

Winter is almost upon us and there is a chill in the air. Enjoy the season.

Speech to The Philosophers' Café Christ Church Cathedral

by Jim Gifford

Breakdown or spiritual breakthrough? This question has been central to my intellectual thought and pursuits since I was first hospitalized, over thirty years ago, for what was then diagnosed as manic-depression, now known as bi-polar affective disorder.

During the 1970s, I was admitted for psychiatric care over a dozen times and have spent five years in halfway houses, all of this after having to withdraw from UBC Law School. I had initially experienced 'cosmic consciousness', unity with the divine, that was expressed in the imagery of my western roots as 'I am God' and 'I Am The Second Coming Of Christ'. Although such declarations of godhead are extremely dangerous to verbalize in our culture because of the heretical and blasphemous megalomania implied, it is accepted and revered by other peoples and in other times.

Such revelatory epiphanies, of what I term 'Universego', are the essence of the emergence of Eastern holy persons, such as Indian gurus and Sufi masters and, of particular interest to me, shamans.

In the aboriginal world, the experiences of mania and schizophrenia are esteemed for their inner value and growth potential. They are the path to becoming a shaman: psychic, seer, magus, healer, an eminent figure in the community.

Amid the throes of 'rite de passage', the primitive undergoes an intense physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual crisis. Literally thrust into the wilderness, he/she is cast into the role of wounded visionary of dead spirits and the supernatural animal, plant, and mineral kingdoms. He/she accesses the dark side of the psyche and, in a psychotic state, is overwhelmed by intuitive magic haunting with its occult powers, including terrifying demons which, in essence are the unexpressed shadow of the dynamic archetypes of humanity. One may ultimately connect with the core of being and God Itself. Delusions, hearing voices, and

hallucinations, are integral to this 'Vision Quest'.

By expressing these potent images of Inner Reality, the primitive comes to accept and be reconciled with these influences seeking to control, possess and manipulate him/her. When this sojourn has run its course, the now fully-fledged 'wounded healer' returns to his people as a key figure.

Like the shamanic trial, manic-schizophrenia-psychosis among the so-called mentally ill is a time of aberrant behaviour characterized by extreme emotional excitability, impetuosity, frenzy of ideas, rambling speech, prophetic visions, and delusions of grandeur.

A key of shamanic intuition is seeing the multi-dimensional worlds as fundamentally vibrational. As a manic-depressive, I am fascinated with the discoveries of quantum physics. What strikes me is the basic concept that all matter is interwoven as waves, troughs and particles, i.e. wavicles. The universe is in a state of cyclical vibrational swing, known for millennia by Eastern mystics and Western esotericists as being fundamental existence. Those going through moodswing highs and lows are mirrors reflecting this

(Continued on next page)

In This Issue:

Speech to The Philosophers' Cafe.....	front page-2, 5
Long Live The Christmas Concert by S. Roddan	3
Minute Particulars by A. Feldmar	4, 5
Bookworm by A. Feldmar.....	6-7
This Earth by T. Levesque	7
A Workshop On Forgiveness by S. Devi	8
Re-apply for Disability Benefits by R. Loxton.....	9
The Wall by Reinhart	10, 11
Poetry by L. Ralph Buckley	12, 13
Soar by R. Grewal	14
New Briefs by S. Dixon	14, 15
Satya's Soapbox by S. Devi	15
Electroshock: A Crime by L. R. Frank	16-22
Bulletin Board	23
Artwork by Reinhart	back page

MPA
#202 - 1675
W. 4th Ave.,
Vancouver, B.C.
V6J 1L8
Tel: 604-738-2811
Fax: 604-738-4132
Website: vmpa.org

cosmic law. The Western World's linear, logical and rational paradigm thinking, a product of the work of Aristotle, Newton and Descartes, debases such apparently irrational and abnormal behaviour as pathologically demented. In extreme emotional polarity, the manic state is one of a rush of excitement, even ecstasy, all around and through the individual. That which is described as psychosis is actually a survival instinct in play: the effort to control and order the mystical fires of 'scattered psychic energy'.

During the phase of struggling to come to terms with this energy, the sensitivity to waves of internal and external life-force is so overwhelming as to appear to conventional mindsets as disoriented and debilitating. There is an intense burst and overcapacity of peripheral input for, unlike 'normal' people who discriminate and select image patterns according to survival and interest moulds, those in spiritual emergency have the mammoth task of making sense and meaning of sensory information flooding the mind like a tidal wave. Symbols are used as unifying tools: telephone poles are crosses; birds are angels; and stars are neurons of God's Mind. Such metaphors, that allow this sensory swamping to settle into a form of clarity, are the result of falling and imploding into the Abyss, frequently without guides or maps. He/she penetrates the Sources of Being that have been coated over in mankind's history with layer-on-layer of the 'civilizing syndrome'. Perceived madness is the acting out, in relationship to the world's daily surroundings, of these awakened and rediscovered entities of the psychological depths. Often creatively gifted as artists, poets, musicians, these individuals' eccentric perceptions, perspectives and attitudes reveal the thin line between insanity and genius. In this regard, it is interesting to note the comments of Buckminster Fuller, one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century. He had suffered an intellectual and spiritual crisis as a young man and, years later, when asked if he was a genius, he said no, he just didn't have any borders or divisions in his head.

Many souls find themselves imprisoned in asylums, subjected to medication, therapy and shock treatment, for having expressed allusions of metaphorical language that are misunderstood by the mainstream populace in whom latent unconsciousness often only surfaces in sleep. Unfortunately, in our material-oriented culture, these souls, who are driven to the upheaval of dis-ease that leads to psychic death and rebirth, are cast aside, fringe members of society who are unheard, ridiculed or ignored. In the 'Ocean of the Unconscious', some learn to swim, while others drown. At odds with, and totally unacceptable to, the safety and status quo of The Establishment, their profound period of transformation is stigmatically labelled by an intervening and controlling psychiatric profession. Institutionalized, they are demeaned, demoralized and dehumanized.

Personally, I see my journey as a 'voyage of discovery' which, by means of extreme growing pains, has unlocked my unconscious, releasing fathomless energy, and granting me a heightened and enlightened awareness. In my life I needed to learn the focus and centering that would encourage balance. In accepting a basic religious precept, I aspired to be 'dead to the world' of vibrations – emptying, life became more abundant. Truly, to lose one's life is to gain it. Today, I have a deep and broad sense of myself and my place in the greater scheme of things.

I realize each of us is special and unique, with our own life stories, gifts, idiosyncrasies, and genetic coding, to name but a few aspects that accentuate our diversity. And yet, in our 'Heart of hearts', we are the One Source that moves both atoms and stars.

In esoteric philosophy, the universe is Mind, the 'Great Thought of God'. To me, it is the 'Ultimate Dream' and we are actor, director, producer, and audience, in this performance known as the 'Magic Show', matter or illusion flowing through 'God's

(Continued on pg. 5)

The Editorial Board of "In A Nutshell" welcomes letters, articles, and poetry on mental health issues from you, our readers.

**Warning! Do not abruptly stop psychiatric medications!
Most psychiatric medications are powerful drugs and should
be withdrawn from gradually under the care of a physician or
other health practitioner.**

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Long Live The Christmas Concert

by Sam Roddan

The Christmas Concert has always been a fertile training ground for future politicians. Many of these public figures got their first start on the stage as Shepherds, Wise Men and Virgin Marys in the pageants put on in school auditoriums and church basements throughout our nation.

Although no politician, my earliest claim to fame was as a Shepherd in the Star of Bethlehem, written, directed and produced by Miss Snelgrove, my Grade 3 teacher at Laura Secord Elementary on the outskirts of a little town named Niverville.

For the occasion I was dressed in my sister's blue robe with a Turkish towel draped over my head. I wore an itchy beard of cotton wool and excelsior. On my feet I had my Dad's black bedroom slippers and I carried a shepherd's crook fashioned from my Granny's rubber tipped cane.

My only line for the pageant was "Behold in the Heavens, the Star of Bethlehem" which I was to shout out when I got the signal from Miss Snelgrove who was prompting from behind the manger. Wise Man Number Two was then to plug in the electric cord to light up the star supported by a coat hanger near the ceiling above the main ventilator.

On the night of the concert, Wise Man Number One forgot where he had put his frankincense and myrrh, a special mixture of rose water and brilliantine. Shepherd Four lost his whiskers. Also, before I could let go with "Behold", my shepherd's crook tangled with the extension cord to the Christmas tree standing in the corner of the stage.

Instead of the Star of Bethlehem brightening the heavens, a burst of sparks showered down from the fuse box near the ventilator, which brought on utter darkness, cries of dismay, crackling sounds and frantic shouts from parents in the front row to their loved ones on the stage.

Miss Snelgrove cried out not to be "sore afraid" and ordered everyone, including the Angels to join hands, sing the first and last verses of Silent Night. And would Mr. McGregor, the school janitor, please come forward at once to check the fuse box.

And oh, how we sang! We rounded our lips, shaped our vowels, let our voices soar past the ventilators in the

ceiling and held our votes firm and steady until at last Mr. McGregor found a new fuse and our 60 watt Star of Bethlehem shone again in lovely splendor.

Then I got the high sign from Miss Snelgrove and raised my voice in a mighty shout, "Behold in the Heavens, the Star of Bethlehem". A great cheer went up from the parents, the pageant unfolded as it should and when the curtain finally rang down, Miss Snelgrove was in tears of joy for yet another successful Christmas Concert at good old Laura Secord Elementary.

Today I sometimes wonder whatever happened to the Josephs and Marys, the Shepherds, Angels and Wise Men who took part in our pageants of old.

I do know two Josephs ended up as senior aldermen on the Town Council of Niverville and one became a judge. Three of the Wise Men eventually were on the Police Commission, another landed a job as Chairman of the School Board. Two Shepherds made it to the Agriculture Land Office and Berty Bunt, who tumbled out of the manger one year and cracked open his head, is now a School Superintendent somewhere in Northern Ontario. Patsy McBride, the best Virgin Mary we ever had, became a beauty queen and took all the prizes three years in a row at the Superior North West Farm Implements Fair.

And, ah yes, the beautiful Angels with their cheese cloth wings and haloes of tinsel and wire. What happened to them? Well, it takes all kinds to run this world and as time passed the Angels became mothers, members of the local PTA and Temperance Union. And one even chaired for years the Commission on Divorce Reform. A few, alas, as was to be expected, fell by the wayside.

But before we bid farewell to the Christmas Concert for yet another year, we must give all praise to Miss Snelgrove, who for so long kept alive its customs and traditions. After 37 years of faithful service at Laura Secord, Miss Snelgrove was promoted to glory on June 30, 1938 with highest honors. Since then her like has not passed my way again.

Minute Particulars

by Andrew Feldmár

I have always liked this quote from George Bernard Shaw: "This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no 'brief candle' to me. It is a sort of splendid torch that I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations". In a day I'll reach my 62nd birthday and couldn't agree with Shaw more. I am also thinking of my teacher, therapist, mentor, colleague and friend, R. D. Laing, who died suddenly in 1989 at the age of 62.

"I must seize the moment between ripe and rotten," wrote W. B. Yeats. Is it too late? How would I know? Were I to die now, what legacy would I be leaving behind? Suppose I have twenty more years left to live and work, what remains to be done? What is important to me *now*? Rilke thought that death and artistic creation are closely related: both are a breakthrough, not so much into another world, but into the hidden, unperceived side of this one. Rilke died, aged 51, of a form of leukemia whose last stages were very painful as well as disfiguring; but he refused alleviating drugs because he wanted to experience his own death to the full. R. D. Laing also refused to interfere with his own death: he consulted no physician during the last few years of his life, even though he suffered greatly, and near the end, had only an hour or two a day when his pain abated enough to allow him to work. What is my own death? Will I die bravely and with a modicum of dignity? Or will I go in terror, stupidly incontinent, unconscious and mewling?

"The fear of dying that subsists is a fear of not having the strength of patience demanded and a fear of one's lucidity and resolve not having the strength to obey the imperative of dying that summons," writes

Alphonso Lingis. He continues, "In the foreboding sense of a day imminent in which one will not be there, there stirs an immanent anxiety that senses that the place one occupies is empty of oneself." Soon, too soon, I'll be dead. Dying is an obligation, it is what I will have to do, for myself, alone. So, what, then, is a *proper* way to die? David Bakan's answer in *The Duality of Human Existence* is the last sentence of the book: "The proper way of dying is from fatigue after a life of trying to mitigate agency with communion."

Living forms have two fundamental modalities of existence, Bakan thought: *agency* denotes the existence of an organism as an individual, and *communion* denotes participation of the individual in some larger organism of which the individual is a part. Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with others. Agency is survival, communion is joyous living. Agency is having to fight for my

freedom, communion is dancing, making love, conversation with friends. Bakan, along with Freud and Hans Selye, thinks that agency hastens death, while communion slows it down. Perhaps Freud would have died before he did, had he not been writing about dying while he struggled with cancer of the jaw. My own writing at this very moment is intended as an act of communion. I recall G. B. Shaw again: "I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can."

We are all death-bound, and the realization of this certainty can be the source of a deeper tenderness and compassion for self and others. After all, in every interaction, every second, we are participating in the community of mortals. When I look at you, I am also looking at your death inside you, "like the core in a beautiful apple," to use Rilke's words.

In Chinese, "the nature of man" is called *jên*. *Jên* is humanity and ethics in one. The ideogram means "man" and "two", that is to say: to be human means to be in communication. Ethics is how we treat each other. What is between minds influences mind.

*"Will I die
bravely and with
a modicum of
dignity?"*

We are not skin-encapsulated egos, we do flow in and through each other. Connection seems to me more important than money, power, prestige, or sex. E. Graham Howe, one of R. D. Laing's teachers, remarked, "It is hard to feel the truth, but easy to accept opinions as to what is best; it is hard to hold the balance tolerantly in suspense, but easy to act in urgent morality identified with a 'good' cause." The connection with others can be nourishing, it can be poisonous, or the connection can generate poisoned nourishment.

Between now and the time I die, I hope to cultivate the garden of my connections. Weed out those that bring poison into my life, and attend to those that promise nourishment. If from the time I was little I had to learn to thrive on poison or poisoned nourishment, I might, just out of sheer habit, continue to seek out more of the same. Poison-free nourishment might strike me as so unfamiliar that I could turn away from it when it is offered to me. What is "poison" in this context? *Reluctance* for example. A meal cooked

when in fact I'd rather have read a book, may still have all its nutrients, yet my *reluctance*, even if I tried to hide it, would poison my dinner guests. Or at least my connection with them will be jeopardized.

W. H. Auden wrote,
"That singular command
I do not understand,
Bless what there is for being,
Which has to be obeyed, for
What else am I made for,
Agreeing or disagreeing?"

Meister Eckhart said, "Should a man have committed a thousand mortal sins, were he rightly disposed he ought not to will not to have committed them."

I can only hope that my last thinks will be thanks. ■

Speech to the Philosophers' Café

(Continued from pg. 2)

Universal Stream of Consciousness'. In this context, I recall the ancient Chinese story of the man who dreams he is a butterfly. Eve rafter, he is uncertain if he really is a man dreaming he is a butterfly or rather is a butterfly dreaming he is a man. Truly, Reality is in the mind of the beholder.

Two games from our childhood have a mystical nature: in one, you may say God is playing Hide-and-Seek with Itself; in the other, God is playing tag – and 'You Are It'. Yet, we must always be mindful of our mortal humanity on this plane of existence. In one of his 'Graceland' songs, Paul Simon sings, 'thinking I had supernatural powers, I slammed into a brick wall'. Although the concept 'Second Coming of Christ' still rings true to me today, allow me to clarify. Realizing All Creation is in Christ, Buddha, or whatever you name It, and the same source is in All Creation, I sense I am surrounded, suffused and infused with Christ Consciousness or Buddha Nature. The Kingdom of God is, in Beatle George Harrison's lyrics, 'within you and without you', exuding a profound meaning and alrightness.

Let us hope and pray some day those who are undergoing a 'breakthrough breakdown' are allowed and encouraged to ascend the spiral of change and, gifted with tender loving care, to grow into the sacredness that is the birthright of us all. With our insights, we may help those struggling in the mind-maze and reveal to mankind its holistic nature.

Noted psychiatrist Carl Jung has remarked, 'the deeper the crisis; the rarer the spirit'. The Chinese

character for crisis is composed of two symbols: one is danger; the other opportunity. I am reminded of the saying, 'a mind is a terrible thing to waste'. The time has come to exercise our compassion by salvaging and redeeming, from the black hole of psychiatric analysis and societal ostracization, our beleaguered fellow humanity.

Perhaps one day such persons will be respected and their healing, through trial and tribulation, reflected upon by a sick and estranged civilization. Perhaps those who have been through psychic dis-ease may be seen as an example of the process of healing through psychic death and rebirth.

Today, en masse, we are diving into the depths of the Universal Sea of Mind, struggling to stay afloat, suffering cosmic pain. We are in the midst of a World Millennial Psychosis.

In these days of extreme polarity, immense power, both black and white, is being unleashed, accelerating towards Harmonic Convergence. In this Dynamic Alchemy, the stormy night will metamorphize into the dawn of sunny skies, and we shall find what we are seeking, The Pot of God at the end of The Rainbow.

Breakthrough Light shall Stream through Blue Healing Consciousness, Blessing Us with Peace of Mind Beyond Understanding of Knowledge's Duality of Good and Evil.

Remember, as the song 'Nature boy' says:
'the greatest thing you will ever learn
is just to love and be loved in return'.

Bookworm

Ecstasy

By Michael Eigen

Wesleyan University Press, 2001

Reviewed by Andrew Feldmár

This book is **not** about the popular drug, MDMA, which, in the late 1970s, was widely used as an adjunct to psychotherapy, by an expanding circle of psychologists and psychiatrists in both Europe and the United States. In 1985 this “heart-opening” drug was made illegal, and today its use is mainly recreational. It is the most commonly used drug at “raves”, all-night ecstatic dance events, held secretly all over the world.

The **experience** of ecstasy, unassisted by drugs, also has been forbidden and viewed with suspicion. A psychiatrist I knew said without the least sense of humour or irony, “Why would I want to experience ecstasy? It’s nothing but cerebral disorganization”. Ecstasy has become the forbidden subject of psychoanalysis. Ecstasy can be creative, and sometimes it can turn destructive. Eigen breaks the taboo and the silence around the topic of ecstatic states of being. He argues that there is an ecstasy that comes through the ever-necessary confrontation of our psychic cores with suffering and degradation, and he shows that when we can be present with these feelings, they add to the tone and texture of our lives, and help us to feel real. Ecstasy transcends sex and potentially can occupy all aspects of our being.

“Ecstasy is the heart’s center,” is the first sentence of the book. “Ecstasy is in the blood,” Eigen goes on, “Blood ecstasies can be terrible. Not just ecstasies of sex, but ecstasies of murder, ecstasies of fear and rage. There are patients who must cut themselves, see and smear and taste their blood, not only to feel real but to feel ecstatic. There are individuals who must cut others to tap a stream of ecstasy”. He is lyrical, thoughtful, intelligent, fearless, daring and thought-provoking. “Madness is inadequate orgasm. Orgasmic fulfillment makes us nicer. And if we are nicer, we might open to more orgasmic fulfillment. The schizophrenic and Nazi share orgasmic inadequacy. They seek alternate orgasms: madness and murder. Mysticism is a kind of orgasm. Character is hostility. Orgasm is love. Orgasmic opening subverts lack”. True? False? It’s certainly worth musing over.

Some of Eigen’s observations strike a familiar chord: “Too often, trying to bring the point of rest into our lives ignites rages. How many meditators and prayers I’ve worked with who are ragers! God help those who break into stillness, who disturb peace! Once having tasted peace at the center of being, we find that loved ones are disturbances. Irritants magnify. Kids, mate, co-workers – the contrast between God’s peace and actual people seems unbridgeable. Too often, hunger for peace increases violence”.

In all the talk about ecstasy, Eigen drops many hints about the nature of psychotherapy as he thinks of it. “Therapy is as much for the therapist as for the patient... Part of the ecstasy-dread of therapy is awareness that the work itself is a difficulty threaded over time. The patient, after all, is in the same boat. Neither therapist nor patient may *know* what is happening at a given time, but either or both may have a *sense* of it. *Sensing this sense* and speaking from it builds the ability to do so again”. What *is* this work of therapy? “Quite simply, to restore the capacity to feel. To become a feeling self. Particularly, a feeling self under pressure not to feel,” concludes Eigen.

In therapy, one hopes to meet an other who can take one, and survive one’s energy, impact, love and hostility. Eigen says, “If I do not have to spend much time worrying about how I’m affecting the other, I can use the other’s not-me material for psychic growth. An important aspect of existence is launched and validated:

1. We use each other for mutual growth.
2. We survive each other’s mutual use.
3. We ruthlessly take what we need from each other’s insides.
4. We all gain from the taking.

Eating God is a good model for part of what we need to do with each other. Joy and mutual appreciation become as necessary and natural as food”.

“Ecstasy can be creative, and sometimes it can turn destructive.”

Many sources, psychoanalytic, philosophical, and literary rub against each other in Eigen's little book: Freud, Lewin, Lacan, Bion, Winnicott, Jung, Reich, Kohut, as well as Plato, Plotinus, William Blake, the Bible, Shakespeare, Kabbala and Spielberg. Quotations from Blake, under the heading of "A little Blakefest", include:

"Exuberance is Beauty."

"Energy is Eternal Delight."

"Joys impregnate. Sorrows bring forth."

"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite."

"For everything that lives is Holy."

The main message of this book is that it is good to be alive! If you have your doubts, read it! Eigen is a psychologist and psychoanalyst. He sees a lot of unhappy people, yet he can conclude: "This mysterious and compelling need, I believe, is the most satisfying drive of all: to be with oneself and others in ways that nourish living, that yield abundant life".

This Earth

by Terrence Levesque

Each year we have four seasons and the sun rises in the summer sky. Each year, I turn another year older. The ebb and flow of time and tide reminds me that I am all too human. To be on this earth in the heat and the cold, to see the leaves change colour in fall, to see new growth in spring and to feel the wind in my face makes me feel alive and gives new life to my tired walk. The earth is ever-present no matter what we humans do. It is one thing we can be sure of and we can count on it. With my feet on the ground I can rest assured that things will turn out alright. I am not as agile as I once was and I feel the effect of time on my body. My strength is renewed with a little rest and my spirit for living is reborn each passing year.

I can think of no other way for it to be. It was this way when I was born and it will be that way when I die. The earth itself is the background to which we play our parts in life. It is therefore

important to remember where we stand as to its significance. In our daily lives we are concerned with many weighty matters and we forget the simplicity and the beauty of the earth. You may live in the city or the country but the feelings are the same. I love to walk on a nice day. I enjoy seeing different things and I find the days and nights fascinating.

When my mind is burdened with heavy thoughts, I turn again to that which always was and will always be. I have learned to move in time with nature. To me, all this has great meaning and through experience I know that I am not mistaken. It is wise to remember what others already know. The tired earth goes around and another year will come and go. I am still here and hope to see many more seasons. Once again I will see the summer come and once again I will feel younger than spring.

"Anything which strengthens or affirms our faith,
hope and love, can be called a miracle."

M.D. Arthurs

A Workshop On Forgiveness

by Satya Devi

Last year, I belatedly bought a book on Forgiveness, as one turns their own 50th year mark. I was already a year late and a dollar short, but I had many issues with my long-deceased mother and believed that no forgiveness was possible, each thought of her bringing more pain and acrimonious feelings towards her. Here is my first attempt, April 30th, 2001:

Mo-ther – if I could forgive you, I might find peace of mind but I feel you do not ask my forgiveness. I feel I have hurt you in some unforgivable way, and for that, I am, as yet, unable to ask your forgiveness. Pride stops me from forgiveness of you and myself. Each day that goes by is another nail in the coffin. I know I must forgive you and let you die and rest in peace. Your last words to me were: “Don’t come and visit me; you wouldn’t believe it if you saw it.” I believe you said that because you cut me out of your will and had guilt and lack of honesty.

It had been that way for over thirty-five years since I left home. It was 23 years after I left home before I contacted my family (with the exception of my brother with whom I am very close) and visited them again. I had intensive therapy for this over the years and because of my schizophrenia, I was ostracized by my family and had blamed them for many years for my illness. That’s another story.

In May of 2002, I started going to a 12 Step Group and, by another co-incidence, met a person from another 12 Step Group and we got to talking about forgiveness and the 4th and 5th steps which were to make an inventory of the wrongs we’ve done and then to admit to a Higher Power, to another human being and to myself these wrongs. I had quite a list and was encouraged to write it by various people. I was astounded at how many instances I had manipulated around me so that I was always the victim. After ten days of writing, I thought I had enough, at least for this first try. The problem was to find someone I didn’t know and that I hoped I would never see again to admit all this crap to. I finally decided to call a clergyman and found a local church in the telephone book and found someone who did 5th Steps and was agreeable to listen. I did not have much time, as I was planning to go the next weekend to Westminster Abbey with a Hindu group I belong to (having decided I did not want any of them to hear my shortcomings)

for a silent retreat. I had read in my book on Forgiveness that one can write the names of ones she is angry at or afraid of, or has some issue with, write that person’s name with a magic marker on a stone and cast the stone into the water. I had planned to spend a good part of the weekend at the Abbey pitching rocks over the cliff into the Fraser River.

The 5th step went very well and when I told the clergyman that I had planned to get rid of a lot of anger and fear pitching rocks with names on them over the cliff, he suggested that I hold the rock and say, I don’t know why you did what you did; it really hurt me, and sometimes it seemed deliberate on your part, and you may not want my forgiveness, but I give it freely and release all the anger I had towards you. That changed the whole attitude and approach for me, and I spent a much more gentle afternoon at the lookout.

Later in the evening, I wrote this:

Dear Mom – thanks for bequeathing on me your good sense of humour. Sometimes I can even laugh at myself and that is when I know I am getting healthier. I don’t know why you did what you did, why you caused me all that pain and shame, but it ends now. You may not want my forgiveness, but I give it to you freely now, as I forgive myself for the anger, jealousy and judgementalism I had towards you all these years, and for my own

hypocrisy when you were dying, just being nice to you so you’d leave something in your will and not out of compassion for the frightened and oppressed human that you were. It ends now.

I cannot rest or sleep. Tonight there is joy. I don’t want to write a great work to make my name and win the Nobel Prize anymore. I want to write something like “Footprints” where a woman looks behind her and sees only one set of footprints and thinks God has abandoned her when he says all along he carried her through the worst times.

(I took my radio to the Abbey and listened to Black gospel music on my headphones as the night waltzed on) ... earlier on there was a program playing Marion Anderson singing “Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees” and some other beautiful Negro Spirituals. I wasn’t sure if my heart would break or if it had been broken a long, long time and was suddenly fusing back together and it was or is the pain of mending and healing. ■

“I cannot rest or sleep. Tonight there is joy.”

Thousands of Mental Health Consumers Must Re-Apply for Disability Benefits

by Robin Loxton
Senior Advocate,

Mental Health Empowerment Advocates Program, MPA

Over the past year there have been some major changes to provincial disability benefits programs. Some of these changes include a new definition of disability, the removal of the permanent disability designation, and a new application process.

At the beginning of October, the Ministry of Human Resources sent out two kinds of letters to people receiving Disability Benefits Level 2 (DB2). One letter – the good news letter – told the DB2 recipient that they are able to keep their disability status without providing more information at this time. The other letter – the bad news letter – said that in order to keep their disability benefits they would have to complete a 23 page “Review” application and submit it before January 15, 2003.

Over 18,000 people on DB2 – more than 5,000 with mental health disabilities – have been told they have to fill out the new disability review application. How did the Ministry decide who had to fill out the new application and who did not? There is not a complete answer to this question – perhaps we will never know the full story. Is there any way someone who has received the review package does not have to fill out the 23 page application? Unfortunately, we know of no way of getting around it: if you do not send your application in by January 15, 2003, you will risk having your benefits reduced at the end of April 2003.

The following are tips for people who have received the disability review application:

- Don't panic and don't throw away or rip up the new application. It is upsetting to get this long and daunting package sent to you, but try and stay calm and make a plan. A good start is to read over the form to see how it is put together and what information is wanted.

- If you are a client of a Mental Health Team or Centre there is a good chance they will assist you with completing the whole review application.

- The new application has 3 sections. You fill out the first section, your doctor fills out the second section, and your doctor or another health professional must complete the Assessor section. Please note that the kind of health professionals that can fill out the

Assessor section is extremely limited. Many people will have to ask their doctor to complete both section 2 and 3.

- The key questions on the new application are about what restrictions you have with daily living activities and whether you need help with these activities from other people or assistive devices.

- There are important questions that have to do with people that have mental health conditions. They include questions about ability to relate to other people, both individually and in groups, and about ability to make decisions about personal affairs.

- The more information the doctor who is filling out the form has about you the better. The things that your doctor may need to be reminded about are the kinds of activities you have problems with and the kinds of help you need – even if you are not actually getting it right now.

- You need to approach this application from the negative side of your disability. In other words, you have to talk about what you cannot do and what life is like on your bad days. We know this can be a hard thing to do.

- It may be hard to find an advocate to sit down with you one-on-one, but a number of groups are holding information sessions on the new application process. More information about these group sessions can be obtained from the Mental Health Empowerment Advocates Program (MHEAP) at 604-738-5770.

- In the event that your review application is rejected, don't give up. There is still an appeal process and you still have the right to appeal.

- Your objective should be to a) get the application form filled out b) get accurate, detailed information on the form and c) get it mailed in by January 15, 2003. If you do these 3 things, then you have done the job.

(Editorial Note: As of Nov. 21 The Ministry of Human Resources has cancelled 5000 re-assessments and will notify clients by telephone and mail. All other re-application due dates have been moved back to March 15, 2003.)

The Wall

by Reinhart

As I was walking along a lonesome, solitary country road, it occurred to me that the idyllic, pastoral scene before me was, by and large, just what I would have expected most other people enjoyed on their excursions away from the turmoil of the city. It was a pleasant day. Great stretches of blue sky afforded plenty of sunshine, and the puffs of cotton white clouds scattered about the radiant, azure expanse appeared so well placed that one might almost believe they were painted there, or assigned by some great, invisible hand. The complete picture before me had a soothing effect and was altogether conducive to reflections and daydreaming as I strolled along the path.

The way laid out before me was a typical, country, dirt road. A mixture of sand, soil and small stones; it was packed hard by travel and baked dry by the summer sun. For the most part, the road stretching out ahead of me was of a tan colour, with spots of brown, and some grey from the stones. It was wide enough to accommodate a single vehicle.

It was a warm day, but not excessively so. Occasionally the sunlight glinted on some moist leaf where a drop of dew had managed to hide, in a previous spot of shade, from the searching rays of the sun. The circumstances seemed delightfully suited to an odyssey through the countryside. And as I made my way along the dusty trail, and wisps of dust puffed up from where my shoes struck the dry earth, I scrutinized the scenery that unfolded all around me. The engaging, charming surroundings filtered into my consciousness by way of the senses and softly settled upon the realizations of my mind. And as I continued walking I fell into a gentle sort of reverie.

On either side of the road, green, grassy fields extended to the horizon. There were trees, like oak and birch, randomly spaced across the almost emerald, shining, verdant expanse. The trees provided lovely, alluring islands of shade; a relief from the brilliant, dazzling glare of the sun. I heard the chirping of a multitude of birds: sparrows, robins and starlings, among others. They filled the world with their songs. When I looked upon some of the trees that were closest to me, I could discern some of these singing virtuosi. They perched here and there, sometimes two or three upon a branch, and in gay profusion proclaimed their song. Then some of them would take to flight and proceed toward another tree, and there again take up

their melodies. And glancing into the sky, I noticed that at all times there were always several in midair.

I had been so enchanted by my beautiful, natural environs, that it took me some time before I discovered the obvious. I stopped short in my tracks, slowly turned and studied the view all around me. I was alone. I was the single solitary human individual within eyesight in all directions. This pleased me, although I was not really certain why. But it seemed as though the vast, spacious, deserted landscape belonged entirely to me.

I resumed my trek; invigorated by the fresh air, and exhilarated by the resplendent nature that provided the setting for my journey. On my right, in the distance and amid the fields and trees, I detected three dark shapes. I focused non them, to the best of my ability, and determined that they were cattle grazing on the lush pastures. I surveyed the terrain for other points of interest, and I went on.

Somewhat further ahead, I came upon another sight. On my left, by the side of the road, I saw a completely ordinary wooden bowl. I stopped to have a closer look. It had the elegant lines of a simple and practical artifact. It was half filled with water. I presumed this was rainwater from the most recent showers. Sunshine sparkled on the smooth, glassy surface. The water appeared to be clean enough, for all intents and purposes, but I suspected that it might be, to some extent, stagnant. Surely it had been standing there for several days, slowly evaporating. I picked the bowl up and put it to my lips. I drank deeply. As I had expected, the water tasted slightly stale and musty. Nevertheless, I found the drink refreshing and was gladdened by the chance to slake my thirst. Then I put the bowl back where I had found it and moved on.

For the most part, the route that I was wandering was fairly straight, with some occasional, gentle curves along the way. Peering ahead into the distance, I thought that I perceived a strange, anomalous contour upon the horizon. I was unable to identify this configuration, but I kept my eyes fixed upon it as I proceeded forward. After having covered some more ground in my progress, it seemed that I was able to make out some sort of demarcation up ahead. The curious outline in the distance was steadily taking on greater proportions. Soon enough I was able to determine that there was some sort of obscure bound-

ary or barrier awaiting me further on. As I drew closer, a large structure began to reveal itself. And it was becoming increasingly more obvious that this thing was cutting directly across the passage of my odyssey. Toward the end of my approach, the massive size of this obstacle began to manifest itself. And upon drawing near to it, it became unmistakably apparent that my way was barred by a gigantic, impassable wall.

Thus I stood before the edifice; a brick wall consisting of concrete blocks and mortar. I looked up. The formation faded and disappeared in the blinding brightness of the sun. It appeared to ascend indefinitely. Obviously, there was no way over the top. I cast my eyes to the right and left. On both sides the wall appeared to stretch into infinity. I was amazed at this remarkable prospect. With the knuckles of my right hand I rapped upon the brick, not quite expecting it to ring hollow. There was no mistake. The barrier was solid. I pulled out a cigarette, the last one in the pack, lit it up and resigned myself to the comfort of smoking. The empty pack I tossed on the ground, at the foot of the wall.

After having finished my smoke, I decided to follow the wall down along my left side to see if there was a way around this blockade somewhere further down the line. I cut across the green, grassy fields on that side of the road. And thus, I proceeded to explore the roadblock down along the left side. But after having gone approximately one mile in this direction, and seeing that there was still no end to the wall, I came to a halt. I gazed down along the barricade as far as my eyes could see, but there was no end in sight. The wall still seemed to extend indefinitely. I decided that there was no way around the barrier in this direction, so I turned back around and retraced my steps.

Once again I came back to the dirt road where I had tossed the empty cigarette pack at the foot of the wall. Now I determined to follow the partition down along my right side to see if there was a way around the obstruction in this direction. And so, this time, I cut across the fields on the right side of the road. Again, I had traversed at least a mile, when I was forced to stop and consider that the wall advanced indefinitely in this direction as well. Looking along the impediment toward the horizon as far as I could see, I could only concede that the hindrance continued without end. There was no way around the wall. I returned back to the road.

Back where road and wall intersected, I stopped and rested for a while. By this time I had done a lot of walking and was beginning to feel somewhat fatigued. I stood still and considered my predicament.

After a while, I decided upon a different course of action. I approached one of the trees and broke off a

sturdy branch, approximately three feet in length. I stripped off its leaves and its small shoots, until I was satisfied that it would make an effective tool. Using the stick as a poker or pick to loosen the earth, I aspired to dig under the structure with my bare hands and my stick. One meter down into the ground I could still detect the brick wall. Two meters down into the earth, and still no end in sight. Doubtlessly, the wall also extended indefinitely downward. I had no choice but to admit defeat. There was no way of passage under the wall. And I had come to the end of my options. The obstruction was impassable.

I climbed out of the pit that I had dug and went up to the colossal barrier. There, I placed my hands upon the wall at shoulder height, leaned slightly into the enormous obstacle, and let my head hang low upon my breast. I was utterly exhausted. The heat, the walking, the digging; it had all wearied, tired and drained me. I let my eyes fall shut. The fatigue I was feeling seemed to be naturally conducive to stilling my thoughts. My mind became clear of all distractions and I gradually lapsed into a meditative state of mind. My consciousness seemed to be wholly absorbed by a soft, gentle, silver-grey fog; and it seemed that I was floating weightless within this pervasive silver mist. I lost all conception of time and place and self-awareness. Slowly, almost imperceptively, I drifted into a trance.

When my eyes opened, I was considerably disoriented. I had no perception as to how much time had elapsed, if any, and momentarily, I had no idea as to where I was. Looking ahead, I beheld the same dirt road that I had been travelling before, continue to stretch out before me into the distance, as far as the eye could see. This revelation brought me back to my senses, and I began to remember my previous situation. I turned around, and there behind me, stood the great impassable wall. I touched it, to make certain. Without any idea as to how, I realized that I had been mysteriously and inexplicably transported to the other side of the edifice. I turned forward again, and yes, it was the same dirt road continuing on. By letting my eyes sweep across the scenery, I scanned the newly discovered vista. And by doing so, I became aware that some of the details of the landscape were slightly different from the ones I had encountered before. But there were green, grassy fields, blooming trees, signing birds, blue skies and puffy, white clouds. And there was the road, the country dirt road, proceeding on ahead until it vanished into the horizon far off in the distance. I started walking... .

The Second Book of Revelations

by L. Ralph Buckley

Gone.
No note. No phone call.
No message left on my answering machine.
No one had seen him for over a week.
Gone. Disappeared.
This wasn't the first time.
Eight years ago he left in a similar manner.
He had got drunk, and when he finally sobered up,
He was on a bus traveling from Toronto to Montreal.
This time I knew he would come back
I just didn't know when.

I had been his case manager for over twenty years.
For each year he aged, I aged equally.
He wrestled with schizophrenia; I did not.

I checked out all the local hospitals.
I made out a missing person's report
And I phoned his apartment manager.
She had put an eviction notice on his door.
I told her we would pay his rent for July.
She sounded surprised, almost resentful.
I had no desire to go into a long-winded, defensive sounding
Explanation of mental illness.
Nor did I want to explain that in the long run
Paying one month's rent would save money for "the system".
"I'm going to threaten him, if and when he comes back,
That if he ever does this again, he will be evicted."
"Do what you feel you need to do."
He should hear about the difficulties he creates for others."

I had helped him get this apartment.
It was what he wanted.
He would come and see me at least once a month
To talk, to get his medications and injection.
He wasn't particularly happy. He was lonely.
He spent much of his time in the beer parlor
Nursing a beer and straining for conversation.
Or else playing the occasional bingo.
Usually he never complained
But on occasion, he would become upset
And state that everyone took advantage of him.
He would buy beer or give out cigarettes.
But when he was broke, no one reciprocated.

"Hello."
It was Calgary General Hospital.
"We've given him his medications and injection
And we are sending him to a local shelter."
"Hi. When are you coming back?"
I'm not sure Ralph.
I've got something to do.
Probably the end of the month."
"Are you okay?"
"I'm all right. Good bye."

He's back"
It was two weeks later and he was sitting in our waiting
area.
"Hi. Welcome back. How are you?"
"Fine."
"Why did you go?"
"God told me to."
"What was it you felt you had to do?"
"I can't tell you that.
Did you know Ralph that Christ didn't die on a the cross
At Calvary 2000 years ago?
He died in Calgary 1000 years ago.
My wife has seven children and has
Never been unfaithful to me.
God would never let her."
"Did you accomplish what you came for?"
"Yes", he smiled, his pilgrimage completed.

Soar

by Raminder Grewal

Whenever I hear the line “Take these broken wings and learn to fly” from that Beatles’ song, I’m taken back to my struggle and eventual triumph of having control over my illness.

When mental illness slowly crept into my life in adolescence, a heavy weight was slowly building on my wings. Right when I was trying to find myself, my mind started unfurling. Eventually, my wings became broken when I became seriously ill and was hospitalized several times in my early twenties.

After my subsequent releases, I was determined to fly to new heights, to try and find myself. No matter how many times I fell down, I didn’t stop trying and, at one point, I thought to myself – maybe I’m not destined for long flights of success – but I felt that the exhilaration of meeting even small goals was sometimes enough to make it through the times I fell flat on my face.

So there I was – it was Raminder vs. her mental illness. I went through a stage where I ignored my illness pretending it wasn’t there, but like a typical ‘bad-guy’ opponent in a wrestling match, my nemesis was playing unfair, twirling chairs at my head and

throwing me outside the ring. At the stage when I acknowledged my illness, I danced around the ring with my illness chasing me. The more I ran away, the worse my illness became.

Finally, after much exhaustion, I went down and my opponent was tying me down for the 3 count. Before I succumbed, at the last moment, a reserve of inner strength came to me and I got out of the hold and called a time out. From then on, I decided to face my opponent head on. With the help of my ringside coaches (my therapists) I finally put my

illness in a sleeper hold and while I can’t say my illness is completely gone or knocked out for good, at least it is under control.

My fight against mental illness is one that is battled everyday. Yes, there are times when I think ‘why me’ and think that I haven’t gone very far in my life but I am strengthened by the fact that my wings are on the mend. The struggle in itself and triumph in having my illness under control helps me realize that I have soared. ■

“... I decided to face my opponent head on.”

Man Bites Black Dogs - News Briefs From All Over

compiled by Scott Dixon

A lengthy investigation by the New York Times reveals that thousands of mental patients, formerly treated in state institutions, are now being housed on locked wards in nursing homes. The mental patients are locked away on isolated floors of nursing homes, barred from going outside on their own, have almost no contact with others, and have little ability to contest their confinement. Treatment is minimal, but the move saves the state government one hundred thousand dollars (US) a year, per patient. (Next step? Perhaps renaming the nursing homes “Bedlam” – and charging spectators a fee to watch the “entertainment.”)

More than half the juveniles entering Pennsylvania’s justice system show signs of mental health

problems. In the last year, 72 percent of girls and 37 percent of males said they had bouts of depression, while 32 percent of the girls and 16 percent of the boys said they had thoughts of suicide. “We see these kids coming, and we’re not quite sure what to do for them,” said Jim Johns, head of the Bureau of State Children and Youth Programs, which runs the facilities. (Let’s hope they don’t have too many empty nursing homes in Pennsylvania... or it could be a VERY early retirement for these kids.)

One in 10 children in Scotland suffers from mental illness. Around 125,000 children under the age of 16 experience symptoms severe enough to affect their daily functioning. The World Health Organization estimates that by 2020, this figure will have

DOUBLED – to one in five. By then mental illness will be the major cause of disability and death among the young.

Splitting Hairs: Good Timing of the Year Award goes to an Australian haircare company which announced two new styling products on the same day Mental Health Awareness Week began Down Under.

The advertising for “Headcase” conditioner uses the slogan “Don’t be a headcase” and depicts a woman in a straitjacket. The product “Schizophrenia” claims it can “Get hair straight one day, and curly the next” thus reinforcing the false belief that the illness means a ‘split personality.’ ■

Satya’s Soapbox

by Satya Devi

“such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow”

To a Skylark,
Percy Bysshe Shelley

In the summer of 2002, a friend wrote a piece for a local street newspaper about mental patients and concluded that when one sees such unfortunates, to think, “there but for the Grace of God go I”. Although my friend is neither arrogant nor self-pitying, I found that remark both. As a long-time mental health consumer, I don’t think of myself as set apart from the rest of society in such an unfortunate manner. I did see a group of yuppies going into their yoga class in their designer yoga outfits with their designer coffee and cell phones and I thought the same thing myself, “there but for the....” Isn’t that the same thing? Is it not judging a group of people by their dress and behaviour as beneath ourselves? I wonder if there isn’t a bigger hand at play in these schemes. I remember sailing along for a few years, thinking all was well, when in San Francisco I saw a Viet Nam Vet playing “Both Sides, Now” on a vibraphone with the stumps of his arms. I fell apart and had a breakdown on the spot, and when I got back to Vancouver, my therapist said, “so, you find the sight of someone worse off than yourself repulsive?”

Where do these labels and judgements come from? Perhaps fear is our basis for defining others. Maybe it’s just if I sit here in my solitude with my little

cup of coffee in one hand and my dust in my other hand and not make a fuss, no one will notice me, that I’m different. Someone else, look – she’s different; make it happen to her. It seems there is a fear among all people, and the reactions are either for a more powerful group to control the more vulnerable, or, and let us remember this also, that there is compassion in this world. We are all on a path in our lifetime, at times one of service or one of being served. I see both paths as that of service.

When our dear friend and great teacher, Ram Dass, whose very name means “Servant of God”, was struck down with a stroke five years ago, he had to reassess his journey. He had been told by his Guru to “serve people”, and now he was in a situation that, instead of serving the destitute and the dying, was one of needing almost constant attention and being served. I still feel his path is one of service.

I see people in the Health Services profession walking around with “How are *we* today?” written all over them, and I contend that these people need us. In angrier moments, I feel they are at least as needy as those they profess to “help”. In more harmonious moments, I can accede to Francis of Assisi explaining that, “it is in giving that we receive”.

So, next time you pass someone on the street who looks in need of help, it may be more correct to wonder as to how this soul and you might serve each other. ■

“Many modern commonplaces would have been
considered miraculous in the past.”

M.D, Arthurs

Prefatory Word

One of the highlights of my work with the ex-mental patients' movement – indeed, of my life (I might as well be completely candid) – was meeting Leonard Roy Frank two summers ago at the World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry “shadow conference” held at the SFU Downtown Campus conjunct with the World Federation of Mental Health's conference at Canada Place. I had been “totally impressed” with Leonard after reading the marvelous interview he did with Seth Farber for Madness, Heresy, and the Rumor of Angels in 1993 – and was even more delighted to find out that he's really like that in person; one of those “great souls”, I don't mind saying, that it's a rarity to meet more than a handful of during the span of a lifetime.

As one of the Founding Fathers – or, as he is often referred to, “the Gandhi” – of the psychiatric survivors' movement, Leonard well-remembered the early days of MPA and stated that he had a complete set of all the early editions of In A Nutshell from circa 1972-73 through to the early 80s, but hadn't seen anything more recent. So, making a mental note of this, I promised to send along some backissues, which we did recently in one of our periodic Outreach Mailings. We didn't solicit, or really anticipate, any response but were pleasantly surprised when he wrote us and also enclosed the following essay submission. He was particularly impressed with Jim Gifford's treatment of the whole “mental breakdown/spiritual breakthrough” subject-area which parallels and resonates with many of his own interpretive inclinations. And he recommended, in this regard, the recent work of Jungian therapist, John Weir Perry, Trials of the Visionary Mind: Spiritual Emergency and the Renewal Process (1999).

It is, then, with something of a deeply heartfelt sense of gratitude that we find ourselves singularly honoured and privileged to be able to present this offering from one of the pre-eminent torch-bearers and distinguished veteran representatives of our movement and MPA's ideological roots.

On behalf of the IAN editors,
Byron Fraser.

Electroshock: A Crime Against The Spirit

Leonard Roy Frank
San Francisco, California

Offprints: Requests for offprints should be directed to Leonard Roy Frank, B.S., 2300 Webster Street, #603, San Francisco, CA 94115. (lfrank@igc.org)

In remembrance lies the secret of redemption.
Bal Shem Tov (1690-1760), founder of Hasidism
(cited in Lieberman, 2001)

Note: This article is based on my testimony at a public hearing on electroconvulsive “treatment” conducted by the Mental Health Committee of the New York State Assembly in Manhattan on May 18, 2001. I was representing Support Coalition International, a human rights group headquartered in Eugene, Oregon. SCI unites 100 sponsoring organizations that oppose all forms of psychiatric oppression and support a broad variety of approaches for assisting people said to be “mentally ill.” In 2001, the United Nations recognized Support Coalition International as “a Non-Governmental Organization with Consultative Roster Status.” For more information about Support Coalition International and electroshock, see <http://www.MindFreedom.org> (phone 541-345-9106) and <http://www.ect.org>.

INTRODUCTION

Some personal background will be helpful in understanding my perspective on electroshock. I was born in 1932 in Brooklyn and was raised there. After graduating from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, I served in the U.S. Army and then worked as a real estate salesman for several years. In 1962, three years after moving to San Francisco, I was diagnosed as a “paranoid schizophrenic,” involuntarily institutionalized, and eventually subjected by force to 50 insulin coma and 35 electroconvulsive procedures (Frank, 1976, 1978, 1990, 1993).

“Combined insulin coma-convulsive treatment” was routinely administered to “schizophrenics” in the U.S. from the late 1930s through the mid-1960s. (The electroconvulsive “treatments” are given while the

subject is in the coma phase of the insulin coma "treatments"; sometimes the two procedures are given separately on alternating days.) Individual sessions last from four to five hours. Large doses of injected insulin reduce the blood's sugar content triggering a physiological crisis manifested in the subject by blood pressure, breathing, heart, pulse, and temperature irregularities; flushing and pallor; "hunger excitement"; incontinence and vomiting; moans and screams (referred to in the professional literature as "noisy excitement"); sobbing, salivation, and sweating; severe restlessness; shaking and spasms, and sometimes convulsions.

The crisis intensifies as the subject, after three or four hours, goes into a coma. Brain-cell destruction occurs when the blood can no longer provide the sugar essential to the brain's survival; the sugar-starved brain begins feeding on itself for nourishment. The hour-long coma phase of the procedure ends with the administration of carbohydrates (glucose and sugar) by mouth, injection or stomach tube. If the subjects cannot be restored to consciousness by this method, they go into what are called "prolonged comas," which result in even more severe brain damage and sometimes death. According to the United States Public Health Service Shock Therapy Survey (October 1941), 122 state hospitals reported 121 deaths among 2,457 insulin coma treatment cases, or 4.9% (Ebaugh, 1943, pp. 294-295).

After gaining my freedom, I made a determined effort to find out how psychiatrists justified their use of this procedure. One of the clearest statements I uncovered came from Manfred Sakel, the Austrian psychiatrist who introduced the insulin method in 1933 and, after arriving in the United States a few years later, became its most active promoter. In a popular book on the state of psychiatry published in 1942, Dr. Sakel was quoted as follows: "With chronic schizophrenics, as with confirmed criminals, we can't hope for reform. Here the faulty pattern of functioning is irrevocably entrenched. Hence we must use more drastic measures to silence the dysfunctioning cells and so liberate the activity of the normal cells. This time we must kill the too vocal dysfunctioning cells. But can we do this without killing normal cells also? Can we select the cells we wish to destroy? I think we can" (cited in Ray, 1942, p. 250, italics in the original).

Of course, I did not see it that way. For me, combined insulin coma-convulsive treatment was an attempt to break my spirit, to force on me a belief system and lifestyle which I, of my own free will, had rejected. It was also the most devastating, painful and humiliating experience of my life. My memory for the three preceding years was gone. The wipe-out in

my mind was like a path cut across a heavily chalked blackboard with a wet eraser. Afterwards I did not know that John F. Kennedy was president although he had been elected three years earlier. There were also big chunks of memory loss for events and periods spanning my entire life; my high school and college education was effectively destroyed. I felt that every part of me was less than what it had been.

Following years of study reeducating myself, I became active in the psychiatric survivors movement, becoming a staff member of Madness Network News (1972) and co-founding the Network Against Psychiatric Assault (1974)—both based in San Francisco and dedicated to ending abuses in the psychiatric system. In 1978 I edited and published The History of Shock Treatment. Since 1995, three books of quotations I edited have been published: Influencing Minds, Random House Webster's Quotationary, and Random House Webster's Wit & Humor Quotationary.

Over the last thirty-five years I have researched the various shock procedures, particularly electroshock or ECT (the focus of the remaining part of this paper), have spoken with hundreds of ECT survivors, and have corresponded with many others. From all these sources and my own experience, I have concluded that ECT—which "between 1 and 2 million patients per year receive... worldwide" (Abrams, 1997, p. 9)—is a brutal, dehumanizing, memory-destroying, intelligence-lowering, brain-damaging, brainwashing, life-threatening technique. ECT robs people of their memories, their personality and their humanity. It reduces their capacity to lead full, meaningful lives; it crushes their spirits. Put simply, electroshock is a method for gutting the brain in order to control and punish people who fall or step out of line, and intimidate others who are on the verge of doing so (See Frank 1978, 1990, 1993; Morgan, 1999).

BRAIN DAMAGE

Brain damage is the most important effect of ECT. It is also the 800-pound gorilla in the living room whose existence psychiatrists refuse to acknowledge, at least publicly. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the American Psychiatric Association's recent Task Force Report on ECT (APA, 2001) which states that "in light of the accumulated body of data dealing with structural effects of ECT, 'brain damage' should not be included [in the ECT consent form] as a potential risk of treatment" (p. 102).

Excluded from the Task Force's "accumulated body of data" were the following facts:

During the 1940s, when some proponents were a bit careless with the truth about ECT, Paul H. Hoch, co-author of a major psychiatric textbook and New York State's Commissioner of Mental Hygiene, commented,

"This brings us for a moment to a discussion of the brain damage produced by electroshock.... Is a certain amount of brain damage not necessary in this type of treatment? Frontal lobotomy indicates that improvement takes place by a definite damage of certain parts of the brain" (Hoch, 1948, p. 49).

More recently, neurologist Sidney Sament (1983) backed the brain-damage charge in a letter to a professional journal:

After a few sessions of ECT the symptoms are those of moderate cerebral contusion, and further enthusiastic use of ECT may result in the patient functioning at a subhuman level.

Electroconvulsive therapy in effect may be defined as a controlled type of brain damage produced by electrical means....

In all cases the ECT "response" is due to the concussion-type, or more serious, effect of ECT. The patient "forgets" his symptoms because the brain damage destroys memory traces in the brain, and the patient has to pay for this by a reduction in mental capacity of varying degree (p. 11).

Psychiatrist Peter R. Breggin (1998), ECT's foremost critic, summarized his findings on electroshock's brain-damaging effects after having studied the scientific evidence for more than 30 years (see Breggin, 1979, 1981, 1991, 1992, 1997, 2001):

[Brain] damage is demonstrated in many large animal studies, human autopsy studies, brain wave studies, and an occasional CT scan study. Animal and human autopsy studies show that ECT routinely causes widespread pinpoint hemorrhages and scattered cell death. While the damage can be found throughout the brain it is often worst in the region beneath the electrodes. Since at least one electrode always lies over the frontal lobe, it is no exaggeration to call ECT an electrical lobotomy (p. 15).

Additional evidence of ECT-caused brain damage was published in an 1978 APA Task Force Report on ECT. Forty-one percent of a large group of psychiatrists responding to a questionnaire agreed with the statement that ECT produces "slight or subtle brain damage." Only 28% disagreed (p. 4).

And finally there is the evidence from the largest published survey of ECT-related deaths (Impastato, 1957). Psychiatrist David J. Impastato was a leading ECT proponent who, interestingly enough, was the first to use the procedure in the United States, in January 1940. He reported 66 "cerebral" deaths among the 235 cases in which he was able to determine the likely cause of death following ECT (p. 34).

MEMORY LOSS

If brain damage is electroshock's most important effect, memory loss is its most obvious one. Such loss can be, and often is, disastrous as these statements from electroshock survivors indicate:

My memory is terrible, absolutely terrible. I can't even remember Sarah's first steps, and that's really hurtful... losing the memory of the kids growing up was awful.

I can be reading a magazine and I get halfway through or nearly to the end and I can't remember what it's about, so I've got to read it all over again.

People would come up to me in the street that knew me and would tell me how they knew me and I had no recollection of them at all... very frightening (cited in Johnstone, 1999, p. 78).

Electroshock proponents are dismissive of the memory problems associated with their procedure. The following is from the sample ECT consent form in the APA's 2001 Task Force Report: "The majority of patients state that the benefits of ECT outweigh the problems with memory. Furthermore, most patients report that their memory is actually improved after ECT. Nonetheless, a minority of patients report problems in memory that remain for months or even years" (pp. 321-322). Nowhere in the text of the report is the claim made in the first sentence directly addressed, while the assertion in the second sentence is patently absurd. The claim made in the third sentence, at least, is closer to the truth than coverage of the same point in the sample consent form of the first edition of the APA's 1990 Task Force Report, which reads: "A small minority of patients, perhaps 1 in 200, report severe problems in memory that remain for months or even years" (p. 158). And even the more recent Report underestimates the prevalence of memory loss among ECT survivors.

Accounts from the hundreds of survivors I have communicated with over the last three decades suggest that the majority experienced memory loss from electroshock that was permanent in nature and moderate to severe in degree; not just for the time surrounding the "treatment" period but covering years of their lives. That findings such as these do not appear in published ECT studies may be explained by the bias of electroshock investigators, virtually all of whom are ECT proponents, by denial (from ECT-induced brain damage) on the part of survivors and their fear of punitive sanctions if they were to report the extent and persistence of their memory loss, and finally by the difficulty in having anything published in a main-

stream professional journal that seriously threatens the vested interests of an important segment of the psychiatric community (the 1978 APA Task Force Report on ECT suggested that 22% of all psychiatrists were electroshock "users." p. 5).

DEATH

The APA's 2001 Task Force Report on ECT states, "a reasonable current estimate is that the rate of ECT-related mortality is 1 per 10,000 patients" (p. 59). However, other accounts suggest that the ECT death rate may be 1 per 100—100 times greater than the Task Force estimate. For example, in Texas, where psychiatrists are required to report all deaths that occur within 14 days of ECT, officials at the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation said that between 1993 and 1996 they had received reports of 21 deaths among an estimated 2,000 patients (Boodman, 1996, p. 20).

Even the 1% estimate, however, may understate the true risk of death from ECT because elderly persons are now being electroshocked in growing numbers: statistics based on California's mandated ECT reporting system indicate that upwards of 50% of all ECT patients are 60 years of age and older. Because of infirmity and disease, the elderly are more vulnerable to ECT's life-threatening dangers than younger people. One study involving 65 patients aged 80 and older who were hospitalized for major depression, showed a much higher risk of death from ECT. The patients were divided into two groups. One group of 37 patients was treated with ECT; the other group of 28 patients was treated with antidepressants. After one year, one patient (4%) in the antidepressant group was dead, while in the ECT group, 10 patients (27%) were dead (Kroessler & Fogel, 1993, p. 30).

BRAINWASHING

The term "brainwashing" came into use during the early 1950s. It identified the technique of intensive indoctrination, combining psychological and physical pressure, developed by the Chinese for use on political dissidents following the Communist takeover on the mainland and on American prisoners of war during the Korean War. While electroshock is not used overtly against political dissidents, it is used throughout most of the world against cultural dissidents, nonconformists, social misfits and the unhappy (the troubling and the troubled), whom psychiatrists diagnose as "mentally ill" in order to justify ECT as a medical intervention.

Indeed, electroshock is a classic example of brainwashing in the most meaningful sense of the

term. Brainwashing means washing the brain of its contents. Electroshock destroys memories and ideas by destroying the brain cells which store them. As psychiatrists J. C. Kennedy and David Anchel, both ECT proponents, described the effects of this tabula rasa "treatment" in 1948: "Their minds seem like clean slates upon which we can write" (p. 318). Soon after published accounts of the erasure of 18 minutes from secret White House audiotapes during the Watergate investigation, another electroshock psychiatrist reported, "Recent memory loss [from ECT] could be compared to erasing a tape recording" (Arnot, 1975, p. 500).

For these reasons, I propose that the procedure now called electroconvulsive treatment (ECT) be renamed electroconvulsive brainwashing (ECB). And ECB may be putting it too mildly. We might ask ourselves, Why is it that 10 volts of electricity applied to a political prisoner's private parts is seen as torture while 10 or 15 times that amount applied to the brain is called "treatment"? Perhaps the acronym "ECT" should be retained with the "T" standing for torture—electroconvulsive torture.

SEVEN REASONS FOR THE PERSISTENCE OF ECT IN PSYCHIATRY

If electroshock is an atrocity, as I and other critics maintain, how can its use on more than 6 million Americans since being introduced more than 60 years ago be explained? Here are seven reasons:

1. ECT is a money-maker. Psychiatrists specializing in ECT earn \$300,000-500,000 a year compared with other psychiatrists whose mean annual income is \$150,000. An in-hospital ECT series costs anywhere from \$50,000-\$75,000. A 1988-89 APA survey estimated that 100,000 Americans undergo ECT annually. Based on this figure, I estimate that electroshock in this country alone is a \$5 billion-a-year industry.

2. ECT supports the biological model. ECT reinforces the psychiatric belief system, the linchpin of which is the biological model of mental illness. This model centers on the brain and reduces most serious personal problems down to genetic, physical, hormonal, and/or biochemical defects which call for biological treatment of one kind or another. The biological approach covers a spectrum of physical treatments, at one end of which are psychiatric drugs, at the other end is psychosurgery (which is still being used, although infrequently), with electroshock falling somewhere between the two. The brain as psychiatry's focus of attention and treatment is not a new idea.

What Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung wrote in 1916 applies today: "The dogma that 'mental diseases are diseases of the brain' is a hangover from the materialism of the 1870s. It has become a prejudice which hinders all progress, with nothing to justify it" (Jung, 1960). Eighty-five years later, there is still nothing in the way of scientific evidence to support the brain-disease notion. The tragic irony is that the psychiatric profession makes unsubstantiated claims that mental illness is caused by a brain disease (or is, in fact, a brain disease) while hotly denying that electroshock causes brain damage, the evidence for which is overwhelming.

3. Informed consent about ECT does not exist.

While outright force is no longer commonly used in the administration of ECT, genuine informed consent today is never obtained because ECT candidates can be coerced into "accepting" the procedure (in a locked psychiatric facility, it is often "an offer that can't be refused") and because electroshock specialists refuse to accurately inform ECT candidates and their families of the procedure's nature and effects. ECT specialists lie not only to the parties vitally concerned, they lie to themselves and to each other. Eventually they come to believe their own lies, and when they do, they become even more persuasive to the naïve and uninformed. As Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1852, "A man cannot dupe others long who has not duped himself first." Here is an instance of evil so deeply ingrained that it is no longer recognized as such by the perpetrators themselves. Instead we see such outrages as ECT specialist Robert E. Peck titling his 1974 book, The Miracle of Shock Treatment and Max Fink, a leading ECT proponent who for many years edited Convulsive Therapy (now called The Journal of ECT), the most influential journal in the field, telling a Washington Post reporter that "ECT is one of God's gifts to mankind" (cited in Boodman, 1996, p. 16).

4. ECT serves as backup for "treatment-resistant" psychiatric drug users. Many, if not most, of those being electroshocked today are suffering from the ill effects of a trial run or long-term use of antidepressant, anti-anxiety, neuroleptic, and/or stimulant drugs. When such effects become obvious, the patient, the patient's family, or the treating psychiatrist may refuse to continue the drug-treatment program. This helps explain why ECT is so necessary in modern psychiatric practice: it is the treatment of next resort. It is psychiatry's way of burying mistakes without killing the patients—at least not too often. Growing use and failure of psychiatric-drug treatment has forced psychiatry to rely more and more on ECT as a way of dealing with difficult, complaining patients, who are usually hurting more from the drugs than from their

original problems. And when the ECT fails to "work," there's always—following an initial series—more ECT (prophylactic ECT administered periodically to outpatients), or more drug treatment, or a combination of the two. That drugs and ECT are for practical purposes the only methods psychiatry offers to, or imposes on, those who seek "treatment" or for whom treatment is sought is further evidence of the profession's clinical and moral bankruptcy.

5. Psychiatrists account to no one. Psychiatry has become a "Teflon profession": what little criticism there is of it does not stick. Psychiatrists routinely carry out brutal acts of inhumanity and no one calls them on it—not the courts, not the government, not the people. Psychiatry has become an out-of-control profession, a rogue profession, a paradigm of authority without responsibility, which is a good working definition of tyranny.

6. The government supports the use of ECT. The federal government stands by passively as psychiatrists continue to electroshock American citizens in direct violation of some of their most fundamental freedoms, including freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom from assault, and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment. The government also actively supports ECT through the licensing and funding of hospitals where the procedure is used, by covering ECT costs in its insurance programs (including Medicare), and by financing ECT research (including some of the most damaging ECT techniques ever devised). One recent study provides an example of such research. This ECT experiment was conducted at Wake Forest University School of Medicine/North Carolina Baptist Hospital, Winston-Salem, between 1995 and 1998 (McCall, Reboussin, Weiner, & Sackeim, 2000). It involved the use of electric current at up to 12 times the individual's convulsive threshold on 36 depressed patients. The destructive element in ECT is the current that causes the convulsion: the more electrical energy, the greater the brain damage. This reckless disregard for the safety of ECT subjects was supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health (p. 43).

7. Professionals and the media actively and passively support the use of ECT. Electroshock could never have become a major psychiatric procedure without the active collusion and silent acquiescence of tens of thousands of psychiatrists and other allied health professionals. Many of them know better; all of them should know better. The active and passive cooperation of the media has also played an essential role in expanding the use of electroshock. Amidst a

barrage of propaganda from the psychiatric profession, the media passes on the claims of ECT proponents almost without challenge. The occasional critical articles are one-shot affairs, with no follow-up, which the public quickly forgets. With so much controversy surrounding this procedure, one would think that some investigative reporters would key on to the story, but until now this has been a rare occurrence. And the silence continues to drown out the voices of those who need to be heard. I am reminded of Martin Luther King's 1963 "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," in which he wrote, "We shall have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people" (cited in Washington, 1986, p. 296).

CONCLUSION

Especially in these perilous times, Dr. King's words need to be taken seriously. While electroshock is being used anywhere on anyone and I am free to express my views, I will continue to write and speak the truth about electroshock. I will do so not only on behalf of those of us who have survived electroshock more or less intact, but on behalf of those who are right now undergoing ECT or who will be faced with the prospect of undergoing ECT at some time in the future. I will also do so on behalf of the silenced ones, the ones whose lives have been ruined, and the ones who died—the true victims of electroshock, all of whom bear witness through my words.

By way of summary, I will close with a short paragraph and with a poem I wrote in 1989.

If the body is the temple of the spirit, the brain may be seen as the inner sanctum of the body, the holiest of holy places. To invade, violate, and injure the brain, as electroshock unflinchingly does, is a crime against the spirit and a desecration of the soul.

Aftermath

With "therapeutic" fury
search-and-destroy doctors
using instruments of infamy
conduct electrical lobotomies
in little Auschwitzes called mental hospitals.

Electroshock specialists brainwash
their apologists whitewash
as silenced screams echo
from pain-treatment rooms
down corridors of shame.

Selves diminished
we return
to a world of narrowed dreams
piecing together memory fragments
for the long journey ahead.

From the roadside
dead-faced onlookers
awash in deliberate ignorance
sanction the unspeakable—
Silence is complicity is betrayal.

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Endnote:

Of the titles mentioned in Leonard's list of references, the following are available from Support Coalition International: The History of Shock Treatment (1978), edited by Leonard Roy Frank; Electroshock: The Case Against (1999) edited by Robert F. Morgan; Brain Disabling Treatments in Psychiatry: Drugs, Electroshock & The Role of the FDA (1997), by Peter Breggin; Toxic Psychiatry (1991), by Peter Breggin; Madness, Heresy, and the Rumor of Angels: The Revolt Against the Mental Health System (1993), by Seth Farber. One of his edited collection of quotations, Influencing Minds: A Reader in Quotations (1995), is also available from SCI. ■

"It is royal to do good and to be abused."

Antisthenes

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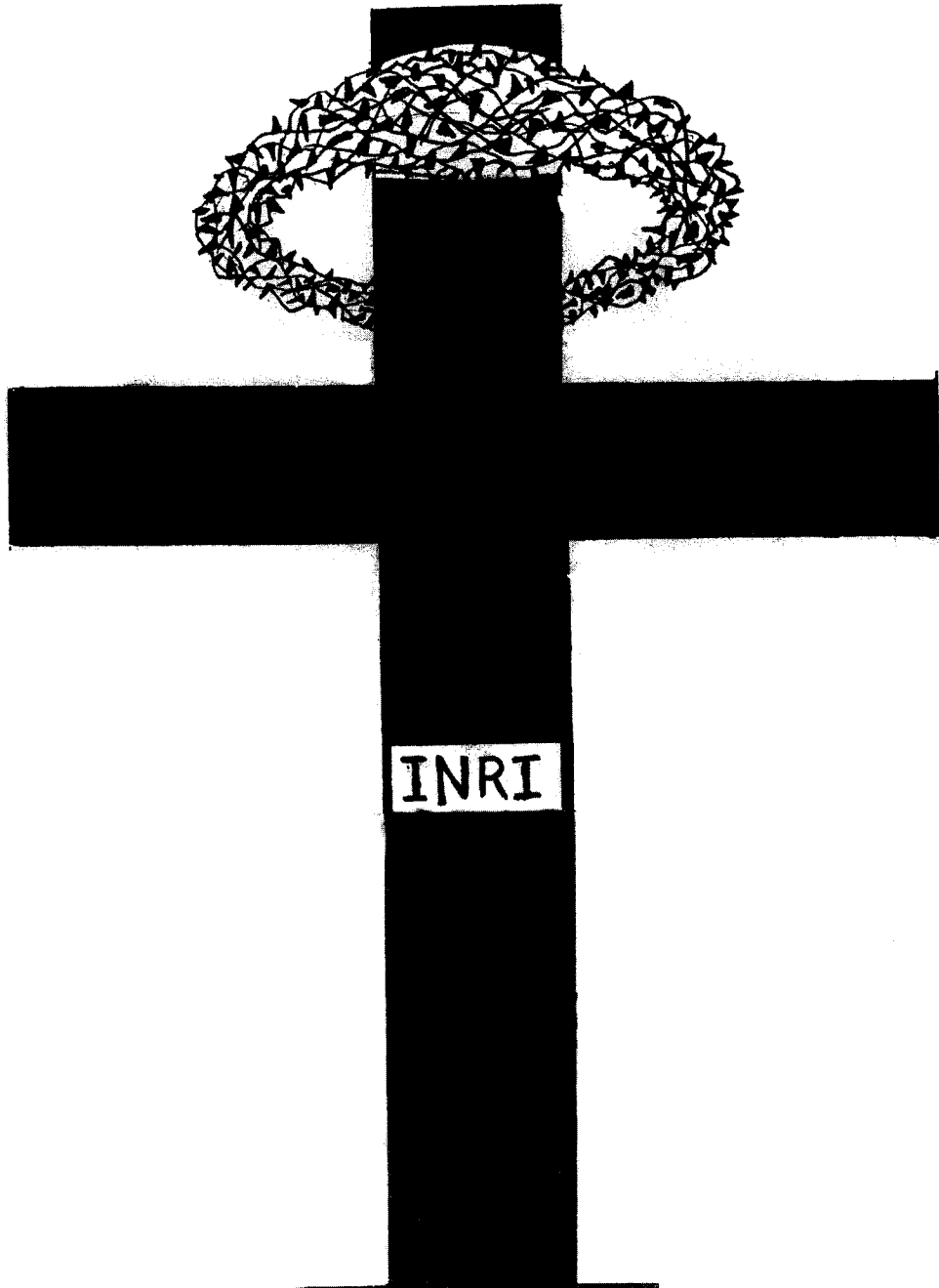
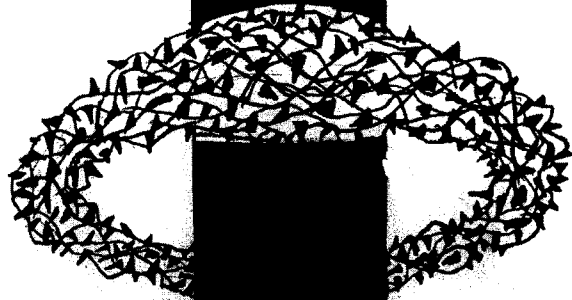
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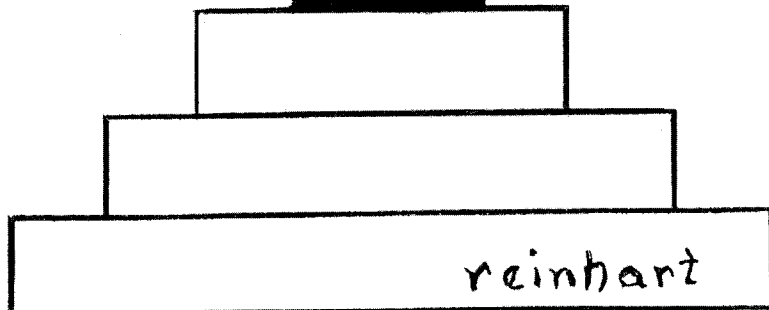
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