these levels of organization are systemic differentiations of one vast seamless system—the Universe—which is guided by certain principles. If we can understand these principles at the individual level, where they are easiest to see and study, then perhaps we can also learn how they operate at these more complex levels.

Individual Level

Briefly, then, looking at the individual level, the personal dimension includes the development, healing, and reorganization of the personality as it seeks to be self-expressive as well as connected to the daily realities of social existence. Work here deals with stress reduction, conflict resolution, ego development, and improvement in social functioning. It also includes work with the personal unconscious and deeper dysfunctional patterns in the structure of the personality, as in object relations analysis, and work with unconscious belief systems and their impact on the personal development. This dimension has been, generally speaking, the focus of western ego psychology, behaviorism, and early psychoanalysis.

The psychical dimension includes the exploration of the deeper and higher realms of the unconscious and the integration of these experiences into the context of personal living. Work here deals with the earliest childhood trauma and identity formation as well as the patterns of potential behavior that represent the attempt to attain a fuller maturity. It also deals with the collective and transgenerational aspects of the psyche, and psychic and transpersonal phenomena. This dimension has been, generally speaking, the focus of neo-psychoanalysis, western depth psychology, and some schools of transpersonal psychology.

The spiritual dimension includes the experience of our deepest identity in Being and our interbeing with all creation—the experience of the soul, or true nature. It also includes establishing contact with the spiritual will, or will of the soul, and alignment of the personal will, or intention, with the deeper life directions expressed by the spiritual

² I have also referred to this dimension as the “transpersonal”. See Yeomans, T. “The Three Dimensions of Psychosynthesis”, (Concord: Concord Institute Publications, 1998).

will. Work here deals with the issues of freedom and responsibility, core values and life-qualities, and with the deepest levels of identity, connection to others, meaning, and life purpose. This dimension is rarely included in western psychological thought, though in the last decade or so, there has been a growing interest in doing so, as reflected in the now many schools of thought that are exploring this realm and integrating with the psychological and biological realms. Carl Jung, Roberto Assagioli, Abraham Maslow, Viktor Frankl, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May have been the early major contributors to work in this dimension and its relationship to psychological life and there are now many good theorists contributing to our understanding of the integration of spiritual and bio-psycho-social life.

In the process of individual psycho-spiritual development, leading to soul-realization, different issues within these three dimensions will need attention at different moments in time/space, and a skillful therapist, or teacher, will be able to recognize where the work is needed and what to do, or not do. At times, for example, work on personality healing and development will be foreground, at other, the deeper work of the transformation of the psyche through work with the unconscious energies and images, and at still another the work with the energies of the Soul, manifested as wisdom, or responsibility, or life-purpose and meaning, and with the alignment of personal will with these core intentions. Work with individual within a spiritual context needs to include all these dimensions and their interplay in order for the therapist to be effective in supporting the process of soul realization. If only one, or at most two, are emphasized, work, and consequent healing and development, will be op-sides and limited. The emerging field of Spiritual Psychology includes all three dimensions in its understanding of the process of psycho-spiritual development and seeks to integrate them into one lived reality, characterized by an experience of health, creativity, maturity, and a sense of one's place and part on earth.³

Group Level

These dimensions also inform group process and development. A group leader who wants to work within a spiritual context needs, therefore, to acknowledge all three dimensions of a group's process, know how to recognize which is foreground at any particular time, and know what to do so that the group develops in healthy and creative ways toward its full realization. This is no easy task, for the complexity at this level of organization is much greater than at the individual. Yet the major principles and patterns remain the same and what we have learned at the individual level can be applied at the group level.

In this light the group can be seen as having a personality, a psyche, and a soul. The personality of the group is the system of identification and relationships of, and between, its members. This system may be harmonious, or not, depending on many current interpersonal factors, and it will be shaped as well by the deeper structure of the member's personalities as well as collective identification in the group's personality. The psyche of the group is the "collective" unconscious of the members, and the psychic interplay between them, which includes both individual, and group histories and potential. The soul of the group is the organizing principle of the group's life, holding

³ This is the concern also of many current transpersonal psychologies. Spiritual Psychology obviously shares this concern and addresses as well the issues of social, national, and planetary life, which are not always included in transpersonal orientations.

the fullest purpose and meaning possible for the group, and the potential of its mature identity and expression, both as itself and in relationship to other groups and the planet as a whole. The soul can also be conceived as holding the group's vocation, or true purpose—its intention—and as the core guiding principle for the life of the group as a whole. As with the individual, the group does not always respond to this deeper life principle, and, in fact, can be quite disconnected from it, but, nonetheless, we posit that it exists and is a force for group development and realization with which we can learn to cooperate. To use common parlance, we can say that the group, like an individual, has a “soul” and that work with a group within a spiritual context means to take the presence of this souls as an organizing principle seriously, assume that it is there, even if we cannot “see” it, and then help the group in various ways to contact and express more fully the aspects and qualities of their true nature.

Of these three dimensions of group life the most familiar is the first, and most current group work is limited to it. Occasionally leaders venture into the territory of the group psyche, as in work with ritual, with collective wounds, and with the cultivation of transpersonal qualities. Rarely do leaders acknowledge the spiritual dimension and work with it deliberately. Nevertheless, it is always a factor in group life, either in its presence, or, more usually, its absence. Social Psychology has yet to take the spiritual dimension seriously, but, as this has also been largely true of Individual Psychology until recently, we can hope that the next decades will bring a similar broadening in our concepts of group life within the field.

The Corona Process

The dream linked for me the three dimensions of group experience and the process of group development, moment to moment and over time. I could see a connection between the first stage (the corona) and the personal dimension, the second (shooting stars) and the psychical dimension, and the third (cosmic lightening) and the spiritual dimension, which synthesizes the other two (pyramid) in to an integrated, three dimensional whole which is grounded through experience and action. My sense was that, if we could bring members of a group into a non-hierarchical circle, a corona, and begin to work out the various relationships in such a way that brought more harmony into the group personality system (personal dimension), the deeper issues, both positive and negative, would begin to emerge (psychical dimension). This would bring an added intensity to the group's experience, and, if the corona, or circle, were strong enough to hold this intensity and stay in place, creating, in effect, a container for the group's experience, the process would work itself through to a point of illumination (spiritual dimension), insight, an resolution, leaving the group more aware and stronger for the experience, more connected to its soul, and able to act in new and more creative ways, both internally and externally. I also guessed that this process would occur in cycles, interweaving the dimensions into an increasingly coherent and dynamic whole, so that the group would experience over time a growing alignment with its deeper purpose and meaning, healing of unconscious traumas, realization of potential, and greater harmony and cooperation among members. In short, it would become what David Bohm calls a “coherent micro-culture”, healthy within itself and contributing to the health of other groups and the planet as a whole, much as a healthy cell contributes to the health of the whole body.

We started here, and immediately saw that this process pattern did work in a very deep and effect way. We also discovered that there was 1) an initial period of settling into the corona, of shifting from being an aggregate of people to a working group personality and 2) a period of rest, integration, reflection, celebration that followed the third stage, perhaps analogous to my writing the dream down. And so, after some initial experimentation, we added two stages to the corona process—1) a pre-corona stage where the group is an aggregate moving into the corona/circle, and 2) a post-illumination stage of rest, reflection, expression. This gave us then five stages—1) pre-corona, 2) corona, 3) working, 4) illumination, and 5) resolution/expression/grounding.

We discovered also that, after the last stage, the process would quite naturally begin again, and that these stages, or perhaps better, phases, seemed to work in larger and smaller cycles, so that the corona process served both in the moment and over time to support the maturation of the group. This, however, was not a strictly linear process, but rather a non-linear, organic sequencing of phases in the experience of the group that best supported its development. There was an order to it, but a complex one that was not always obvious to group members. It was powerful and seemed to have its own wisdom that we could cooperate with, but not control. From this we posited that perhaps the corona process was a central way in which the soul of the group was seeking to reorganize group personality and psyche to more truly and deeply express its spiritual force, much as we had seen the soul do within an individual's life. Therefore, the closer we could get to this process, and the more precisely we could cooperate with it, the more powerful the forces of transformation and realization in the life of the group would be.

We started experimenting with this framework and these ideas, trying to stay true to the phases that the dream had given us and to develop a way of being in, and leading groups so that this process was supported and not hindered. The greatest challenge, we found, was to let go of control enough to allow this process to work naturally and spontaneously, as it seemed to, when given a chance. It seemed the less we did, the more happened. The more we stayed true to our immediate experience, putting aside preoccupation with past and future, the deeper the work, the healing, and the learning. The more we let go of control, and welcomed the unknown, the more a deeper order emerged that brought us just what we needed to experience and understand. The more we expressed the truth of our individual experience and received that of the other members, the more empowered we each felt **and** the closer we felt to each other as a community. It was as if the group began to have a life of its own, in which we were all participants, and to which we all contributed, each in his/her own unique way, and this life was more creative and expressive than any we could have made happen by ourselves. This did not mean that the leader did not use his/her power to help this process, but it meant the power of leadership was used in a different way. Group members, also, used different skills and had different responsibilities as the group developed, and sometimes it was difficult to say who was the leader at any particular point, for leadership increasingly became decentralized and shared in service of this deeper emerging order. I will come back to this issue of leadership later, but want to say here that there is a paradox of leadership in this work that needs careful attention and training, so that the leader's power is used to liberate, rather than suppress, the power of the other members of the group.

Quite frankly, we were amazed at what began to happen. An experience of connection to soul and other began to grow that we had not known in much previous group experience, and we grew to cherish this ambiance that seemed to support, simultaneously, both personal freedom and responsibility **and** a deep sense of community. And, from this experience we began to formulate hypotheses as to what was happening as the corona process was allowed to work in us as a group.

Working Hypotheses

One hypothesis was that the group forms a “container” for its own experience, which through the working of the corona process, becomes stronger and stronger and is able to hold more and more truth and intensity. This container grows gradually, and as we shall see later, can also be undermined, but it is the context for the group’s experience which provides a means for the group to become more deeply connected to the spiritual dimension.

A second hypothesis was that, as the corona process proceeds, the level of unconscious fear which is present in all groups, both from negative past experience and the existential vulnerability of being with others, begins to drop, both in individuals and in the group as a whole. And what emerges, as this happens, is a growing experience of affection and mutual respect, a ground of common being, and finally, love. We noted that, as the fear left, the love appeared; we did not have to evoke it, it simply was there. Further, we saw that the fear and the defenses it generated had only obscured this ground, and that it was there in our nature as we began to feel safe enough to express it. The level of fear dropped as the process proceeded and the group cohered—first the personal fears and then the deeper existential fears—and what emerged quite spontaneously in peoples’ experience was respect and love—for self and other. It was as if the fear had pushed aside the love, and as it abated, the love came through again. We called this “the ground of love”. There would be certain moments when this was felt very strongly, particularly as it first emerged, and people would speak of gratitude for being in a group where they felt full membership in a community **and** free to be themselves. Later, this ground became an ambiance we simply worked in and enjoyed, without much notice. It had become part of our experience together. At the same time, in turn, it allowed the emergence of deeper levels of fear and alienation, so that the process never reached a stasis, but remained dynamic as the group matured.

A third hypothesis was that, as more truth of experience is spoken by group member, and more differences between members are held by the group in the container of the corona, deceit and pretense decrease, and defense mechanisms are less needed. Authenticity emerges as personal protective pretenses fall away, and a tremendous relief comes in this letting go and being able to be more truly oneself in a group context. Personal truth, moment to moment, was the means to this liberation from fear and defensive behavior, and, of course it took a while for group members to believe this was really possible. Therefore, there was always interplay between authenticity and pretense in the process, and reaching one level would open up the possibility of being even truer to self and other. And so we found that patience was needed to support the gradual letting go of defenses that had perhaps been in place for a long time. Further we discovered that, paradoxically, not pushing people to open up allowed this to happen more quickly, and that many small steps were more effective than a few big ones. In fact, the big steps

seemed to stimulate the reactivity of members and increase the level of fear in the group. Conversely, with patience to process and small steps, members could be aware of, and work with, their own reactivity, and remain connected to their deeper intentions and soul. Slower seemed to move things better, and patience became a central practice in our work with the corona.

We also saw that, as this process continued, there was a gradual shift in members' behavior from what we called "self-referential" to "group referential" behavior, and that, as that happened, the group became more coherent, effective, and expressive. In common parlance we could say the egos were less and less in the way and people were more willing to listen to each other, to cooperate, to welcome and accept differences, and to arrive at solutions to presented problems together. It was as if they realized that their good was enhanced by the group good, and that their needs would be met as part of the group meeting its needs. What is important here, however, is that this was not an idea that was imposed on them, but one that they discovered from their own experience in their own time. The corona could hold people at very different stages in this discovery. In time, a critical mass of members would become group referential most of the time, and the group then would stay largely coherent and connected to its deeper purpose as it continued to work. Strangely, the group gave the individual a place that was safe enough to gradually learn to make this shift. And, at the same time, the individual was always bringing new experience to the group through the statement of truth, which kept the group open and dynamic. What was central here was the practice of presence, both by the individual member and eventually by the group as a whole. This practice reduced the level of reactivity in the personalities of the group members and supported the building of a container and the emergence of the ground of respect and love. Within this "group presence" the work of the group quickened and became more creative.

A fourth hypothesis was that individual process often seemed to serve group process and that one person's issues, when spread out through the group, turned out to be a group issue also, so that the person was working on his own issues and also working on the group's. We hypothesized from this that the group soul worked through different people at different times, depending on what the group needed to learn at that moment, and that its attention shifted from person to person as best supported the growth of the whole as well as the individual. This was incredibly efficient, for both individual and group work were done simultaneously. It also meant that different people at different times were the focal point for group learning, and that the leader became less and less the major source. In fact, often the source was "the majority of one",⁴ the outsider who breaks the norms of the group to bring in new experience, and the leader's role became more and more the welcoming of this messenger and making room for this voice in the group rather than his/her own.

A fifth hypothesis was that, as these conditions described above increase, due to the cycles of the corona process and members learning how to cooperate with them, power and creativity increase and are shared more equally among group members rather than being vested in the leader, or in a few dominant people. This decentralization of power and creativity seemed to serve both individual and the group purposes, for the group as a whole became more coherent and connected and yet there was no loss of individual

⁴ This is an idea drawn from Native American council practiced and developed in a peace curriculum at the Crossroads School in Santa Monica, CA.

meaning and vitality. It was as if the leader and follower relationship paled in the face of the group responding to, and taking responsibility for, the leadership/guidance of the group soul. Everyone in the group was included in this process, and a greater acceptance of difference among members enriched the permutations and combinations of options in the group's life. Members experienced having a legitimate place in the group as themselves, and there was differentiation of members from each other without polarization, or exclusion. The container was able to hold both more intensity and diversity of experience and beyond that, to be more and more open to the unknown as the process proceeded. And from this we began to see that the healthier and more creative a group is, the more unknown they will be able to welcome and work with moment to moment and over time.

This process did not occur without conflict, and we discovered that conflict could be resolved in several different ways that supported the corona process. One—the most familiar—was to facilitate a dialogue between two members, or two subgroups, in order to clarify the nature of the conflict and move to the deeper level of need, from which a resolution could be worked out. This was largely done in the personal dimension. Another was to go deeper into the unconscious roots of the positions taken and to work in the psychical dimension to transform the substructures on which the conflict was based. This, we discovered, was powerful, not only for the individuals directly involved, but for the group as a whole. For these substructures always had some collective aspects. A third was simply to hold the conflict in the corona as co-existing difference without trying to resolve it, but simply bearing its intensity until, in time, it was resolved by the natural movement of the process. This entailed drawing on the spiritual dimension and holding the conflict in that context, which strikingly increased the group's capacity to welcome differences and brought greater human richness and diversity to the group's life. Rather than negotiation, or transformation, what we gained in this dimension was perspective and the inclusion of disparate views and realities that co-existed in a larger “common consciousness” as Bohm would say. The trick was to know how to handle any particular conflict that came up, and which dimension to work in.⁵ Some conflicts seemed passing, while others were deep-seated and recurrent. But when we were able to work with them in a way that supported the corona process, group members experienced a deepening sense of belonging and participation, of ownership in the group, and issues of polarization, withdrawal, rebellion, conformity, and sycophancy gradually disappeared and were replaced by vital and equal relationships among peers who had different kinds of responsibility for, and different contributions to, the purpose of the group as a whole.

Finally, we hypothesized that working this way brings significant change and growth to member's lives—a quickening of meaning and creativity, of resourcefulness and self-confidence in their work and living. It seems the group begins to provide a base from which to enter life more deeply and fully as oneself, drawing on the experience of community as well as the opportunity to come and go freely, to speak out, and to act as seems best in any particular situation. At first, we truly could not believe the impact of this approach, and were awe-struck that we had happened upon it and had the chance now to develop it. It seemed it might be a way to build, or rebuild communities, on a foundation of diversity and equality, and to give birth to “coherent micro cultures” in

⁵ See the work of Louise Diamond at the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy, 1819 H Street, Suite 1200, Washington, D.C. 20006

many different settings and cultures that could, in a small, but significant way, contribute to the increasing coherence of the macro-cultures in which we live.

Working Guidelines

From this experience we also formulated a set of guidelines for group work that seemed to support the corona process. We experimented with them ourselves and taught them to groups we were working with. They are as follows:

Circle: Form a circle, if possible, and work within this format. If not possible, work in the spirit of a circle—non hierarchical, inclusive, containing.

Slow down: Slow down from your habitual pace of interaction and take all the time you need to listen to yourself and others, to express, to interact.

Breathe: Breathe fully and rest in this rhythm of breathing as you participate in the group.

Silence: Tolerate, accept, and welcome silence in the group, either when called for by a group member, or when it falls spontaneously.

Truth of Experience: Speak the truth of your experience, moment to moment and over time. This includes disagreement, negative feelings, and the experience of being disconnected—these being the hardest to express.

Deep listening/presence: Listen to each other deeply and with presence. Let go of rehearsing your response, or strategizing.

Welcome/appreciate differences: Express differences and appreciate other's, even if this generates conflict. Hold the differences as a creative part of the group's experience, not as something to be avoided.

No blame/judgment: Suspend judgment/blame of self and others and practice simply being with your own and/or the other person's experience.

Hold intensity: At moments of intensity, hold this experience in your awareness without reacting, or trying to do anything about it. Let it live in the group and be contained within the circle.

Welcome unknown: Let the unknown of your, and others' experience simply be, rather than seeking to explain, or control events immediately.

Patience: Have patience with the workings of the group and the time it takes to grow and change, both individually and collectively.

Enjoy the process: Enter into the moment to moment changes in experience both individual and group, that necessarily constitute the multi-dimensional process of human healing, development, and creative work.⁶

We presented these guidelines at the beginning of a group and then wrote them on a large sheet of paper, which we placed on the wall to remind people. As people began to practice these simple guidelines, the corona formed and the process began. After a while, they became second nature and an assumed way of our working together. They are deceptively simple, but seem to have a powerful effect and readied the group personality and psyche to respond more fully to the group soul.

⁶ We occasionally added David Bohm's guideline of "nothing to do".

The Group Field

This work with the corona process, with its hypotheses and guidelines, led to another step in or thinking, namely, that the corona process seemed to generate an energy field that held the group as it worked. This field grew stronger and more coherent as the process proceeded, and we began to develop a sensitivity to its fluctuations in coherence, depending on what was happening in the group. I had seen this phenomenon in individual work within a spiritual context, where the presence of the therapist and the work of the client seems to generate an healing field within which work proceeds more truly and deeply, and had thought of this as the field of the soul—a field of spiritual energy, radiating from the soul, that both guides and helps with work on personality and psyche. Perhaps the “collective” souls of the group members, or the soul of the group, was also radiating a coherent field of spiritual energy to guide and help with the group work, and, as we practiced the guidelines and tested the hypotheses, we were contacting this field and its resources for healing and creativity. Was this what Bohm had meant by “common consciousness”? If the soul was the organizing principle for the life of an individual, perhaps a group also had such an organizing principle for its life—a soul that radiated this field of energy to support and guide the group development. We did not know exactly what to call this force, but we posited its existence, used the term “group field” for want of a better, and began to study its influence.

We made several discoveries. The first was that, as mentioned above, certain behaviors seemed to strengthen and cohere the field, while others seemed to deflate and disorganize it. For example, if a person was afraid, but did not express this, but rather acted in a way to compensate for that fear, i.e. defensively, the force of the field would decrease. When a person spoke the truth of his/her experience, the field would intensify. When there was a polarity that became polarized, causing people to choose sides, the field decreased. Conversely, when a polarity was held without polarization, and explored, and the differences appreciated and accepted, the field would intensify. When someone was excluded, either by self, or others, and this was not addressed, the field decreased. When the person was able to speak of this pain, and of feeling excluded, the field would intensify. When a person deeply and honestly explored some issue, intellectual or emotional, that had meaning for everyone, the field increased. When, conversely, a person used issues to control the group in some way, the field decreased. It seemed that certain ways of being together connected the group to its organizing principle and the healing/guiding energies of the group soul, while other tended to disconnect it. The group would still exist, obviously, as “personality” and “psyche”, but it would be disconnected from its source of meaning, wisdom, vitality, and creativity. This condition of disconnection would lead, in time, to more and more incoherence and conflict within these personal and psychical systems, a growing amount of pain and frustration, and eventually the existence of a group in which members were alienated from each other, suspicious, defensive, and competitive and which, as a whole, was disconnected from its true purpose. There would be a great deal of hidden suffering in such a group, many political battles for power, in-factions and out-factions—in short, all the problems that most groups face.

Conversely, as the field coheres and a stronger connection is made to the spiritual organizing principle of the group, its soul, these problems are solved, the wounds healed, dialogue among members opened, and the purpose and creativity of each group member

and all the group members realized. The field seems to have healing properties, which are related to the ground of love mentioned earlier. In its ambiance, as people worked through intrapersonal and interpersonal difficulties, they became more rooted in their own wisdom, power, and creativity, in their differences, and they were able to listen to each other, respect each other, and work together harmoniously on whatever the group's project was. Further, often personal issues simply melted away under the influence of the field and did not need to be worked on. It was as if people moved into a way of being with each other that was natural, yet a surprise, given their previous experience in groups. From this there emerged a general enhancement of vitality in individuals and the group as a whole, an enjoyment in being together, occasional spontaneous celebration of this fact, and generally a sense of well-being and appreciation of Life—all of which further enhanced the coherence and strength of the field. The group quickened and began to have some of the attributes of an individual who is deeply connected to his/her own soul. The incidence of synchronicity increased, and the learning became increasingly non-linear, rich and complex, so much so that at times the realization of what we had learned was delayed so that the fullness of the experience could be fully integrated. Here again was the unknown and learning to live with it.

We did notice one pattern of learning that repeated itself again and again, and seemed to correlate directly with the phases of the corona process. This was the pattern of the “capstone”. As a group worked on a particular issue, exploring its mental, emotional, and practical aspects, different ideas would begin to emerge and be held in the container of the group field. As more ideas emerged, there might be conflict, and always there was an increase in intensity and divergent views and feelings. If the group could hold this and stay open to the process, at one point, usually through one person, and often an unexpected voice, would emerge the idea that synthesized the divergences without reducing them, and expressed the pattern of learning and possible next step that had been behind the whole process. This idea would be recognized by the group as the one they most needed, and it would be adopted and, if appropriate, acted on jointly. We called this the capstone, and hypothesized that this pattern was emerging from the group field and soul and that we, as the personality of the group, therefore, recognized it as central to our life as a group and were able to align ourselves with it. What was striking was how much we had to keep choosing to stay open to the unknown of this until, in its own time, it made itself clear. If anyone tried to impose an idea prematurely, the field decreased and the creative tension was broken. Conversely, if we could stay with the intensity and the unknown, then at some point this capstone would become evident and we would have what we most needed to learn and know, even if it was what we least suspected when we started out. Learning increasingly became “ontime” learning that emerged at the moment it was needed, or, in some cases, learning was delayed until the group's experience had filled out enough without it being understood, so that a deeper learning could emerge. Here again, staying with the unknown was an important group skill.

We discovered too, that intention was very central to cohering the field. The more members focused their attention on what was happening in the moment, the more present they could be, the more powerful the field became. We also saw that the more this happened, the more the power in the group was shared and equalized, and the more the leadership shifted from person to person as needed, rather than being invested just in one leader. If, however, one person, say, intended to deliberately sabotage the process, and

was unwilling to enter into the shared intention to support it, the field decreased, and could disappear, leaving the group disconnected, defended, and in disarray. The shared intention seemed to open the possibility for healing and development, and, if that were there, even if there were severe disagreement on issues, fear, and resentment, etc., the process could proceed. This work has now been done in multi-cultural situation where there is a great deal of difficulty in communication and understanding, yet, if the intention is there, the rest is possible.

From all these observations, we began to hypothesize that a group too was in a process of soul-realization, involving the psycho-spiritual development of all the member, and that cohering the field via the corona process was a way of connecting with, and supporting, that process. We further posited that the corona process was a major means by which the soul gradually healed and reorganized the group to more fully express its energies, and so, by cooperating with the process, of which the result was a stronger and stronger spiritual field, we were cooperating with the true soul of the group—that organizing principle of which we were each a part, and which held us all in both our differences and our common humanity.

We were very excited about these discoveries, and grateful to have stumbled on them simply by starting from the dream and then paying very close attention to our experience and continuing to study it over time. The photograph was becoming clearer, though it was by no means complete, and so we looked to other sources to see if we could fill it out further.

Kindred Approaches

We looked for other descriptions of group work that implied a spiritual context and found several. The first is the work of David Bohm, an American physicist, who, as I mentioned above, in the last years of his life developed what he called the “dialogue process”. Bohm speaks of the emergence of a “common consciousness” from the dialogue which is capable of holding the many difference in a group and connecting members through their common human nature. This results in what he called a “coherent micro-culture” in which the group’s experience is not distorted by emotional attachments and mental rigidities, and so can think clearly together about issues and concerns. It also becomes, through this coherence of its consciousness, an agent of coherence in the larger culture, and so, in a small way, a contributor to world peace. Bohm has a number of guidelines to develop the dialogue process in a group, and his method has now been applied to many different settings, both in this country and around the world. We drew heavily on his work initially, and are grateful for his inspiration.⁷

Another source was the work of Carl Rogers, which he did at the end of his life in Russia and Brazil. In visits to both countries he and his staff gathered very large groups, up to eight hundred people, and put them in a concentric circle formation. They then facilitated a dialogue among these people by simply supporting non-directively the voices that emerged and trusting that the wisdom of the group as a whole would emerge. In Brazil he called these gatherings *ciclos* (“circles”) and describes them as among the most exciting work that he did in his career. We drew on this practice and on Rogers’ idea of

⁷ See David Bohm, “On Dialogue” (Ojai, CA: David Bohm Seminars, 1990).

“unconditional positive regard” as another way of describing the practice of spiritual presence.⁸

A third source was Psychosynthesis as practiced by a number of people in our group and the sparse writing on groups by Roberto Assagioli. From here we drew the idea of the soul as an organizing principle of the life of the group and a guide for its development and also the relationship of a group to what Assagioli called the “Supreme Synthesis” – the gradual integration of the planet and its life-systems into a harmonious whole.⁹ We also drew on years of experience leading groups within a spiritual context as we taught Psychosynthesis by asking, “what have we been doing implicitly at the group level that supported the individual learning and how can we make that explicit in the forms of principles and practice of group work?”

A fourth source was the work of several educators in Los Angeles who had adapted the Native American Council process to group dialogue. From them we took such as 1) “The majority of one”, in which, if one voice dissents, no decision is made, but dialogue continues, 2) the relativity of time, in which no arbitrary deadlines are set for ending and decision, and again, 3) the circle with every voice having a say in the deliberation and dialogue. In some cases we used the “talking stick” as a means to give the speaker the authority of the whole, and always we encouraged the full hearing of each member of the group and the welcoming of the differences and a holding of them until the deeper wisdom of the group emerged.⁴

Other sources that contributed to the spirit of the work were the Quakers in their silent meeting for worship, the many Women’s Circles, and the other instances in people’s experience where, usually in a circle around a campfire, or kitchen table, an honest and deep dialogue had occurred—one that led to both personal healing and right action in those involved. In this we sensed the archetypal and ancient quality of these gatherings, and that we were merely finding a current form through which the spirit could move.

Group Development

As our experiment continued, we began to think about the dynamics of group development over time, seen within a spiritual context, and what the stages of this development might be. In this we drew both on our own experience together and on what we knew of individual psycho-spiritual development and what, by analogy, it might tell us about the behavior and development of a group which was responding more and more to its deeper organizing principle. David Bohm had started on this by indicating that a group could progress, by means of his dialogue process, from incoherence and conflict to coherence and a common consciousness that could hold and integrate the many differences among individuals members. We also knew of groups that had developed in quite the opposite direction, starting off fairly coherent and gradually regressing into more and more authoritarian and abusive behavior until they reached the status of a cult. From this we posited a spectrum of group development within a spiritual context that ranged from the cult at the most dysfunctional, disconnected and destructive end to the coherent micro-culture at the most functional, connective and creative end. Most groups that we had been in existed somewhere in the middle, neither too destructive nor too

⁸ See Carl Rogers, The Process of Education. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1973).

⁹ See Roberto Assagioli, Psychosynthesis. (New York: Viking, 1971).

creative. Some of us however, had been in groups that had taken on cult-like characteristics, and, at the other end of the spectrum, in our work together, we were touching at times the qualities of a coherent micro-culture. The question was, how do you recognize where on the spectrum a particular group is and which way it is going, and how do you participate, and/or lead, in ways that help it to move in a healthy direction? I will deal with the third part of this question in the section on “group leadership”, but here I think a useful way of looking at where a group is on the developmental spectrum is to ask to what degree is it connected to, and expressing, its soul as manifested in its behavior, both internal and external? Are its members predominantly egoistic and self-referential (most groups) in relation to each other and is the group as a whole this way in relation to other groups and the larger world? Is the group involuted and parasitic, destructive of its members’ freedom and creativity, run in an authoritarian way, and motivated by separative values and fear (cults)? Or is the group creative in its activity, oriented to the larger whole, and expressive of values that serve the good of all through individual members taking initiative and responsibility in shared leadership for their part in the group’s work (rare groups)?

We found that in most cases we started with a group in the middle of the spectrum, and by working as I have described above, in all three dimensions of the group’s experience, over time the group was able to move toward and become a more coherent micro-culture. Conversely, we saw around us many incidence of a group starting, again, at the middle, and perhaps even progress some toward coherence, but then the dynamics became such that it began to regress, the leader became more authoritarian, and the members regressed by giving over their power and authority to the leader(s). The dynamics of this group regression are very complex and beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to say here that working within a spiritual context does not guarantee maturation and coherence. A group can set off in that direction and become dangerous sidetracked by the personality reactions to the presence of spiritual energy. This, in fact, is always a factor, but in cult development, these reactions become institutionalized and become reinforced, the fear increases, both individually and collectively, the group as a whole is increasingly isolated, the leader inflated, the followers deflated, and quite literally all hell breaks loose. We have seen this happen again and again in political movements, but as the century ends, we see that spiritual groups as well, are not exempt from these dynamics and that any group – from a family to a nation – can develop cult-like characteristics.

Conversely, we know that this process can be reversed and groups can also become less fear-ridden, more open and responsive both within and without, and increasingly creative and connected to the world beyond, which it serves in some particular way. In other words, using the frame we are exploring here, a group can be said to be more or less, connected to, and expressive of, its soul, and this condition will be reflected in the degree of coherence, or incoherence, in the group’s daily life. Groups will go through stages and crises as this connection is made and strengthened, they will develop a strong shared observer and a decentralized, shared personal will, they will explore and tap their collective unconscious and super-conscious, and will clarify and align with, their true purpose and creative vision. They will go through cycles of breakthrough and reactivity in relation to their response to the soul, and they will experience crises of various sorts on this path to soul-realization, much as an individual does. In short, it is a complex process,

progressing or regressing along the spectrum and no group ever is just doing one thing. Rather, all the propensities exist at once, and it is a matter of how the group chooses to be in relationship to all these and how skillful the leader is initially, and the members soon after, in keeping the group's development on the right track towards coherence and group maturity.

From this we developed a chart which portrayed a spectrum of group organization and experience that ran from dyscoherence to coherence through the middle range of normal and somewhat incoherent group experience. This chart is included here, and what is striking about it is that a dysfunctional group and, most of all, a cult is, in fact, highly organized, but in a destructive way. I coined the term "dyscoherent" to describe this state – a highly organized, but closed system, which is regressed psychologically and disconnected spiritually. We also learned from the chart and our experience with it that the dyscoherence is always in the shadow of the coherent group and vice-versa, and in fact, one property of the coherent group is that it recognizes this fact whereas the dyscoherent group projects it onto other groups and claims what amounts to a false coherence for itself.

Group Leadership

From all this work together it became clear that another form of leadership was needed, and we began to try to describe the attributes of a leadership that would help cohere the group field and support the corona process. In this quest, we saw immediately that the more authoritarian form of leadership, in which the leader remains "outside", or above the group and in control, not only did not work, but decreased the field and left the members a choice either to conform, withdraw, or rebel, covertly or overtly. This leader then needed to use personal power and charisma to control the group, and eventually emotional or physical coercion and threat to keep it on track. This resulted in some degree of oppression of group members' freedom and the growing isolation of the leader(s). The group worked and got the job done in most cases, but the hidden suffering was great for everyone. Sadly, this arrangement describes most of the groups we spend our lives in, from families to institutions. Cults are only a worst-case situation of patterns that exist in less severe forms "normal" groups.

Leadership within a spiritual context seemed different, for the leader here was intent on cooperating with the soul of the group and with a process that he/she could neither control nor fully understand. Further, this leader was not outside, or above this process, but was part of it with everyone else, and seemed only to have an initial role as an agent to get it started and guide it until the spiritual connection was strong enough to direct the group in its work and life through others as well as the leader. Thus, leadership was gradually decentralized and shared, given the needs of the group, rather than invested forever in one person only. The leader here had to learn to let go of authority and power as much as use it in the service of this corona process and the group soul. He/she had to learn to accept and work with a great deal of unknown and not move prematurely to solve problems and provide solutions.

We also saw, however, that there was an element of timing in this, and that the leader needed to know how to provide a spectrum of structure, ranging from closed to open, depending on two factors, 1 – where the group was in its development and 2 – where the group was in the corona process. Generally speaking, more traditional structuring was

needed initially in the group's life and with more incoherent groups and less as the group field developed and the group matured and became more connected.

We also discovered that, as the group cohered, the leader began to experience a diminishment of power. Whereas initially he/she had been the primary "lightning rod" for spiritual force in the group, as others became empowered this force became redistributed more widely, and the leader had to go through a "death" of sorts as he/she took a place in the group as another member. We also saw that this constituted a turning point in the development of groups, for if the leader could not let go, and struggle to maintain the same level of power and authority, the group could begin to reverse course and regress. Conversely, if the leader could let go and allow the force to be distributed throughout the group, this constituted for the group as a whole toward coherence and connection with its soul and creative force. In the end, the leader's power was restored, as the power of the group as a whole increased, but now it existed in a new context as part of the whole, and this only happened if the leader was willing to have less at that crucial point.

To help with this kind of group leadership, we developed a set of guidelines that would enable the leader to support the corona process. Note that these are in addition to the more familiar guidelines for group leadership and are particular to work with the corona process and furthering the development toward coherence. These can be added to the more familiar leadership skills to fill out the full spectrum needed.

1. Practice presence/breathe/relax/stay in present moment.
2. Share vulnerability: hopes, fears, pains, and excitements.
3. Include all experience of members: no judgment, welcome and seek out differences.
4. Keep balance of experiencing/learning modes.
5. Teach, model, and support use of corona process guidelines.
6. Support/guide corona process in its phases.
7. Support interplay among members/weave and relate meanings within the whole. Decentralize attention.
8. Decentralize power: look for "leaders" of the moment, welcome gifts and share leadership.
9. Observe the group as a whole as well as individuals, stay sensitive to the group field.
10. Be curious, wonder, welcome unknown and question.
11. Beginner's mind: let go of identified expert and having to make something happen.
12. Give feedback to group how learning is happening – patterns, themes, process you observe, "capstone".
13. Do individual work to open and deepen group learning.
14. Initiate structure/let go of structure as needed by the field.
15. Protect the field, as needed, with your presence and power.
16. Share your own learning and discoveries.
17. Support disorientation, disorder, chaos, rest, play, and silence in the field.
18. Work to resolve conflict, or hold it creatively in the group field.
19. Summarize and cohere what is learned as means of grounding.

20. Repeat and reinforce learning, relating learnings (non-linear) to each other and to the process as a whole.
21. Be sensitive to relative coherence of group field and its fluctuations.
22. Support creative tension between group soul and personality.
23. Help with group personality reactivity to force of soul.
24. Keep eye for emerging true purpose of the group.
25. Share power as other “leaders” emerge and step back as leader.
26. Support creative expression and spontaneous ritual of group.
27. Rest in the group field and in your being.

These leadership guidelines express a set of attitudes and skills that support the working of the corona process. It is important to note that more conventional leadership skills are needed to set this process in motion, and in the initial stages of gathering and work a more structured and directive style is often needed. Everything we know about group leadership already, thus, can be used, and what is added here is a larger context—the spiritual dimension—that the group learns to open to and work within and how a leader needs to work with this. Another way of saying this is that a leader needs to be able to work with all three dimensions of the group’s experience, and to shift his/her style depending on what dimension is foreground, where the process is, and at what level of development the group is at. At times he/she will need to provide direction and structure, at others, let go of any structure and intention for the group. He/she will need to recognize in which dimension the soul of the group is at work, i.e. at times there may be a focus on interpersonal conflict (personal dimension), at others on deeper collective pain (psychical dimension) and at still others, on the experience of love and faith in the group’s life, experienced in a moment of deep silence and presence to each other (spiritual dimension). The key in this kind of leadership is to sense, moment to moment, how and where the soul is working, and to follow and support that intention as well as possible, drawing on a range of interventions. No easy task! Yet it is made easier by the fact that the leader is participating in the field as it works and so gets the information he/she needs to be able to do this. The ultimate skill therefore, in this kind of leadership is to be able to stay in the present moment, practice presence, discern what is needed as the process proceeds, and use whatever intervention is appropriate to further the group’s development.

In this regard an image that emerged in our work was that of an “emptiness” generated by the presence, first, of the leader, and then, increasingly, of the other members of the group. This emptiness was experienced as a letting go of all expectation in order to welcome the unknown that would emerge in the present experience of the group. The emptiness was also an aspect of the field, and so the more coherent the field became, the more emptiness there was. And the group’s life and creativity seemed to quicken in proportions to these factors. Rather than the group being full of psychological elements, overt and covert, it seemed to empty and become spacious, and, in doing this, it sorted out quite naturally just what was important to feel and do to enhance the life and creativity of the group. Much as an individual needs to be “empty” of small self-preoccupations in order for soulforce to move in his/her life, so here the group needed to “empty” itself in the same way in order to be infused with the energies of its deeper organizing principle. The leader’s presence is key to initiating this development of this

emptiness—both his/her spiritual presence (soul) and personal presence (attention to other). Therefore, the practice of presence becomes the central discipline for group leadership in a spiritual context. Being becomes the touchstone of leadership rather than doing, and furthermore, the doing seems to increasingly grow out of the group's being together in this way rather than from anything the leader makes happen. Different leadership skills are needed at different points in the corona process, but the core practice throughout is presence.

In short, group leadership within a spiritual context seemed to call for a wide range of skills and a sensitivity to what to use when, given the influence of the group field and the deeper organizing principle of the soul. This realization led us to reflect a bit on leadership training and what might be included in a curriculum that educated leaders in any field to take initiative and responsibility within a spiritual context.

Leadership Training

Traditional leadership skills, as indicated above, are prerequisite to this way of working with groups and we are adding here skills that allow the group to develop further than “normal” groups and draw more and more directly on the spiritual dimension with consequent coherence, power, and creativity within a larger social context—community, national, or global. We are also considering, secondarily, how groups that are devolving toward cults can be turned around in their development and return to normal and then mature. Leadership training within a spiritual context needs to take both ends of the developmental spectrum into account.

The details of such a curriculum are beyond the scope of this paper, but I can outline here the general skill areas that would need to be taught.

1. **Self-skills:** These are the skills of self-knowledge and understanding that constitute human maturity and which are often lacking in leaders. A leader working within a spiritual context needs to know him/herself very well and have the skills to work with all the dimensions of experience in him/herself. This includes thorough awareness of his personality, of the deeper levels of his psyche, and of contact with the soul. It includes the capacity to manage her own reactivity, to remain centered, and to be able to direct her energy and attention freely as is demanded by the situations he/she finds himself in.
2. **Individual work skills:** These are the skills of in-depth individual work with others, what might be called counseling skills. these skills would be used in the group setting to support the corona process as it manifested in the experience of individuals. Again, most leaders do not have this capacity, but, as we have seen, it is necessary in order for the deeper dimensions of the group's life and development to emerge and be included in the group process. In many groups these dimensions are never plumb because the leader lacks the Intrapersonal skills to make it safe and productive to do so.
3. **Group work skills:** These are the skills necessary to guide the corona process, to function as a decentralizing leader, to let go to the organizing energies of the soul. These would be combined with the more traditional skills associated with group leadership, so that a full spectrum of skills can be applied depending where the group is in the corona process and in its longer term development. This set of skills, obviously, would be the

major ones required, but they in turn, require the first two in order for the full dimensionality and complexity of the group process to be honored and effectively utilized for full development of the group and enhancement of its power and creativity.

4. Organizational skills: These skills focus on the life of the group within a larger social, political, and economic context. The leader needs to consider what the relationship of the group is to other groups and larger organizations and to coordinate these relationships so that the group is not debilitated by adverse conditions beyond it, and more important, it is positioned so that it can make a contribution to this larger context and play an active part in it.

5. “Planetary context” skills: These constitute the capacity to think and act within a global context and to hold the group’s life within it. This does not mean that all groups need to be linked directly to planetary issues, but they do need to be aware that what they do counts in relationship to planetary issues. Often groups act within a limited context for what seems their own good only to discover later that their good contributed to suffering and loss for the whole. We are at a point now where we can no longer afford this blindness, and increasingly, groups—and leaders can be agents of this need to align their actions with a personal good that is also good for the larger whole. Sensitivity to this spiritual/global context and the ability to think and act within it then becomes an important skill for anyone who is taking initiative and responsibility in today’s world.

Skills in these five areas—from personal to planetary—are no small order, but I think we need to include all five if we are going to have leaders who are truly and deeply effective in helping with the needed transformations of our cultures and species at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.

Applications

The range of application of these ideas and practices is already wide, stretching from therapy groups, men’s and women’s groups, and educational groups to organizational and corporate groups, multi-cultural, and multi-national groups. These groups have very different personalities and psyches, and different purposes, so it is necessary for the leader to find those techniques, approaches and language that will fit the culture of the particular group and help it become more connected to the organizing principle of the soul. The underlying principles remain the same, but how they are expressed will vary widely, depending on these factors. The situation is analogous to that of an individual client who arrives with a particular history, background, language, and difficulty. These differences need to be respected and worked with, but they can be held in a context that allows certain deeper principles to work and the process of the individual’s psycho-spiritual development to proceed.

This analogy is also useful in thinking about how this way of working with groups might be applied. The client comes to get perspective on his/her difficulties, to heal old wound, to discover new ways of being in the world, all with the intention to change and live more fully and happily. When he/she returns to life, hopefully this learning will bear fruit in new behavior. The therapy session is a “time out” in which to reflect on the game and return to it a better player.

Groups also need this form of “time out” in order to reflect on their work and life and to find new ways of being and working together. They so easily become caught in old and unconscious habit patterns, or reactive to pressures of various sorts, internal and external. They are overwhelmed by deeper pain and anger that is never expressed, and lose touch with the qualities that bring them refreshment and creativity. They lose touch with their purpose and with the meaning of what they are trying to do, and become alienated, both inwardly, and in relation to other groups. Groups, in fact, suffer deeply and their members with them. All of us have painful associations with being in groups, whether it is the family, or peer, or work, or institutional group, and are lucky if we can recount times when we experienced the safety and support to be ourselves and a member all at once.

My suggestion is that perhaps groups need periods of time when they focus, not on their work, but on this reconnection with the spiritual dimension, and that they come together to work on this in order to see more clearly what their true life and purpose is. In a sense, they need time to restore the soul of the group and draw energy and guidance from it. They then can return to their work with renewed vision and a sense of what changes need to be made for this connection to be sustained. This is not group therapy so much as therapy for groups, seeing the group as a client that has become disconnected from its Self and needs to restore and strengthen this connection in order to live and work more fully and happily, in order to return to the game, whatever it is, a better player.

This is then, not a strictly problem-solving approach, but rather one that brings a broader perspective to the problems and the life of the group. The problems will get addressed, but from this larger context, and the group learns ways of being and doing that will help when new problems occur. The approach addresses the deeper suffering of disconnection that often remains quite unconscious and unaddressed in group work, but which nonetheless is affecting everything in the group’s life.

A second application would be to groups during “time in”. This would be to help groups that work together to work in new ways in whatever setting they exist. This need could arise at a time of crisis for the group, but it could also be a request of a group that is functioning normally and wants to increase its coherence and creativity. A crisis often facilitates such a development, but there is no inherent need to wait until things get bad in order for them to get better. Here the work would be to help the group become more coherent and creative at whatever it’s doing, and to help it move from the normal to the paranormal in its maturation process.

A third application could be the building of sustained coherent micro-cultures that operate within a spiritual context and have a long life within the larger whole of the culture of which they are a part. New groups are being born all the time, but often they lack the skill to sustain their development and in some cases, as we have seen, after a promising start, they actually devolve into dysfunction, and at times, cults, either becoming increasingly abusive and destructive, or falling apart, leaving members wounded and suspicious of any such venture in the future. These groups, given the right kind of help at the right times, could continue to develop in a progressive direction and become more and more coherent until the soul-connection is sustained and the maturity of this connection and expression achieved. We all know individuals that have gained that maturity, usually through a long and challenging as well as rewarding life, and there

is no reason why groups cannot also live that long and be that healthy. We just don't yet see that many that make it.

I am sure that we will discover more ways to apply this work, but these three will suffice for now. And I want only to add here that, as a group becomes more coherent and creative, it not only lives better itself, but it begins to affect the groups around it, much as a spiritually connected person affects those around him or her. The group becomes radiant of its best qualities, of its sense of purpose and vitality, and it touches and inspires those around it. It becomes a home of respect, power, beauty, and love, and people feel it and are influenced by it. In Bohm's words, it becomes "a coherent micro-culture" which impacts the macro-culture in a positive way, contributing health to the larger whole the way a healthy cell in the body does. Cooperation between groups becomes possible, as does trust and mutual care. And through all this there is a discovery of the underlying love that hold all groups, though we mostly fail to realize it, and the experience of joy. That we are very far from this does not mean it is impossible, but only that we do not yet know how to realize what is deeply stored in our minds and hearts. Hopefully, the next century will see this realization.

Group work and Planetary Peace

If we move now, in a speculative way, to the larger levels of organization, nation, and planet, we can posit that there may be spiritual organizing principles for these larger wholes that are also seeking to reorganize national and planetary personalities and psyches to express more fully the true purpose and vitality of these entities. At the moment our macro-systems are such that we are experiencing the breakdown of our ways of living—politically, socially, economically, ecologically—but in a spiritual context this chaos can also be seen as the disintegration of old forms that no longer work to sustain Life and the search for new ones that will sustain, not only the life of the human species, but of all species on earth. International relations are evolving fast and conflicts changing (personal dimension), deep racial and religious wounds are being aired (psychical dimension), and new values and ways of being are emerging out of this period of experimentation (spiritual dimension). On earth, it is all happening at once—birth and death, destruction and transformation—and the question we all face is how to help and what will help. David Bohm devoted the last years of his life to the development and teaching of the dialogue process as his contribution to world peace. He saw group work as a key to helping the larger process of national and planetary healing and transformation. I agree with this, and am grateful to him for pioneering this idea which is now spreading throughout the world.

The key is the personal and psychic health of the group and its degree of connection to its soul. As groups become more connected and soul-expressive, they become increasingly an agent of world peace. The content of their work is not important; rather it is the context in which they do it. The group can be a family, a neighborhood, a city, a corporation, a school, or a nation. If this entity is connected to its soul, if it is drawing on the spiritual dimension for its development, then it will contribute to planetary peace. If it is disconnected, as most groups are, it will not. Groups are the link between person and planet, and they give people a manageable arena to work within on the larger problems. They, therefore, are the crucible of both person and planetary healing and realization, and

how we are in groups affects almost everything else we do. It is in this spirit that we have conducted these experiments with the corona process and will continue to.

The Unfinished Dream: Next Steps

I see at least three major steps to be taken now. The first is to experiment with this approach in a wider range of settings, both within particular culture and cross-culturally. And here I list a number of unanswered questions, which I think would be useful, among many more, to consider as we explore further work. They are as follows:

1. Can this process work when the conflict in a group is economic and political as well as psychological and cultural?
2. Can this process work when the group is limited by time and task, and is under a great deal of institutional pressure to perform, or produce?
3. Can this process work in multi-cultural settings where the divisions are particularly deep and painful, currently, Bosnia?
4. Can this process work when there is not shared intention, or when one person continually disrupts the work?
5. How can this approach be combined with the more familiar problem solving and task-oriented approaches to group work in order to create a synthesis of “inner” and “outer” development?
6. How does this process help with group development over time, and how is it related to the experience of healthy group and institutional life?

The second step is to derive further theory from this wider experimentation that can be used in a wide range of settings and to link it with other work that is being done with groups now. My guess is that these ideas and related practices are emerging in a number of places on the planet and in a number of hearts and minds, and it is necessary to connect these various efforts in order to get the full picture of what is developing in group work at this century’s end.

And the third step, that follows from these first two, is to develop leadership training programs to teach people with responsibility and power in organizations to include this way of leading in their work. Ultimately, what is at stake here is the vitality and creativity of organizations, local, national, and international, and leadership is central to this outcome—leadership that is organic, democratic, and inclusive, that involves leader and group members in a process of growth and development, and that insures the health and creative responsiveness of the group and/or organization to the ever changing conditions of our post-modern world.

Further, I would like to see this work of exploration and experimentation go on in a number of cultures, not just in North America. For behind these steps—and, I believe, behind this work—lies a vision of pan-human principles that will work to support both the incredible diversity of this planet’s life and a realization of our common destiny on

earth—human, animal, plant, alike. These principles will need to bear at all levels simultaneously—individual, group, nation, planet—if they bear rightly and usefully at any, and will need to support the constant and inextricable interplay between these levels which is the experience of Life itself. If we can discover these pan-human principles, perhaps we can learn to live on earth, to quote Martin Luther King, “as brothers and sisters”, and not “perish as fools”. Clearly, we are far from this now, as individuals, as groups, as a species, and our spiritual immaturity is reflected back to us in the condition in which we are now living. But much now is also changing, and opportunities abound for the discovery of new ways of being and doing on earth.

The future lies in the hands of each of us and how we choose to respond. And the promise we can work to fulfill is that of species maturity on earth and a way of living that will allow the planet to survive and thrive as our, and all beings’, home. This will come through the work of each and all of us, experimenting with new ways of being and doing at all levels of social organization. This paper perhaps provides some new ways of exploring work with groups, and I end it with the wish that we may continue together to labor toward the birth of a new world.