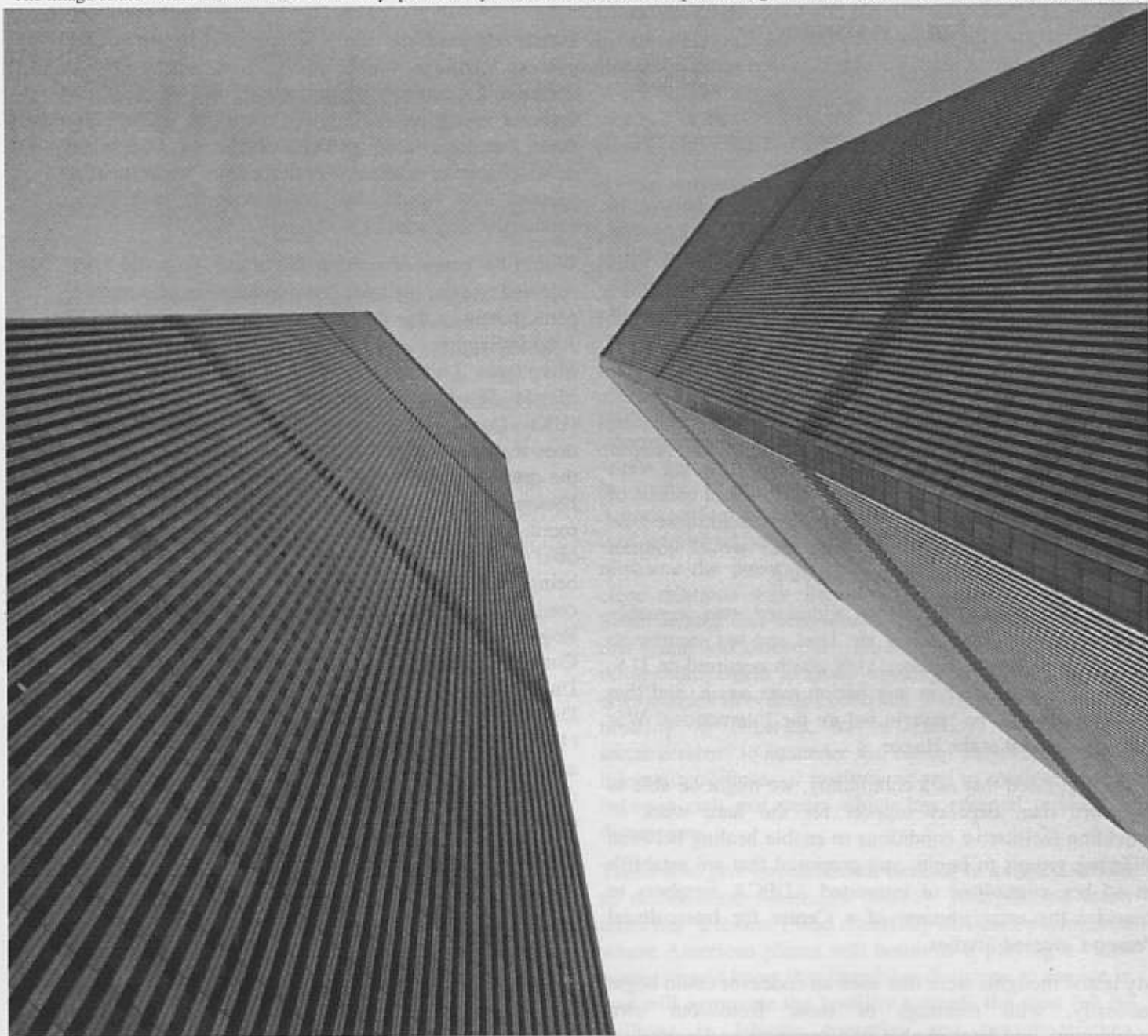


RENAISSANCE

Newsletter of the Association for the Development of the Person-Centered Approach

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The image of the World Trade Center was kindly provided by Jens Grabenstein <<http://www.grabenstein.de>>. © Jens Grabenstein, 2001.



“Tragedy compels us to reflect on our lives. It inevitably leads us to think more deeply about the people we care most about and life as we conceive it. We have been challenged to make sense of a devastating and traumatic disaster. In doing so we must revisit the nature and meaning of our own life.” David Cain.

David's complete article starts on page 13.

Call for Interest in Preliminary Group Discussion Regarding Establishment of a Center for Intercultural Person-Centered Studies

to be convened at the Summer, 2002 ADPCA Annual Meeting, Cleveland, Ohio

Jan I. Harman

The City College
City University of New York

In the days following the tragic terrorist attacks of September 11, person-centered individuals from around the world posted on the CCT-PCA Internet Listserv their reflections, messages of concern for friends and colleagues in New York, and offered differing conceptualizations of how the world community should best respond to terrorism. One particularly poignant message was posted by Alberto Segrera, who observed that "the future of the world cannot be based on rage and hurt alone, it also needs reflection and measure." I responded that I fully agreed, and reiterated a theme others had voiced in differing ways to the effect that true courage at this time would consist of a willingness to listen and trying to understand those who experience such rage and hurt that they would commit terrorist acts, as against simply retaliating.

At the same time, I briefly addressed two arguably "measured" steps: upgrading air, land and sea security so that the events of September 11th which occurred on U.S. soil are not visited upon any nation ever again, and that those responsible be brought before the International War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague.

I also suggested that as a community, we might be able to do more than express support for the hard work of providing facilitative conditions to enable healing between differing groups to begin, and proposed that we establish an ad hoc committee of interested ADPCA members to consider the establishment of a Center for Intercultural Person-Centered Studies.

My initial thoughts were that such an endeavor could begin modestly, with meetings of those from our own community, and later evolve into seminars and workshop experiences we might offer to others, similar to those Carl Rogers and Ruth Sanford conducted in South Africa, Mexico and the former Soviet Union. Clearly, the application of the person-centered approach in the latter contexts, while occurring most intensively in the last decade of Carl's life, had long been among his central interests. Forty years ago, in his preface to *On Becoming a Person* (1961/1995), Rogers wrote, "I hope for the day when we will invest at least the price of one or two large rockets in the search for more adequate understanding of

human relationships," and emphasized that "we *already* possess learnings which, put to use, would help to decrease the inter-racial, industrial, and international tensions which exist. I hope it will be evident that these learnings, used preventively, could aid in the development of mature, nondefensive, understanding persons who would deal constructively with future tensions as they arise" (p. xx).

Within 48 hours of posting the above proposal I had received, via the internet, communications of interest in participating in this project from Ruth Sanford (USA), Alberto Segrera (Mexico), Ed Bodfish (USA), Martine-Marguerite Leonard (France), David Tanner (UK), Magda Draskoczy (Hungary), and Conrad Brown (UK). David Tanner wrote, "What you are proposing does resonate with me. I would like to be involved in the creation and further facilitation of a focus for the Person-Centered Approach outside of the therapy room, where we can be of use to the world and begin to offer alternative ways—to offer this way of being" (CCTPCA Listserv, 9/18/01). David's comments are an affirmative response to the question Rogers asked in his 1951 presentation at the Centennial Conference on Communications at Northwestern University (reprinted in *On Becoming a Person*). Discussing "Breakdowns in Communication," Rogers (1961/1995) observed that "defensive distortions drop away with astonishing speed as people find that the only intent is to understand, not judge" (p. 336), and concluded by asking whether we can take what then appeared, "...a test-tube solution to the breakdown of communication as it occurs in small groups" and "...investigate it further, refine it, develop it and apply it to the tragic and well-nigh failures of communication which threaten the very existence of our modern world? It seems to me that this is a possibility and a challenge which we should explore" (p. 336-337).

Paul Blanchard suggested inclusion of this call for interest in the *Renaissance*, given that the Internet listserv does not reach all of our members, and thus this entry.

I will formally propose a meeting to address the issues and project above for inclusion in the Cleveland schedule. In the interim, if you indicate an interest in participating, it will be helpful for Cleveland organizers in determining the most appropriately sized room and, importantly, would also facilitate future

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communication among us. I can be reached by e-mail at Drjharman@aol.com, or by regular mail at the School of Education, NAC 6/207, City College of New York, 138th St. at Convent Avenue, New York, NY 10031.

Reference

Rogers, C.R. (1995). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. NY: Houghton Mifflin (originally published 1961).

The events of 9/11 still linger on the edge of my mind, even as I try to "get back to normal", whatever that means now. **The following opinion piece from *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK** made me think of a contribution PCA could make to the current situation. I couldn't help but think of the work done by Rogers and many others in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and the former USSR during the Cold War. The groups that were conducted in those places provide a model for what could be attempted today.

Jay Downing

Listen to the damned

It is not Islam or poverty that succours terrorism, but the failure to be heard

Orhan Pamuk

Saturday September 29, 2001

The Guardian

As I walked the streets of Istanbul after watching the unbelievable images of the twin towers in New York blazing and collapsing, I met one of my neighbours. "Sir, have you seen, they have bombed America," he said, and added fiercely, "They did the right thing."

This angry old man, who is not religious, who struggles to make a living by doing minor repair jobs and gardening, who drinks in the evening and argues with his wife, had not yet seen the appalling scenes on television, but had heard only that some people had done something dreadful to America. I listened to many other people express anger similar to his initial reaction, which he was subsequently to regret.

At the first moment in Turkey, everyone spoke of how despicable and horrifying the attack was. However, they followed up their denunciation of the slaughter of

innocent people with a "but", introducing restrained or resentful criticism of America's political and economic role in the world. Debating America's world role in the shadow of a terrorism that is based on hatred of the "west", endeavours to create artificial enmity between Islam and Christianity and brutally kills innocent people is extremely difficult and, perhaps, morally questionable. But since in the heat of righteous anger at this vicious act of terror, and in nationalistic rage, it is so easy to speak words that can lead to the slaughter of other innocent people, one wishes to say something.

If the American military bombs innocent people in Afghanistan, or any other part of the world, to satisfy its own people, it will exacerbate the artificial tension that some quarters are endeavouring to generate between "east" and "west" and bolster the terrorism that it sets out to punish. We must make it our duty to understand why the poor nations of the world, the millions of people belonging to countries that have been pushed to one side and deprived of the right even to decide their own histories, feel such anger at America. We are not obliged, however, always to countenance this anger.

In many third world and Islamic countries, anti-American feeling is not so much righteous anger, as a tool employed to conceal the lack of democracy and reinforce the power of local dictators. The forging of close relations with America by insular societies like Saudi Arabia that behave as if they had sworn to prove that Islam and democracy are mutually irreconcilable is no encouragement to those working to establish secular democracies in Islamic countries. Similarly, a superficial hostility to America, as in Turkey's case, allows administrators to squander the money they receive from international financial institutions and to conceal the gap between rich and poor, which has reached intolerable dimensions.

Those who give unconditional backing to military attacks to demonstrate America's military strength and teach terrorists "a lesson", who cheerfully discuss on television where American planes will bomb as if playing a video game, should know that impulsive decisions to engage in war will aggravate the hostility towards the west felt by millions in Islamic countries and poverty-stricken regions. This gives rise to feelings of humiliation and inferiority. It is neither Islam nor even poverty itself directly that succours terrorists whose ferocity and creativity are unprecedented in human history, but the crushing humiliation that has infected third world countries like cancer.

Never has the gulf between rich and poor been so wide. It might be argued that the wealth of rich countries is their own achievement and does not concern the poor of

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the world, but never have the lives of the rich been so forcibly brought to the attention of the poor through television and Hollywood films.

Today, an ordinary citizen of a poor Muslim country without democracy, or a civil servant in a third world country or a former socialist republic struggling to make ends meet, is aware of how insubstantial an amount of the world's wealth falls to his share and that his living conditions, so much harsher than those of a westerner, condemn him to a much shorter life. At the same time, a corner of his mind senses that his poverty is the fault of his own folly, or that of his father and grandfather.

The western world is scarcely aware of this overwhelming humiliation experienced by most of the world's population, which they have to overcome without losing their common sense and without being seduced by terrorists, extreme nationalists or fundamentalists. Neither the magical realistic novels that endow poverty and foolishness with charm, nor the exoticism of popular travel literature manage to fathom this cursed private sphere. The great majority of the world population — which is passed over with a light depreciating smile and feelings of pity and compassion — is afflicted by spiritual misery.

The problem facing the west today is not only to discover which terrorist is preparing a bomb in which tent, which cave, or which street of which remote city, but to understand the poor, scorned majority that does not belong to the western world.

War cries, nationalistic speeches and impetuous military operations take quite the opposite course. The new visa restrictions for the Schengen countries; law-enforcement measures aimed at impeding the movement in western

countries of Muslims and people from poor nations; suspicion of Islam and everything non-western and crude and aggressive language that identifies the entire Islamic civilisation with terror and fanaticism are rapidly carrying the world further from peace.

What prompts an impoverished old man in Istanbul to condone the terror in New York in a moment of anger, or a Palestinian youth fed up with Israeli oppression to admire the Taliban who throw nitric acid in women's faces, is not Islam, nor the idiocy described as the clash between east and west, nor poverty itself, but the feeling of impotence deriving from degradation and the failure to be heard and understood.

The wealthy, pro-modernist class who founded the Turkish republic reacted to resistance from the poor and backward sectors of society not by attempting to understand them, but by law-enforcement measures, interdictions, and the army. In the end, the modernisation effort remained half-finished, and Turkey became a limited democracy in which intolerance prevailed.

Now, as cries for an east-west war echo throughout the world, I am afraid of the world turning into a place like Turkey, governed almost permanently by martial law. I am afraid that self-satisfied and self-righteous western nationalism will drive the rest of the world into defiantly contending that two plus two equals five, like Dostoevsky's underground man. Nothing can fuel support for "Islamists" who throw nitric acid at women because they reveal their faces as much as the west's failure to understand the damned of the world.

Orhan Pamuk's latest novel is *My Name is Red*, published by Faber

Guardian Unlimited © Guardian Newspapers Limited 2001

Jay,

In and around October 1999, I proposed to the PCA practitioners in Austria to offer a forum in which minority groups and supporters of Joreg Haider come together to appreciate and learn about the various frames of references of these groups. No takers. I further proposed to the PCA practitioners in Austria to arrange for such forums in the Austrian school system. To this end, I also offered several thousand dollars to get it going, but no takers.

Couple of days after the September 11th INTERNATIONAL TRAGEDY in NYC, I proposed to members of this listserv who preached on what should be done to arrange for forums that guide toward acceptance of differences, but no takers. I finally referred to the "preachers" as Monday morning quarter backs (based on the American football system). Perhaps in the UK they are referred to as the Monday morning midfielders.

Also, shortly after a decision was made during the ADPCA meeting in Boston to hold the 2001 meeting in Manchester (of which I was a supporter from the get go), I proposed that invitations be extended to people from the Middle East so as to learn about tolerance and acceptance of differences, but no action.

I would like to use this opportunity and pose again a challenge to those who profess to do life the PCA way: Do it in a scale larger than your office. Translate your words, whether in books, articles or on this listserv to real life action. I'll be happy to participate in the organization of such activities here, in the US, and in Europe.

Uri Amit

(letters continued on next page)

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Uri:

I read accusations in your message. When I want to see something accomplished, I rarely can depend on others to do it. I do it myself. I wonder what the people in Austria would have done if you had contacted some supporters of Joreg Haider, asked them if they'd be interested in an invitation to the forum; then contact the forum and tell them you are inviting them — or perhaps ask if you could invite them. I'm not meaning to tell you HOW to do it. I'm merely suggesting that you DO it.

I know a lot of people who like to preach about person centeredness, or about the hungry children in Rwanda, etc. I conclude that what they want is exactly what they are doing: preaching. They don't want to commit to internalizing person centered values; they don't want to do something to help those children survive. Simply, they want to preach.

I can't count the number of people who have come to me and asked if we could have some sort of person centered group meeting. Almost always, I support them, am willing to participate in it to whatever extent I can, including the preparation for the workshop; but they almost always fail to follow through with action. It's a waste of precious time (my life) to involve myself with people who like to preach and not do. So I'm pretty much alone, and happy with it. And I'm very active in doing many things which involve other people, but these are activities I choose to do, so I make them happen.

Now if that wasn't excellent preaching, I'll eat my shoe!

Alex

Dear Jay and all

Your message encouraged me to present some of my ideas relating the 11th September tragedy. It has been quite difficult for me to express my opinion due to my limited knowledge of English. However, I have been feeling that I have something to add to this discussion coming from my "third world" perspective. Pamuk's depiction of some ordinary Turkey citizens' reaction to the attack to New York is somewhat similar to some reactions that I have seen in my own country, Brazil. Although we are a "western" society we do view ourselves as the "damned of the world" too. This sort of "anti-American" feeling does not come only from the "East" but from most poor countries throughout the world.

On the morning of September 11th I was working, but came back home around 11:30 in order to have lunch with my daughter, eleven years old. When I arrived home she was complaining that she could not watch the cartoons on TV. I looked at the TV and, at first, I could not understand what was happening. After some moments I eventually understood that there had been a terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Then my daughter told me that one of the towers had collapsed and I could see the other tower blazing on the TV screen. I got struck and paralyzed with terror and pain. And suddenly, right in front of my eyes I saw the last tower collapsing. Tears burst from my eyes and my daughter left the room saying that she could not stand to watch me crying. I have no words in English to express my feelings of sadness, horror and dread. These feelings lingered within me for the rest of the week. But when I

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