

KEVYN BURN

This drawing emerged as Kevyn communicated her concept of *Present Tense: Healing as We Speak* to Cheryl.

A Message in the Bottle: Process Work with Addictions

Reini Hauser

In my early twenties I experimented with a hallucinogenic plant and underwent a profound conversion, an initiation into the spirit world. I experienced a new and intimate connection with parts of myself and with what I consider to be God. This connection shifted my entire attitude about life and provided a sense of belonging for which I had always yearned. The experiment also initiated deep feelings for and a relationship with altered states of consciousness and the spiritual world.

After this peak experience I also became aware of the pain of feeling separate and distant from my spiritual life and creativity. I found it difficult to integrate the intensity of my experience into daily life. In an attempt to overcome this feeling of alienation and longing, I became dependent on alcohol and cigarettes. Over time I understood that what lay behind these addictive tendencies could transform and help me experience and live the spirituality and creativity I missed in my life.

Through my studies and work with clients over the years I discovered that many people have had similar experiences. The longing to alter one's state of mind seems a common drive which I believe can be seen, at its core, as a spiritual quest and a tendency toward wholeness.

Unusual altered states hold a potential known to humankind for millennia. In traditional societies altered states are utilized for paranormal perception, healing, and the well-being of the collective. In contrast, much of mainstream western society denies altered state experiences and offers few ritual spaces to express certain dream-like events. Perhaps because many westerners lack opportunities for connection to the spiritual world, our yearnings for spiritual experience are

lived unconsciously, either through drug induced altered states or in spontaneously occurring extreme states of consciousness. After working with hundreds of people with all kinds of addictions, I believe that the search for wholeness, including personal and collective completion and transpersonal union, is one of the spiritual processes underlying addictions. Spiritual practice is, in a process-oriented perspective, the quest "to find the missing pieces of reality" (Mindell 1993: 114) and to consciously live them in order to become more whole.

The approach to addiction work outlined in this article forms an important segment of substance abuse treatment. The connection between spirituality and addiction is a seasoned idea that flows from Carl Jung through Bill W. into the Alcoholics Anonymous movement. The interventions presented here may seem radical. They are new attempts to go deeply into the spiritual natures of people suffering from addictions. These methods work best at phases in the addiction process that call for expansion of awareness. Disciplined abstinence may be more in the foreground during other phases or used in conjunction with ideas presented here.

In this article I will try to show that altered states of consciousness:

1. may represent these missing pieces of reality;
2. are full of creative energy;
3. contain useful information for individual, family and group life.

On an individual level, drug-induced altered states seem to compensate a one-sided conscious attitude. They may help us gain access to disavowed and unknown aspects of our personali-

ties. In altered states we may discover our highest dreams about ourselves, our relationships and life as a whole. We may also encounter parts of ourselves lost or disowned in childhood. If abuse and oppression have left us feeling hurt, empty and worthless, we may turn to foods, drugs and other substances and activities in an attempt to gain access to experiences which help us reclaim our original wholeness.

On the familial and cultural level, altered states of consciousness may represent experiences at the fringe of what the family or society can tolerate and integrate. The so-called identified patient mirrors disowned aspects of the family, and marginalized groups live out what society represses. Mindell (1988) calls marginalized individuals and groups "city shadows" because they represent that which cannot live consciously in mainstream culture. In expressing disavowed aspects of the mainstream, city shadows confront the status quo and bring neglected ways of being to mainstream awareness. Some altered states of consciousness spring up as reactions against social, political, economic and spiritual climates which disenfranchise and oppress people. These altered states bring alternative possibilities to the mainstream culture.

In the United States, the failed attempt of official policy to ban mind-altering substances with a "war on drugs" demonstrates the limitations of an approach which tries to repress altered states, and thus any potential message these states may have for the mainstream. This type of policy denies the possibility of expanding normal states of consciousness to include that which mainstream consciousness occludes. As much as society tries to repress these unusual states of mind, they persist.

On a personal level, addiction can be seen as an effort to relate to parts of ourselves which our sober life-style excludes, and which we cannot access and use deliberately. In this sense, addiction is an attempt at wholeness (Mindell 1989a). The use of drugs like

...alcohol is a symptom of trying to find dreamtime in cosmopolitan reality; it is a symptom of a loss of rootedness in wholeness and dreaming, and of the depression and pain of oppression and disenfranchisement. Drugs are a means of getting around personal history and journeying to other realms to find the missing pieces of reality.... (Mindell 1993: 114)

Although drug-induced states may provide an individual a taste of what he seeks, the deeper nature of the desire for altered states lies beyond the state achieved by drugs alone. When the purpose and meaning of the underlying process cannot be lived consciously, the person will likely continue turning to drugs. In addiction, the person using drugs usually falls short of the state he yearns for and often increases drug use in ever more futile attempts to contact his deepest desire. For many people, the addiction seems to demand nothing less than a spiritual transformation of the self.

While drug-induced states momentarily succeed in overcoming daily identity, the search for meaning usually gets lost in the frenzy of consuming the drug. As tolerance increases, the individual augments the quantity of the substance in order to reach the altered state seemingly inaccessible to the ordinary identity. Most commonly, addiction does not lead to transcendence of the status quo, but to repeated unsuccessful attempts to annihilate the ordinary personality. Christina Grof talks about this destruction of the ego in her addictive state. "Instead of completing the ego death experience internally, I had been acting it out externally through the horrifying self-destructive drama of alcoholism" (Grof 1990).

Reaccessing and completing the altered state

If we accept the premise that the need for altered states is based on a drive towards transformation and wholeness, important questions concerning new treatment approaches arise. In the following discussion, I will focus on attitudes and interventions which may help bring out the deeper meaning behind altered states of consciousness, and may also help facilitate integrating these states. According to Mindell (1989) the ingredients for discovering and integrating the meaning inherent in the addictive process include: the desire to live, a loving relationship in which growth is valued, and a supportive environment. The absence of somebody strongly opposed to the altered state is another prerequisite for healing, since drug use is often in part a reaction against negative authority figures. Unless both inner and outer dynamics can change, there is a fair chance that the addictive reaction which damages self and others will persist.

Process Work holds a number of unique approaches to addiction. Here are several core beliefs from which I can work. The first is the

powerful attitude that altered states, no matter how unusual, are potentially meaningful and purposeful. This belief helps the client and therapist value even the strangest experiences. Within this climate details of these experiences can emerge and be made available to the client through means other than drugs.

Another crucial tool is awareness, or attention. Attention can be divided into two types, the first and second attentions. First attention focuses on our intentions, our normal state of consciousness. We need this state "to accomplish goals, to do our daily work, to appear the way (we) want to appear" (Mindell 1993: 24). The second attention focuses on irrational processes and perceives altered states of consciousness. "It is the key to the world of dreaming, the unconscious and dream-like movements, the accidents and slips of tongue that happen all day long" (Mindell 1993: 25). Developing second attention helps us perceive, enter and explore altered experiences which emerge on the fringe of awareness. Through using attention, we become more able to notice and follow inner and outer changes rather than only trying to guide and program what happens. Using awareness when working with people in altered states helps therapists follow clients and allows altered states to unfold and complete.

In working with addictions, a third important point consists of increasing one's fluidity in changing states. This requires developing the ability to enter and leave non-ordinary states with sober awareness.

One of the most useful approaches in working with altered states of consciousness is to simply encourage and be present with people as they go through their experiences. Perry (1974) and Laing (1970) demonstrated the value of believing in people's altered states and providing a safe place for experiences to unfold. In this vein, a powerful process-oriented technique involves reaccessing altered states. One way to reaccess an altered state is for a client to pretend to consume the mind-altering substance and experience the effects of the induced state, while watching the changes that take place with alertness. It is important to check with a client to see if this intervention feels appropriate. Clients may be in phases of needing to avoid altered states, or may need time to develop a sense of safety with the therapist before reaccessing an altered state. If the client is an active user it may be useful to work during an altered state in

order to take advantage of what is occurring already and work through strong projections onto the drug (Mindell in Van Felter 1987). While the client monitors his experience, the therapist helps unfold the altered state to completion.

The bee's buzz: a case example

I met Peter when he was in his early twenties. He had started shooting up heroin a few years before. After attempting residential treatment for his addiction, he relapsed and was accepted into a methadone program. Peter had lived with his severely depressed mother since his parents separated when he was three years old. A few years after the separation, his father died of alcoholism. In addition to methadone, Peter occasionally used heroin and cocaine trying to obtain the "rush" sensation which would satisfy him.

Peter expressed interest in trying to reaccess the heroin state through pretending to use the drug. He began his shooting up ritual, sitting on the floor in an imaginary public rest room and pretending to slowly inject the heroin into his vein. As he acted out his drug use, he stopped for a moment and said, "How stupid to inject this stuff!" Then he closed his eyes and described a feeling starting to occur in his stomach and moving upward through his body. As he spoke, his hands spontaneously demonstrated the flow of the feeling. I encouraged him to move his hands more fully. Peter stood, embraced the space in front of him with his arms and started moving slightly around his own axis. He said, "Ah, what a beautiful feeling. If it only stayed with me, I would be happy!" I encouraged him to make his movements even bigger. Keeping his eyes closed and moving his whole body, he began to experience himself as a bee buzzing across fields, landing and nibbling on flowers, feeling total bliss throughout his body.

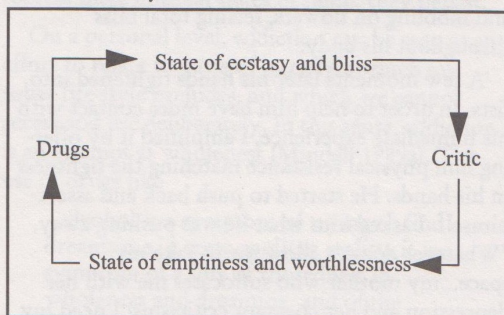
A few moments later his hands tightened into fists. In order to help him have more contact with his immediate experience, I amplified it by offering him physical resistance matching the tightness in his hands. He started to push back and assert himself. I asked him what he was pushing away. "Whatever doesn't allow me to take my space...my mother who suffocates me with her depression and her constant criticisms! I need my own space!" After a short struggle with his "mother," Peter spontaneously started to move by himself again, eyes closed, humming happily. I encouraged him to go deeply into his feelings. At

one point his head tipped back, leading his whole body into a backward arch. I supported him as he slowly slid to the floor in a complete trance state. After a few minutes of quietly experiencing his inner state, he opened his eyes and said, "That is the most beautiful feeling! I feel an incredible well-being all over my body. I feel full of that feeling!"

Addiction and inner critics

When Peter acts out his use of heroin, he seems to yearn for a state of bliss, free from inner criticisms and from a mother whose painful comments and attitudes hurt his feelings and injure his self-esteem. In his attempt to liberate himself, he begins to conflict with the side of his mother which he experiences as oppressive. His next steps in growing may be to consciously take a stronger stand against an inner abusive critic, to bring himself into fuller relationship with his mother and to find support for the part of him which wants to clean up his act. The underlying process seems to move in a direction of growth, while the actual substance abuse probably undermines his efforts to work on himself and move beyond his present identity.

The urge to induce altered states of consciousness through addictions seems in many cases related to the need to ward off inner critics, yet the attempt proves ineffective because the effects don't last. Once we return to our normal identities, our inner critics usually return unchanged, and the addictive cycle begins anew. We need to find sustainable methods of working on these abusive parts of ourselves. One possible approach to working with Peter involves processing all aspects of the cycle, working with both the critic and the state of worthlessness, with the drug induced ecstasy as well as the means to achieve it.



In reaccessing the altered state the client learns techniques to induce the state she yearns for psychologically—without the use of drugs. In amplifying and unraveling the ecstatic state she

experiences the meaningful core of her yearning which in turn supports her against feelings of emptiness and worthlessness induced by inner critics. Thus, the state of well being facilitates the confrontation with the oppressive critic.

One important step toward having it out with the critical figure involves entering the role of the critic and getting to know every detail of this figure. Often active negotiation between the inner critic and the inner victim changes these figures and helps strengthen a fair observer or metacommunicator. "If you work with the conflicts between the processes, following them congruently, step by step, you will notice another aspect of consciousness: the experience of freedom" (Mindell 1990: 121).

The addictive cycle seems to include several elements which need to be processed: the drug states of ecstasy and bliss and the states of inner criticism, emptiness and worthlessness. Exploring all sides of this interaction in detail can lead to freedom and long lasting life-style changes.

Process Work offers tools to unfold meaningful patterns in altered states and to access unconscious information enfolded in them. The state of intoxication can launch a process of transcending the status quo. By gaining access to larger definitions of oneself it becomes easier to work through inner negative figures. Peter completed the altered state in the experience of the bee which may symbolize wholeness and the soul and represent the transformative journey through death and rebirth (Herder 1978). This symbolism confirms the experiential work retrospectively and illustrates the collective amplification of his individual discovery. His normal identity needed to "die" in order for bliss and self-esteem to emerge.

Altered states as roles in the field

When working with severe addictive processes it is often essential to include the family in treatment. Altered states nearly always fit into the context of a larger system. They reflect powerful dreaming processes not only of the individual, but also the family and the culture as a whole. Addictions often indicate a reaction to a system, with addictive behavior mirroring unconscious aspects of the system.

Families become torn between the need to change and grow and the need for homeostasis. Early models in family therapy understood symptoms functionally as protecting the status quo of a family system. Newer theories based in evolution-

ary epistemology (Dell 1981) consider symptomatic behaviors as evolutionary feedback which pushes a system in a new direction. Prigogine (1986) demonstrates how amplifying fluctuations in a given system forces the system into a new structure.

In Process Work we think of family interactions as group processes. The group or family field consists of interchangeable roles which need to be filled. Roles which are not consciously filled can act as disturbing "ghosts" which "haunt" the atmosphere, making people irritable, bored, sleepy, etc. A field includes not only the primary culture of a family or a group, that which we say we do, but also that which we actually do. Incongruities between what any group says it does and what it actually does flood the atmosphere and create an "information float, a sea of signals that have an impact, but their impact is disavowed" (Mindell 1992a: 14). These disturbances create sparks in consciousness which may serve to propel the family into new behaviors. Disturbers to the family system, as "messengers of change" (Reiss 1993), can represent minority roles in the family field. The disturber's symptomatic behaviors usually get acted out unconsciously. Nevertheless, they reflect qualities the system may need. The mainstream culture of the family system frequently becomes stuck in a limited set of roles and may need to open up to its disavowed parts. Often the identified patient becomes the channel for the family's direction of growth. The family can change and grow when its members consciously explore and live the disturber's role.

I remember seeing a family who thought of themselves as very harmonious. Ironically, their presenting problem was their 17 year old daughter, Petra, who had recently admitted to using heroin for the past year. The parents complained that Petra terrorized them with her disrespectful behavior. They felt helpless and overpowered. During our first meeting, Petra yelled that she despised her parents and felt sick even looking at them. She stood openly for her life-style, which involved lots of sex and drug consumption.

The mother cried that she could not take the family conflicts any longer. She felt that she had sacrificed her life for the family instead of pursuing her own career, cultivating friendships and enjoying life. Despite her unhappiness, she felt protective of the family and afraid to stand up for herself. Her husband, a police officer, tended to

lean back. He acted polite and cooperative with occasional angry outbursts. He admitted taking a regular drink or two and complained of feeling isolated from the family. During our session, he frequently looked at me as if he needed support.

Sitting with this family, I had the impression that the effects of heroin came not only from the outside but were present in the sessions. The parents focused on passivity, tranquillity and harmony, all of which heroin commonly induces. Neither of them felt able to confront Petra, nor did they dare address conflicts in their relationship or follow their respective individual dreams. Working on the premise that the "disturber" brings a new direction of growth for the family, I felt that Petra interacted with people in the way that the family needed to interact. When I told her to be quiet, she responded with a bright smile and immediately became calm and attentive.

Each member of this family had gotten stuck in his or her respective role. Petra, the identified patient, indicated the direction of change. She came across as lively, unpredictable and powerful, confronting the unknown and ruthlessly pursuing her dreams. In order for the family system to become more fluid, the parents needed to discover their own power and ruthlessness, confront their inner barriers to a full life, and become more direct in relationship. They courageously started to challenge not only Petra but also each other as they began to pursue their own dreams. The mother felt unhappy with their sex life and wanted to follow her own relationship and career needs more. Petra's father turned off sexually because he felt powerless in relationship to his wife. He wanted time to discover his deeper needs and to work on his rage and fear of abandonment. The more closely he followed himself and stood for his needs, the more powerful he felt. As the couple confronted and worked through some of their personal issues and relationship conflicts, Petra agreed to stop using heroin and to enter a therapeutic community.

Listening with heart

Some people are interested in learning from and integrating altered states of consciousness, while others are not. The task of some individuals calls them to change within the structure of consensus reality. For other people, consensus reality proves simply too painful or narrow to live in. It seems not their fate to change. For these people, their unusual or altered states confront

the culture and ask others to change. The feeling attitude of "deep democracy" (see Mindell 1992a) values all parts of the individual and collective, no matter how disturbing they may appear. This attitude embraces and supports every single member of our communal family and facilitates the relationship between the governing paradigm and disenfranchised individuals and groups. I agree with Mindell when he says that an essential component in working with human beings is "the feeling or the attitude which you have for yourself and others. With a compassionate attitude you automatically pick up the feedback of others and respond" (Mindell 1990b: 69). My deepest belief is that unusual, altered and extreme states of consciousness can provide meaning and direction not only for the individual, but for relationships, families and the culture as a whole.

Listening with heart to stories from city shadows is inspiring. I remember a seminar with Mindell (1992b) where we invited some heroin addicts from the streets of Zurich. They did not want to change; rather, they challenged the seminar participants to change. A woman related the brutality of street life and prostitution and told us how coldly society treated her. She moved the whole group. I realized that her story reflected our own faces, and understood better how unbearably difficult and challenging today's world has become. I learned about listening and understanding the important social and spiritual messages which come from those marginalized by mainstream society.

Working on addiction as a problem of personal psychology alone misses an important point. We also need to expand our vision and understand how social reality impacts our innermost lives. As we saw in the example with Peter, external oppression is internalized and crystallizes into cruel inner figures and victim parts. Since oppressive collective beliefs manifest in individual psychology, treatment needs to unravel not only individual but cultural dramas. Psychology, politics and spirituality form an inseparable whole (Mindell *Sitting in the Fire*) and social and political phenomena need to be addressed for change and healing to occur. Standing against oppressors in real life and turning to social activism can help our common struggle toward freedom and completion.

If our search for wholeness involves finding the missing pieces of reality, then our spiritual practice must include consciously standing for and expressing our disavowed parts. We can help accomplish this through opening up to the creative messages in altered states of individuals, families and the culture as a whole.

References

- Dell, P. F. and Goolishian, H. A. "Ordnung durch Fluktuation." *Familiendynamik* 6 (1981): 104-122.
- Grof, Christina and Grof, Stan. *The Stormy Search for the Self*. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1990.
- Herder Lexikon: *Symbole*. Freiburg: Herder, 1978.
- Laing, R. D. *The Politics of Experience*. London: Penguin, 1967.
- Mindell Arnold. *City Shadows: Psychological Interventions in Psychiatry*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988.
- Mindell, Arnold. *Seminar on addictions, trances, altered states*. Eigenthal, Switzerland, 1989.
- Mindell, Arnold. *Working on Yourself Alone: Inner Dreambody Work*. London: Penguin Arkana, 1990a.
- Mindell, Arnold. "Field of Dreams: An Interview with Arnold Mindell by Stephen Bodian." *Yoga Journal*, No. 91, March/April 1990b.
- Mindell, Arnold. *The Leader as a Martial Artist*. San Francisco: Harper, 1992a.
- Mindell, Arnold. *Schatten der Stadt*. Seminar, Zurich, 1992b.
- Mindell, Arnold. *The Shaman's Body*. San Francisco: Harper, 1993.
- Mindell, Arnold. *Sitting in the Fire: The Politics of Awareness*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Perry, John. *The Far Side of Madness*. Dallas, TX: Spring, 1974.
- Prigogine, Ilya. *Dialog mit der Natur*. Munchen: Piper, 1986.
- Reiss, Gary. "The Role of the Disturber in Process Oriented Family Therapy." *Journal of Process-oriented Psychology* Vol. 5 No. 1 (1993): 60-66.
- Van Felter, Debbie. "Heroin Addiction from a Process-oriented Viewpoint." Diss. William Lyon University, 1987.
- Reini Hauser, M.A., hails from Zürich, Switzerland. He has worked in a substance abuse treatment facility using a process-oriented approach and travels and teaches Process Work worldwide. Reini lives in Eugene, Oregon, where he has a private practice and enjoys relationship life, organic gardening and fishing in Oregon's wild rivers. He is interested in community building, group and family conflict work and in expanding his political, psychological and spiritual awareness.*