

Flection

BY MARY BARNES

FLECTION: the act of bending or the state of being bent. That's how I was at Kingsley Hall, bent back into a womb of rebirth. From this cocoon I emerged, changed to the self I had almost lost. The buried me, entangled in guilt and choked with anger as a plant matted in weed, grew anew, freed from the knots of my past.

That was Kingsley Hall to me, a backward somersault, a breakdown, a purification, a renewal. It was a place of rest, of utter stillness, of terrible turmoil, of the most shattering violence, of panic and of peace, of safety and security and of risk and reckless joy. It was the essence of life. The world, caught, held, contained, in space and time. Five years as five seconds; five seconds as five hundred years.

Kingsley Hall, my 'second' life, my 'second' family, may it ever live within me. My life, within a life. It was a seed, a kernel of the time to come. How can I know what will come. As I write, as I paint, the words, the colours—they emerge, grow, take shape, blend, and part; a sharp line, darkness; light. The

canvas, a paper, a life, is full, complete, whole. We are at one with God. Through the half light, the blessed blur of life, we stumble to the God we sense within.

Knowing, yet unknowing. Seeing, yet blind. Striving yet yielding. We reach out, from our own depth to the height of heaven, and in our stretch all life is held, bubbling and breaking with joy, still as deep water, moving as the clouds. Thousands, millions of lives. A word, a colour, alone yet a part. One life seeking to live, expanded consciousness, participation in the 'sight of God'. How would I be in a new place? God knows.

I would let everything 'be'; all the 'Johns' and 'Janets' and 'Peters' and 'Pamelas' I would let 'be'. We should be alone, yet in communion, in communication, with each other. In order to come to the light we have to germinate in the dark.

We must go the way we are made, an oak cannot be bent as a willow. To lay down, to pray, to draw in to the core of one's being, is to 'start a place'. What place? A house, a community, a group of people? You have to wait and see what will happen, and let it happen.

The place that you start is there already, inside the people that will come. It's as white as heaven and black as hell and the background is grey, because that's the mixture we mainly are. How to build heaven on earth, how to save souls. That's what it's all about.

"Don't be too 'spiritual'," says Joe. "No," I replied, "I'll try to express it in psychological terms."

'Dark night of the soul', deep despair, desperate depression; schizophrenia, split mind, tormented with

distractions; cut off from God; division of the self; 'to die to the self to live in God'; to get free from the self in the mother to live in God within the self; 'our life as a bird has escaped from the snare', from the bonds, or rather the emotional ties, of the past. From these have I through psychotherapy been released.

Different ages, different terms, the world moves, in the eternal breath of God.

(Of her particular experience at Kingsley Hall Mary Barnes is writing a book with Joe—Dr. Joseph Berke, who guided her through madness.)

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RONNIE (Dr. R. D. Laing) told me "What you need is analysis twenty four hours out of the twenty four." I was one of those people who just cannot be healed through spasmodic help, whilst living in an ordinary situation. I just had to be in a special place, a house for madness.

It's the inner state that matters. But it's people less sick than I was, who can get free, whole, through the ordinary course of life. Extreme states help to 'bring it up', to uncover the real self, but to go further in extreme conditions is very rare. How many, in a prison, or physically living with the family they were born into, or in a contemplative convent, reach through to integration, wholeness, sanctity? It's what we are all made for, given time in this life to achieve.

Yet, never, for one moment, do we 'make it' of ourselves. God, through other people, reaches out to us and draws us on. It's a question of suffering but the suffering for many of us means madness before sanity—sanctity—wholeness. We go from false self, to madness, to sanity.

Mother Mary of Jesus early in this century spent two years alone in her cell, in a sense sick, yet not physically ill, before she was able to participate in the life of her community. Many years later she founded thirty-three Carmelite convents in England, Scotland and Wales before she died in 1942.

A convent day school in London is boarding one of their older pupils, because she is in mental distress. But it is rare for an established community to accommodate itself to the needs of such people, and if these people were in psychotherapy as such, with all the tremendous emotional upheaval that entails, it would probably be well nigh impossible to accommodate them within 'so-called' sane living conditions.

A very twisted up person cannot get free without being allowed extremes of behaviour. Regression is a safety valve. Playing, bashing about, screaming, sucking, messing with shit, laying naked, wetting the bed, are all ways of getting the anger into the body, without hurting the body.

Laying in a painful position, being alone for a day, will resolve anger. But resolution through bodily pain, fasting and isolation as all religious orders of all religions through all ages practise, is *not* possible, at least at *first*, for people who are very twisted up, as I was. They have to be allowed, encouraged, to *be* as 'baby' as they feel and emotionally re-grown until they can participate in what might be termed a more 'spiritual' level of development.

Just as one doesn't give a one-year old baby tranquilisers or kneel him down to meditate, so must one *not* have expectations of a person in madness utterly beyond his state. Otherwise, there is danger of just shaking him (a modern way of doing this is electric

shocks) or shutting him away in a cupboard (the chronic ward of a mental hospital).

The person must be seen and understood as the baby he is—and allowed to live that way, through it.

He is dying to be loved, to be wanted, to be accepted. He has within himself to emotionally accept, to feel, all the anger, the anguish of the past, to go through periods of deadness when nothing at all can be felt, to be green with envy and hating with jealousy. Still, he must be loved, totally, for what he is, as a baby needs love.

Important as understanding is, it is love and trust that matter most. As a mother knows her baby, so can one 'know' another person. Immediate response of feeling is not in the head. It's the heart, the feeling that counts. Intellect and feeling come together later. Madness is the nursery, not the library. Babies suck and mothers love. Let therapists beware of too much thought and lettered words. (Madness and the understanding of it is more akin to contemplation than intellectual activity, as such.)

As a 'little baby' with eyes tight shut I lay together 'whole' on the floor. Anything more was 'too much'. Too much for my 'wholeness'. (It was better to be 'very baby' and whole than pretending and talking or walking and split.)

Truth wells up from within, and living, growing life brings changing forms and structures to suit the needs on one's being. (After psychotherapists the people I seemed most able to 'meet' in madness, or 'felt' nearest to, were contemplative nuns.)

The fear of coming out of a strait jacketed, stereotyped existence to a consciously unknown, long forgotten life, is very great. Not iron bars or padded

cells, nor injections or tablets, but *people*, who love and accept, and know how and when to leave you alone, are what's needed. Given the soil, a plant will grow.

How to let go, lay down, break, be held, be beyond words, float, is a matter of trust. It's trusting God, through another person and no matter if so called 'mistakes' are made, God doesn't 'drop us'. Through every shattering, smashing explosion our life is still there, more whole than before. Our will submitted we are yet free, and every happening is a growing step. When in a mad state one is 'without words', in touch with the 'hidden underneath' of another person. Very sensitive and fragile you respond or withdraw as a snail with a shell. The other person may have no idea what he is hiding, but you pick it up—like a magnet.

Madness is purification. To go through it needs a guide, in the terms of our world today, a psychotherapist. It has to be gone *through*, not round, and only someone else can keep us there. "You're a slippery eel; the more you suffer, the more free you get." So Joe (Dr. Joseph Berke) would tell me.

When of ourselves we would give all, we must take half, and when of ourselves we would take half, we must give all.

Joe taught me a lot about this through food. If in the course of going through madness, the 'baby', regressed state is at times 'leapt above', the baby as it were sensing, seeing, as a 'wise old man', and what might be termed mystical experience is encountered, this should not be 'wallowed in'. It's a drink, a refreshment, a shady tree, a magnificent view, before again going down through the woods.

Going through madness is a matter of right *discipline* and *control*. So *feeling frees* and *serves* us, instead of *binding* and *killing*. A saint feels evil as fire on flesh. Many of us feel much that is not evil as if it was. Something is amiss, we are astray, off track.

The feeling of shame, guilt, that brings us to a dead stillness, makes all giving and receiving of love impossible, is a barrier to all creativity, causes us to feel as ghosts and bury our souls and bodies in 'living death,' and is a *very* great sickness.

When very twisted up so the feelings, the emotions are not true, the impulse of the being is to break down.

To resist, is 'screaming agony' or 'living death'.

To be helped, to make the break, to go *through* madness, is salvation.