



"CAN COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE BE PREVENTED?"

A PsychoPolitical Action Project on the Island of Bali,
Indonesia, October 2001

For some time already I had carefully prepared the ground to begin working on a larger scale on our project, "Can Collective Violence Be Prevented?" (CCVBP) in the Anjar slum which is located in the very heart of Kuta, a well visited tourist area on the island of Bali, the land of gods and demons. The preparations included delicate negotiations with the local Balinese government and the religious representative. The slum, an enclave of various ethnic groups, was a home to mostly Muslims, plus some Christians coming from other Indonesian islands hoping for a better life. Most people were organized by so-called "bosses" or gangleaders. Two hundred fifty to three hundred people lived in this small area.

To reach the largest number of youth possible to participate in our project, the agreement of the gang leaders was needed. After several months, I knew the names of most of the "bosses" and sizes of their gangs. I invited each boss and his group to a meeting. The small place where I waited was filled with curious people. I invited the fifteen "employees" of the beggar boss to join me the following day in a different, beautiful place. They agreed to come. After a lengthy discussion I suggested the possibility of allowing some of the five to nine year olds to go to school. We would support the financial side if the boss allowed the free time for them to go to school and time to study after school. He seemed deeply touched and promised to give some of the children permission.

The next evening over twenty-five people accepted my invitation, mostly young people and some women with children. During the previous few weeks I had developed several program outlines. Maybe it would be possible to initiate a cultural exchange program between the underprivileged young Muslims and Christians in the slum with the Hindu youth in a traditional Balinese village. This could possibly lead to a deeper understanding of each other's culture as well as of each other and serve to prevent violence, especially to prevent the ideas of radical Muslim powers to root in the poor slum areas.

I invited all to take a seat on cushions in a circle. The faces were mistrusting yet at the same time curious. After some silence laughter began to spread hesitantly, after which I invited the group to join in an exercise to get in touch with one's own heart to allow creative ideas that would eventually lead to concrete projects to come forth. They did not ask questions and spoke little, not used to being asked for thoughts and ideas. I looked into the face of the gang leader of the garbage pickers, a twenty year old man with one leg missing below the knee. His eyes mirrored bitterness and the potential for aggression. And yet, in this relaxed atmosphere, surrounded by a pond with open flowering waterlilies, he, too, relaxed and smiled. A package of food had been prepared for each and was gladly accepted. They ate with great appetite, having to

The most important process began to unfold now, how to touch each heart and its potential to allow a process as a group which could lead to realizing various projects in the slum. The psychological principles which are at the base of each project of the PsychoPolitical Peace Foundation are: Consciousness of Joy, Empowerment to Choose, Choice and Self Help.

None of these processes is present in a slum. Poverty and drugs determine daily survival. It is ideal breeding ground for hatred and a fertile soil for recruiting young Muslims into the Jihad, the holy war of the fundamentalists. (Its original meaning, inner cleansing, has been distorted).

For several weeks now bearded Afghan men, in head scarves have been visiting the Islamic population in Bali. They preach in the mosques to recruit young men for the war in Afghanistan. They seem quite successful, especially where the poorest live. Our projects, based on the above named values, especially on learning about consciousness of joy, invite people to translate their inner potential into action to become life-giving, rather than become terrorists.

What took place next seemed incredible. This rag tag bunch of people began to relax, were able to turn to their hearts and listen to their inner voice to allow the experience of creativity. Miracles took place that evening. People relaxed, felt well, began to talk. They treated the beautiful environment with the same care that I modelled. It was deeply touching to see many eyes come alive and awaken to see that they felt able to do something, given a chance.

Several interesting ideas were presented which the group will develop further. We will assess each idea to determine how much each can do and where our support is truly needed. What will be done depends on the strength of their motivation and action. This process allows us, in turn, to feel motivated and find the needed resources to support the unfolding activities.

The project *CAN COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE BE PREVENTED* is unfolding organically. The Balinese culture, a very special branch of Hinduism, was brought to Bali from neighboring Java, when the ruling Javanese elite tried to escape from Islam. It brought its structures and rigid system with it, overlaying the original Balinese culture which had been influenced by Buddhism as well. Indonesia has developed its own moderate form of Islam, integrating many pre-Islamic customs which are unique to its many multi-ethnic groups living on its seventeen thousand islands.

I left the following day to return to an emotionally shaken Switzerland, where the dream of a safe inner and outer environment had been broken due to the local event

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