

CENTER FOR THE INNER DIMENSIONS OF LIFE
A group work experience

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THANKS

First, I want to thank all who have ever been part of the group behind the Center for the Inner Dimensions of Life. This group's endeavors to live and embody the teachings of the Ageless Wisdom are the basis for all the experiences described in this booklet.

I especially would like to thank Niels Bronsted, who was the founder and leader of the group in its initial years. Niels Bronsted is one of a handful of distinctive personalities in Denmark who each have offered their special contributions to bring through the ideals of the Ageless Wisdom to the public in various ways, mostly by teaching. Niels Bronsted's special merit was the creation of the Esoteric School, where he presented all the information contained in the theosophical and esoteric works in an orderly and logical way that gave students an overview of the worldview, the philosophy, the psychology and the sociology, which are contained in the Ageless Wisdom. The school is now contained in three books: The Inner Dimensions of Life I, II and III.

It has also been the merit of Niels Bronsted to acknowledge all the writers who over a period of about 100 years conveyed the Ageless Wisdom and to understand that their works built upon each other, forming together the nucleus of the modern presentation of the Ageless Wisdom. These writers were the following: H.P. Blavatsky, who together with other theosophical writers founded the theosophical movement in 1875; Alice Bailey, who reformulated and enhanced the doctrine given by H.P. Blavatsky; and Lucille Cedercrans who from 1950 to about 1963 gave her very practical contribution on how to integrate the Wisdom in the daily life of the disciple. Blavatsky, Bailey and Cedercrans were all channels for the Masters of Wisdom, and they all used the same concepts and terminology.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The Group was founded in 2001 and was dissolved in 2015. Even though the group is not together as a group any more, all the experiences and learnings from this group work still stand. It is my hope that groups who are trying to establish an esoteric group work, or groups who have encountered difficulties in their work can benefit from reading how the experiment of this group unfolded and learn from it. Readers may thus hopefully avoid or at least foresee some of the difficulties that this group encountered along its way.

As this is a description of events and experiences that constantly evolved over a period of 14 years, a chronology of events will not always provide a satisfactory narration of the development processes that occurred. I have therefore chosen to tell the story via some essential themes, describing for each theme the developments that happened over time. The central section is the chapter on the group's inner structure and life, while the other chapters intend to set up the framework and to deepen specific topics that have had special significance in the development of the group life. I have attempted to make the description of each theme as objective as possible, but sometimes I have added my own reflections as well.

This is my narration of the story of the group and I alone am responsible for what is written.

THE GROUP IS FORMED

What is a group?

In order to talk about a group, there must be recognition by the participants of being part of a common group endeavor, and there must be a common purpose for the group. In our daily lives, we are part of many different group settings. A family is its own type of group. At work and in our spare time we may choose to be part of groups or teams of a lasting character and with a defined common objective. Often group members have mixed motives for their participating in a group. In the workplace, some people are there because they are passionate about the product being developed, while others just need to earn a living and have been lucky to get a job. In a board of directors of an association, some are there because they want to accomplish an altruistic work of some kind, while others want the power and status that comes with calling oneself a board member. A number of standards, conventions and rules that guide the work and output of these groups can also control them "from above".

What especially characterizes the esoteric group is the common conceptual framework based on theosophy and the esoteric teachings as expressed through a variety of publications and spiritual teachings. This kind of group has a common purpose to study the Ageless Wisdom teachings and to bring the ideals of these teachings through in various ways, for instance by teaching. In addition, such a group and its members often wish to live according to the esoteric principles revealed through these teachings, which basically involve study, service and meditation and the belief in evolution, reincarnation and karma as basic truths. In our group there was a feeling or an idea of the group having come together for karmic reasons, even reasons that reached far back in time and lives.

A personal comment

It may be of value to think of an esoteric group as a living organism with the following characteristics: physical expression, feelings, thoughts, its own unique personality and associated centers and chakras, which are a synthesis of the individual group member's physical expressions, feelings, thoughts and personality. It is then obvious that the same processes that apply to an individual disciple on the Evolutionary Path also apply to a discipleship group who consciously enters on the Path. For both the group and the individual, the purpose is to establish a conscious relationship with the Overshadowing Soul, and thus strive to become a suitable vehicle for manifestation of the Divine Plan.

The group comes together

The group first emerged out of the management team of the Theosophical Association in Scandinavia. The purpose of this association was basically educational - to make available the Ageless Wisdom for students of these teachings in various ways.

In the late 1990's, the Theosophical Association developed contacts with the international esoteric community. The group was then able to invite guest teachers from other countries and esoteric traditions to focalize seminars and schools here in Denmark. In addition, each year the group had a retreat with one or more of these guest teachers during which time we focused on different aspects of esoteric group life. The first inspiration to meditate together as a group and to use meditation for different purposes came out of these retreats.

Yet, before the endeavor to meditate together as a group really got started, controversies developed between the various groups that together constituted the Theosophical Association in Scandinavia. The controversy had the effect that Niels, together with those of the management team that wished to follow him, left the Theosophical Association and founded the Esoteric Center of Scandinavia instead. The creation of this new association marked the starting point of the group. The entire management group now constituted the directional board of the new association. From that point on, all decisions made that concerned the association and its development were in principal group decisions; every group member had essentially the same influence as every other member.

Group Members

The newly formed group originally consisted of those of the management team that chose to leave the Theosophical Association together with Niels.

A characteristic of this particular group, which has had great impact on the group life, is that many of the members have a family relation to Niels. This fact has had both its advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, there was a strong sense of unity within the group even in times of crisis. Also, there was a younger generation to take the work forward when the initiator eventually became less active. The young group members also made it easier to attract other young people to the association.

On the other hand, the family relation created a core group with more power - or rather easier access to share information, power and privileges - than those group members who were not family members. Such a strong inner group core made it more difficult for newcomers to enter the group and to see themselves as contributing equally to the work - especially as the family members already had prominent positions and responsibilities in the administration and service work of the association.

It was a general requirement that group members undertook some kind of service work within the association. New members of the group were typically allowed into the group if there was a need for replacement of group leaders or a need for the handling of new functions.

At the time when the group began, it had 17 members. Later this number increased to more than 20 members. By the time the group dissolved, there were 11 members.

THE OUTER STRUCTURE

The concept of associations in Denmark

In Denmark, almost everyone is or has been a member of an association. Associations are an integral part of our democratic awareness. There are certain national laws regulating this field of activity, but in general, the whole concept is based on standards of how association life unfolds and the resulting expectations from the ranks of members. The most important expectations are that the members of the association have certain favors and that they have the democratic right to be part of the decision making process and the election of board members on the annual general meeting. Each member of the association is also in principle able to become a board member.

The Theosophical Association and Esoteric Center were both associations. They had about 400 and 200 members respectively, and they both held annual general meetings. The board had about five participants. Any of the members could apply to join the group of assistants who voluntarily undertook service work of various kinds. The assistants were organized in smaller groups, each with a focalizer. A management team for the association consisted of the members of the board and the focalizers of the various groups of assistants.

Development in the outer structure of group

Originally, the Theosophical Association and the Esoteric Center Scandinavia were normal associations with annual general meetings, election of board members, fee-paying members, etc. However, the wish of the management group to work in accordance with esoteric principles and to develop together through meditation and study was not consistent with the group board members periodically running for re-election. The Board therefore made a proposal for an amendment to the rules of the association stating that the Board could choose its own members and not have to run for election. The General meeting adopted the amendment. Even so, the process brought up a number of questions and some uncertainty among the members. They felt that democratic procedures had been abolished and that ordinary members could no longer become members of the board through a democratic process and therefore no longer had a role in the decision making process for the further development of the association. In addition, the process aroused resistance from the other groups that were part of the overall Theosophical Society in Scandinavia. Ultimately, the decision to abolish the member democracy became a main cause for the group to break away from The Theosophical Association and to establish a new association - the Esoteric Centre Scandinavia.

The new association conducted its activities from rented premises, and it soon flourished. With the increased activities came the wish to have premises of its own. By means of some very generous donations from members of the group, we were able to buy a property, which enabled us to offer all the activities that we as a group were capable of, including therapy.

As the Association continued to flourish, we started to consider how our activities might be less esoteric in expression in order to attract more participants. We were convinced that the esoteric principles that we had practiced ourselves for several years would also be beneficial to others outside our present narrow esoteric circle of participants. We thought along the line of becoming less sectarian and more businesslike. The idea emerged that if we just had a place suitable for offering accommodations for retreats, there would be virtually no limit to our outreach! At about the same time, our existing premises was inundated with water, causing severe damage. We considered this as a wakeup call. By means of additional substantial donations from the group members and members of the association, we were finally able to buy Elves Farm, a beautiful property approximately 45 minutes by car from Copenhagen.

With this new purchase, the group abolished the association form and established an outer structure through a fund and a company that bought the property and handled the daily operations of the Center for the Inner Dimensions of Life. The earlier concept of an association based on occultism with its teachings and terminology that were accessible

only to a small aspect of the general population did not seem to be aligned with our ideas of approaching business life. Furthermore, the management of memberships was burdensome, and we wanted to focus our time on more essential endeavors. In regard to future finances, we thought that the members of the association would turn their membership fees into donations. We also believed that foundations, companies or organizations who supported activities such as ours, and "wealthy" business customers would donate to our center. The reality turned out to be completely different!

Several factors contributed to a drastic decrease in the flow of participants to our activities and consequently a severe decrease of our finances:

- We once again changed the name, logo and website of the Center and moved its activities out of Copenhagen where almost all our members lived.
- We no longer had members to support the activities. It was probably also too much to ask that they would be faithful and continue their 'membership' when we abolished the association scheme and thus completely ignored the ties created through membership and the feeling of being part of something important.
- The ambition to reach out to business life was also not very realistic considering the group of people we were - a somewhat mixed crowd of people of all ages, who were used to work on a voluntary basis in an esoteric environment and who had no idea of how to act in a high-profile business-oriented environment.
- The Elves Farm did not have appropriate buildings for teaching and accommodation. These were to be designed and built, and the group had very limited financial resources of its own. Moreover, we took over a property that required much more effort to develop and maintain than this group of people could manage.
- Although the group had about 20 members most of these either were students or had regular paid jobs, and their need to balance their own finances eventually prevented group members from being able to invest the required time and money to bring the fulfillment of the dream into manifestation.

As it turned out, the participation in our activities declined. We never did manage to direct our activities to the business life, and we were never able to establish the training and retreat center we intended when we first bought the place. Instead, we were caught up in the conflicting demands of owning and maintaining a property and of developing and offering esoteric classes and retreats.

In the end, we had to admit that the project had failed, and the Elves farm was put up for sale.

One might conclude from the above account that we were just a collection of hopelessly naive people who lived in a dream world. This may be true as viewed from without, but certainly this was not the case as seen from an inner perspective. No member of the group would have missed the learning that has been gained from this turbulent process.

A personal comment - an esoteric perspective

Seen from an esoteric perspective, what happened? Some of the first chapters of The Nature of the Soul by Lucille Cedercrans include a review of what happens in a person's life when the path of discipleship is initiated and one begins to open up to the divine inflow of will, love and intelligent activity.

When these higher and finer energies begin to make themselves felt in the life of the probationer, the first visible result is invariably both positive and negative because the influx of these energies magnifies that which is already present, both the good and the not so good. The soul-oriented qualities are stimulated, as well as the self-centered, separatist motives and perceptions. The task then is learning how to control the personality motives while the refocusing towards the soul's qualities takes place.

Lucille Cedercrans, Nature of the Soul, lesson 8

The impact of Divine Intelligence upon a probationer disciple results in three major effects within his consciousness and instrument.

1. The first manifestation is that of apparent chaos. This is the result of an activation of old forms, plus a mental awakening. The individual has been undergoing a series of experiences which, in one sense, are not seen. They are felt in pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, loss and gain. Very often these experiences appear to be unrelated, and without meaning. Then one day the individual awakens to the facts of life. He realizes that everything he has undergone has been for a definite purpose. He sees a pattern and realizes the Soul as its motivating cause.

He begins to take a mental (note the difference between mental and emotional) interest in what is going on within and without himself, as well as others.

At the same time, he is recipient of a flow of Divine Energies pouring down from the Soul through the various aspects of the persona. As we have already discovered, this energy activates the desirable as well as the undesirable, causing a growth of all that lies within the total state of consciousness.

As it passes through the mental aspect, thoughts of self, as well as thoughts of service, expand and grow out into manifestation. The mental body is activated and the individual becomes aware of his own thought-life.

As the energies pass through the emotional nature, all desire remaining is fanned into a flame to rise in conflict with the newly awakened aspiration. Very often the student is amazed to discover within himself emotions he had not known he was capable of entertaining. He becomes aware of his own subconscious wish life.

As the energies pass through the physical instrument and out into the environment, the effects are many and varied, for here in concrete form the subjective thought-life and astral-emotional life are precipitated. There may be an appearance of many small illnesses, or even a serious illness, while on the other hand, there may appear healings which are miraculous to the onlooker.

In the beginning, the manifestations, whatever they are, seem to be in a state of upheaval, as one opposes the other. Hence, the first manifestation of intelligent ac-

tivity in the life of an aspirant or probationer disciple is chaos. It does not make sense to the ordinary human mind.

This is the first danger upon the path for the beginner, the trial accompanying initiation. The young disciple must look past the appearance to the inner reality, realizing that via this outer chaos, Divine Order shall be reestablished in his life and affairs.

2. The second manifestation of Intelligent Activity which must take place within the life of the disciple now is that of mental polarization. He has to shift his focal point of attention from the astral-emotional nature into his mental body and this is no easy task.

An individual who is focused in the astral body is controlled by his emotions and influenced by the emotions of others. He is pulled this way and that by the forces of this aspect of his instrument, and of the emotional world in which he lives. Astral forces are the power factor of manifestation. He, then, is controlled by power on the rampage, so to speak, and cannot see with a clear inner vision because he is blinded by his own desires and feelings. He is lost in the midst of illusion, actually a part of that illusion since he is, after all, only an actor in a great drama, unaware of himself as an actor. He is suffering the triumphs and the tragedies of the role he plays, unaware of his true identity.

Let the student realize that if an emotion, any emotion, be it that of yourself or another, can deflect your action or your thought from any Truth which you have at some time grasped, there, in that area of the astral body, a part of your consciousness is polarized.

This does not count only for the individual aspirant; it is true whether it be an aspiring disciple or an aspiring group. In my opinion, our group became an aspiring group at the time we began to meditate together. Up until that time, we were just an ordinary board of an association in line with all other voluntary boards of associations. However, when we started meditating together as a group, we called upon the energies from the inner world, and the group was thus inevitably exposed to all the effects described above. These effects were set in motion not only for the group as a whole but also for the individuals of the group. Result: double chaos!

Almost immediately, we found ourselves to be in conflict with the local branch of the Theosophical Association, and shortly after with the Danish esoteric community. Later, the group also came into conflict with the international esoteric community, and dear me, the emotions were in turmoil! I dare not think about the number of emails and letters that were exchanged and which were certainly not expressions of mental polarization or harmlessness in speech and action – which as we know are essential qualities of discipleship in the New Age. All these upheavals may be regarded as the resulting chaos that can be a natural consequence when invoking higher energies and consciousness into the personality vehicles, which in our case was a group entity under development.

Might we have avoided it? If we had been consciously aware of the above quoted text, would we have been able to react in a different manner, such as the following, "Oh, well, when we are exposed to these " attacks" it is only apparent chaos caused by inflowing energies, and we will deal with it through establishing an inner calm and a mental polarization. Then, in all situations we will consciously consider how we can best express ourselves and act in accordance with right human relations." Could we have done that?

Looking back, I do not think so! It is very difficult to be centered when one is in the midst of a conflictive situation with those who are considered to be close and confidential friends. In the Nature of the Soul, it is explained that all humans are initially emotionally polarized. Only when we face conflictive challenges time after time can we grow in the ability to detect our own emotional polarization and to consciously learn to step back and observe the situation, thus gaining the capacity to maintain a more mental polarization and eventually manifest harmlessness.

A personal comment - conflict and disagreements

As can be seen from the above description, the group has had its share of disagreements. To the disappointment of many people, esoteric groups are, in such matters, no different from other groups. In esoteric groups, as in all groups, there are conflicts and disagreements that lead to separations of a more or less dramatic nature. In retrospective, it no longer matters what caused these disagreements. Ask the Centre for the Inner Dimensions of Life and you will hear one version of what happened; ask the other party or parties and they will have a different version; and if you ask someone who was not involved, you will receive a completely different version. None of these versions is more true than any other, but merely the same event seen from different angles. It is worth remembering in times of quarrel and disagreement that we all in the end work for the same cause.

THE INNER STRUCTURE AND LIFE OF THE GROUP

The structure as described above was only the outer framework of the group and was defined through a set of rules that stated the purpose and the administration of its activities. This together, with a website, was the group's face to the world. Such a structure was also needed in relation to the official authorities of the country.

What goes on within the group life away from the eyes of the public is of course an entirely different matter. The decision to work and develop as an esoteric group through study and meditation eventually created a rather large gap between the outer form and the inner life of the Group. Or rather, besides taking care of the outer framework, the Group now also had to develop its inner cohesion and esoterically to become a group with a unified and soul-aligned energetic field.

This inner work was the core of the group life. The development extended over a period of 14 years and took place in phases. In the initial phase, the group was established. In the second phase, the Group developed its inner life, which was often quite challenging interpersonally. In the last phase, the Group tried to consolidate at the Elves Farm but eventually had to admit that the idea of a training and retreat center was not going to manifest.

These phases together can be regarded as a cycle in accordance with the three aspects, which are so fundamental in all esoteric work – Will, Love, and Intelligence.

Lucille Cedercrans, Nature of the Soul, lesson 1, p.17

In the approach to an understanding of the Soul, consideration is first given the basic concept underlying all manifestation. Any appearance in form is but the working

out, or breathing forth (to use an occult term) of the three Principles of Deity. These three Principles which have been referred to as the Holy Trinity, and symbolized in geometric form as the Triangle of manifestation, are the three Persons in One: God the Father (Spiritual Will), God the Son (Spiritual Love) and God the Mother or Holy Ghost (Spiritual Mind or Active Intelligence),

The occult student divorces them from personality, and considers these three basic Principles as that which can be seen as the underlying cause of every appearance in form.

The three aspects will apply in the manifestation of a group in several different ways. In the formation of a group, there will be a phase where the group is established based on a first impulse (Will), a phase of development where the purpose and the relationships within the group are developed into a group field (Love), and a phase of manifestation where the results of the previous phases are realized (Active Intelligence).

First phase - The group is established

In this first phase, the group received much inspiration from its international contacts. Each year the group had retreats with invited guest teachers. The group processes that emerged from these retreats led the group eventually to an understanding of the group's deeper purpose. The group also grew in understanding of group meditation and the ways in which meditation could be used in difference contexts. Throughout its existence, the group's meditations and exercises expanded to also include therapeutic training.

Let us pause for a moment and consider why a group of people will begin to take an interest in occult, esoteric matters. I can of course only speak for myself. My interest in the occult world emerged from my curiosity about the themes and skills I read about in books addressing such topics as magic, telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. I asked myself, "What is it? How does it work? Might it also be possible for me to develop such skills?" I observed that most Ageless Wisdom books at that time were based on channeling from the inner worlds through sensitive, clairvoyant human beings. For me, one of the attractions of exploring the wisdom teachings was to investigate if I might have the ability to develop such skills. Such a viewpoint may seem rather naive, but is it any weirder than collecting stamps hoping to find just that little scrap of paper that is worth millions?

I imagine that others in the group hoped to achieve some of these skills as well. Perhaps the main motive was not so much to achieve the skills but to have some sign that indicated to us that we were advancing along the Spiritual Path. Any gained spiritual skills would then be real evidence that our aspiration had allowed us to advance in spiritual development and soul contact – the purpose of meditation. Some of us may have possessed such skills to a greater or lesser extent and may have found that the Group was the right place to learn how to practice and to develop those skills even more. So it was a profound experience for me – and probably for many of the group's other members – to begin to meditate together with the intention to contact our own souls and our Group Soul while hoping that eventually such a contact would lead us more deeply into the inner worlds .

From an esoteric point of view, this curiosity, personal search and interest in meditation is a sign that the soul is beginning to manifest itself in the life of the individual. Since the

soul is group conscious, the next step for a spiritual seeker will often be to engage in some kind of group work. The constant urge of the individual towards that which is best for "me" is eventually replaced by a focus on what is best for the group and the whole, even if it means great personal sacrifice. Group consciousness may also be present in a person who is not a member of a group, but who is engaged in voluntary group work for selfless purposes. However, membership within an esoteric group is really an ideal opportunity to incorporate group consciousness into one's being.

As a result of the expanded meditative work, the group's invocative potential increased greatly, which then led to a powerful inflow of spiritual energy into the group. This inflow initiated a huge expansion in the group's consciousness, and consequently the group was faced with the challenge of learning how to deal with this energy.

Second phase - Expansion

This expansion in the group life emerged during the period from 2004 until we bought the Elves Farm in 2007.

As the main leadership group of Esoteric Center Scandinavia, the group had a number of working groups that were responsible for different projects of the association's operations. There was a group responsible for the production of a CD and DVD series, a PR group responsible for programs and booklets, and a service group who took care of the practical aspects, etc. Later, this structure expanded until by 2005, we had eleven such working groups in addition to the boards of the fund and the company. Each working group had a focalizer who was responsible for overseeing the work of their particular group.

Since we were also endeavoring to embody the teachings in our daily lives, we engaged in a deep study of various spiritual themes. In addition to the working groups already established to run the association, spiritual working groups were created to investigate subjects such as healing, astrology, diet, education and deva life. The idea was that all members of the group would eventually participate in one or more of the occult activities according to their interest and ability.

Moreover, we had become very engaged in the idea of bringing the esoteric principles and methods to people who had no previous esoteric knowledge. To this end, a number of companies were set up which offered therapy, consulting services, and educational training for ordinary businesses and for people with no special esoteric knowledge. Even though these companies were not activities of the group, they did however emerge out of the group life, and members of the group were behind them. In 2005, there were five such companies under development.

Almost all the members of the group participated in several working groups and/or companies, each group with its own separate meetings in addition to the weekly joint group meeting. Some of these separate meetings were dedicated to handling the operations of the Center while others were dedicated to study, psychological processes, etc.

Even if the 20 members of the Group had all been working full time with these many plans and projects, it would have been a fairly ambitious scheme. So taking into account

that everything was done on a voluntary basis and almost all of the members of the Group had either work or studies on the side, one may wonder how we dared such an undertaking! However, we were driven by a huge enthusiasm for all the opportunities that we saw emerging. It was also part of our overall plan as we had imagined it that both the center and the companies would eventually generate income for the group and even jobs and income for group members.

A personal comment - an esoteric perspective

Another quote might be appropriate here to observe this expansion in our group life from an esoteric perspective. Both Lucille Cedercrans and Alice Bailey describe what happens when the soul begins to assert itself in the disciple's life and how it affects the life and subtle bodies of the disciple.

Lucille Cedercrans, Nature of the Soul, lesson 5, p 69-71

When the human being begins to glimpse the vision of his Soul, and to be impressed by the Wisdom of his Soul, his first reaction is egotistical. He thinks of himself as different from the rest of humanity, and little realizing the error of his way, becomes more dangerously separative than when he was a persona without thought of Soul. The antidote is absorption of a few occult facts, plus the realization that what is happening to him is as natural as any process of growth. He is not different, nor unique, above or below his brothers. He is simply entering into an experience which every man, woman, and child upon the planet either has already, is now, or will, in due course of time, share with him.

...

Let us now observe the natural effects of such an impact upon each of the three aspects of the persona.

The moment such energy impacts upon the mental body, it stirs the consciousness therein toward some kind of drive. The individual has availed himself of more motive power, so to speak, which activates the motives already present. Thus, spiritual ambition, which is the drive for Spiritual attainment as a separated persona, stirs its head and the aspirant begins to think in terms of a position of power, of wide influence. Instead of serving those whom he is dedicated to serve, or responding to their needs naturally, he is conscious only of himself and his need to satisfy his ego. He wants to be "somebody" in a Spiritual sense.

At the same time, the real mental impulse to be of service to the Divine Plan, to discipline the persona, to evolve as a member of the human family, is activated too, and the pairs of opposites make an appearance within the mind nature to be resolved into harmony.

...

As the Will energy passes from the mental into the emotional nature, it produces the same type of conflict there; desire versus aspiration. It activates the so-called good and bad, very often producing emotional disturbance. The aspirant simply wills to Love. He floods his emotional nature with Love via the direction of his thought, and calms the troubled waters. He assumes the same attitude toward the emotional situation as he does toward the mental, bringing the reality of his Soul into being within this aspect of his nature. Thus, he becomes a harmonizing agent in the world of affairs.

Alice Bailey, Esoteric Psychology II, page 120 - 121,

Service is usually interpreted as exceedingly desirable and it is seldom realized how very difficult service essentially is. It involves so much sacrifice of time and of interest and of one's own ideas, it requires exceedingly hard work, because it necessitates deliberate effort, conscious wisdom, and the ability to work without attachment. These qualities are not easy of attainment by the average aspirant, and yet today the tendency to serve is an attitude which is true of a vast majority of the people in the world. Such has been the success of the evolutionary process

Service is frequently regarded as an endeavor to bring people around to the point of view of the one who serves, because what the would-be server has found to be good and true and useful must necessarily be good and true and useful for all. Service is viewed as something we render to the poor, the afflicted, the diseased and the unhappy because we think we want to help them, little realizing that primarily this help is offered because we ourselves are made uncomfortable by distressing conditions, and must therefore endeavor to ameliorate those conditions in order ourselves to be comfortable again. The act of thus helping releases us from our misery, even if we fail to release or relieve the sufferers.

Service is frequently an indication of a busy and overactive temperament, or of a self-satisfied disposition, which leads its possessor to a strenuous effort to change situations, and make them what he feels they should be, thus forcing people to conform to that which the server feels should be done.

Or again, service can grow out of a fanatical desire to tread in the footsteps of the Christ, that great Son of God Who "went about doing good", leaving an example that we should follow in His footsteps. People, therefore, serve from a sense of obedience, and not from a spontaneous outgoing towards the needy. The essential quality for service is, therefore, lacking, and from the start they fail to do more than make certain gestures. Service can likewise be rendered from a deep seated desire for spiritual perfection. It is regarded as one of the necessary qualifications for discipleship and, therefore, if one is to be a disciple, one must serve. This theory is correct, but the living substance of service is lacking. The ideal is right and true and meritorious, but the motive behind it all is entirely wrong.

In these two quotes, Cedercrans and Bailey are each describing in their own way how a great inflow of energy arouses equally strong opposing energetic impulses that can magnify both good and less desirable motives. Moreover, the engagement to the spiritual life can expand immensely in persons receiving such an energetic inflow, often leading to the experience of a burning zeal to convince the world about the truths they have seen. In my opinion, this applies to the individual human being as well as to a dedicated group like ours, and I recognize the traits described by Cedercrans and Bailey both in me and in the group life as it unfolded during this period.

It is worth noting that the quotes describe the negative reactions to the inflow as something that inevitably happens, and in most cases, the involved persons or groups do not even notice what is happening. Eventually through the process of mental polarization, one learns to step back and observe with a certain detachment the inner processes going on. It is also worth noting that over time the good and noble motives are enhanced. These positive features can be recognized in the group life during this period as well.

Over time, the group expansion created a need for a larger center preferably located outside of Copenhagen in order to be suitable for retreats. The Elves Farm was purchased.

Third phase – The Elves Farm

After the massive expansion, it was now time for the group to move its activities to the new center, the Elves Farm, and to begin to stabilize the group life, to develop education and training programs according to the new paradigm, and last but not least, to raise money to build facilities for meditation, teaching and accommodations.

This phase of group life is hard to describe because the group's endeavor ultimately did not succeed. The Elves Farm is now sold, and the group is dissolved. Still it may be worthwhile to note what aspects of the group life process actually were successful.

The group aspects that succeeded ...

Personal Development - Right Human Relations

In the period during which the group conducted its activities from the Elves Farm, it managed to create a unique group field. The extensive processing on both individual and group levels via soul therapy and other therapies brought forth definite positive effects within the group members' relationships. Even very sensitive and personal issues could be discussed. Although passions ran high at times and although aspects of competition and disagreement surfaced, there was an overall loving understanding and acceptance of each other's individual paths among the group members. Such a level of acceptance had not generally been the case in other groups that I had participated in - especially in my various "civilian" jobs.

The process of selling the farm and dissolving the group over a period of two years has been challenging in so many ways, but we managed to go through the whole process as a group, and we are still friends. Because of the solid esoteric basis in the group work that we had explored together, we have now, in a certain way, shifted and directed our service to include everyone around us, and each of us strives to serve by establishing spiritual values as an integrated part of our daily lives and "civil" work.

Prototype of an esoteric group

Initially, the purpose of the group had been rather simple: to establish the Scandinavian Esoteric School - or the forerunner of such a school as described in the works of Alice Bailey. Later we became aware that such a limited purpose did not embrace a receptivity to the needs of humanity as our service work optimally should reflect. Reconsidering our purpose, we became aware that our group work might explore in more depth the nature and requirements of true esoteric group work.

Accordingly, after the group established itself at the Elves Farm, we began to experiment with our group life, endeavoring to understand the dynamics that especially apply to an esoteric group. We began our experiment by incorporating the above mentioned "three aspects" ("Will, Love, and Active Intelligence") into our group work. The process of manifestation will always include these three aspects. Therefore, conscious understanding of these three aspects of the manifestation process is key to the creation of productive group work. "Will", the first aspect is about leadership motivated by the intent, "Love",

the second aspect, concerns the energizing of the intent and the creation of the group field. "Active Intelligence" refers to the manifestation of the intent in physical life.

In order to enhance the efficiency of the group's development of each of these aspects, we also tried to establish the group head center, heart center, and throat center of that which we conceived as the "group entity or being". We then assigned the group members to the particular center, which seemed most appropriate for each person.

In addition, we linked these three aspects and our related subjective group activities to the energies available via the three-year cycle of the New Group of World Servers. This three year cycle also incorporates the three aspects but from a more global perspective.

Finally, we experimented with the concept of each member of the group having his or her specific function to perform within the group life, using as our model the instructions found in Leadership Training by Lucille Cedercrans:

Lucille Cedercrans, Leadership Training, chapter 19, p 119-120

Insofar as each individual contribution is concerned, I would like to leave you as a leadership class with one major concept.

This has relationship to Divine purpose, to spiritual individuality, to specific function. Every member of the human family, regardless of his evolutionary development, regardless of his place in the scheme of things, and therefore, every member of the overall group life, has a specific function to perform within the One Life. Each one is an individual; that is, he is, within his highest aspect, an essential part of the One Life, indivisible, individual. In that relationship within the One Life, each has a specific function to perform, a specific part to play. That is *his* Divine Purpose. ... Only *he* can make his contribution – no one else. Only *he* can serve *his* specific purpose, *his* particular relationship within the One Life – no one else. It is this purpose, which sends him forth into incarnation ...

Now certainly, he interprets his Divine Purpose differently within the different levels of his being, and according to his evolutionary development or his state of consciousness at any given moment. But always that interpretation has some relationship to, because it is a reflection of, his Divine Purpose. It may be oppositional, but it can be understood in its very opposition. It is this purpose, which motivates all of his individual experience, both as a Soul and as a man.

We envisioned that the individual group members would participate in one or more of the working groups and that each participant would take upon him or her the responsibility for a specific function according to their own interpretation of that function.

Eventually, it turned out to be quite difficult to incorporate these ideas more directly into our way of functioning as a group. However, these experiments all contributed to our understanding of the dynamics of group work, and to our perception of the value of each individual member of the group life.

Development of educational and training programs

As long as we worked as the management group of the association of the Esoteric Center of Scandinavia, the objective of our work was to provide lectures, courses and schools

based on the theosophical and esoteric teachings. Our main activity was The Esoteric School as developed by Niels Bronsted. The main intent of this line of work was to present the esoteric teachings in a logical and comprehensible way.

However, as we continued to meditate together, we began to experience the teachings and their effects on our personal lives and within the group life. The next step for us emerged naturally in that we realized that we would like to pass this experience on to others. We then decided to put less emphasis on information and knowledge of the teachings and more on exploring and experiencing in order for the participants to apply the teachings into their lives.

It was our idea and prerequisite that those who were attracted to our activities had reached a stage of development where they were able to take responsibility for their own development and learning and that they would practice on their own initiative between the learning modules.

As our new program, "Soul Therapy", gradually came into being, we began to incorporate healing and astrology into the therapy work that our group was already doing. We saw a great potential in this synthesized form of therapy and started to develop a school, supplemental to the Esoteric School, in order to educate new Soul Therapists. Out of this came the idea of an Academy to embrace both the well-known Esoteric School and the new ideas of a spiritual education. The Academy would consist of a primary school that would offer the basic spiritual knowledge and practices. After that, the students would be able to specialize in fields such as healing, astrology, new age economy, etc. Almost every member of the group became part of this endeavor, either as teachers or as participants. The participants were in this way invited to be part of and hopefully to benefit from our already well-consolidated group field. The Academy for the Inner Dimensions of Life from then on became the focal point of our activities.

The things that did not succeed ...

The initial motivation to move the group to Elves Farm was based on the perceived need to establish a center that would offer meditation, teaching, therapy, and accommodation for participants. This of course required considerable funds, which we did not have, so we set up an ambitious program to raise money. A new working group was established to meet the new financial needs. Another working group had to find an architect for a building project. An overall grand plan for the center was prepared. However, when the group applied for permission to make the needed changes to the property, government authorities turned the request down. In addition, we received negative responses from all the funds to which we had applied for financing.

Somewhat crestfallen and after much soul-searching, it dawned on us that the project was much too large compared to the immediate need. There were not nearly as many participants for our activities as we had hoped for and had expected. Eventually we also had to admit that the idea of directing our activities toward business life was probably not the right path for most of us. Without money and without a proper building project, we turned our attention to the development of our various activities. Once again, we took up the discussion of the group's intent and development prospects.

When we later returned to the building plans, we went about it with more humility. We endeavored to create in a more occult way, primarily through a unified meditative effort. We persuaded the architect to draw up a smaller and economically more affordable project. Even with this, we did not succeed.

The final stages of the group life

When the group decided to put the Elves Farm up for sale, all the experiments of group work came to an end as did the different programs. We continued to offer public full moon meditations. However, in the final stages of our days at the Elves Farm, our full moon meditation focused primarily on group endeavor and was solely limited to group members.

During the two years that it took to sell the farm, we still hoped that the group would continue to work together after the sale. We all felt that the group field that we had built together was too valuable to release. At the same time, we did not want to create new objectives for the group as long as we were still in the process of selling the farm. Instead, we spent our meetings focusing on meditative service work. Once again, here is a quote well worth considering:

Lucille Cedercrans, Nature of the Soul, lesson 11, p.143

As a service activity, which each one of you can initiate here and now, meditation is one of the most important. Via this activity, the disciple is enabled to focus within himself not only the Divine Plan or Hierarchical intent, but the precipitating energy of the Divine Plan as well. He becomes an instrumentality through which the Christ focuses His effort to guide, instruct and uplift the mass consciousness.

Every disciple who offers himself in this way serves a much greater cause than he can possibly realize. For as he experiences the realization of a Truth, the strength of his realization broadcasts that Truth into the mass mind where other members of humanity may pick it up as their own thought. In this way those Divine ideas which spring forth from the Hierarchy to the disciple, from the Spiritual Soul to the man in the brain, are again transmitted into the mental body of humanity as a whole, where many members of humanity can both be influenced by them, and in turn, become an influence in the activity of the Divine Plan. Realize this importance, and consider the service which you render each time you contemplate in meditation a concept of Truth, each time you contact, focus within yourself, and transmit a Divine energy which underlies a concept of Truth.

GROUP LIFE - A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Together with the expansion of the group's life, we experienced the deepening of our contact with the inner world - group soul contact, one might call it. This experience was not the same for everyone. Some in the group seemed to receive very clear and deep impressions during their meditation - impressions that other group members immediately accepted to follow. This dawning group soul contact led us to believe that we as a group had achieved a relatively high level of development. We began to think of ourselves as a group with a long history of evolution behind us in past lives, and that we now had come together again for karmic reasons and with a task to perform together. Also on a personal level, we as individual members of the group saw ourselves as partici-

pants in something important and significant, - a perception that came out of the expansion of consciousness as already described.

Most importantly, we experienced that we could use our meditation impressions very directly for the benefit of the group's work. Since our primary objective was to establish an esoteric school as described in the Alice Bailey books, we tried through focused meditations to open to the reception of impressions that would reveal to us how best we could move forward toward that goal.

We also started to sense that the Hierarchy might need a group like ours who was willing to avail itself for whatever the Masters might want from us. One might say that we applied the "as if" method and began to work "as if" this was indeed the case. We expected and trained to build an inner trust that we would receive the help needed to manifest our chosen forms of service. For example, we wanted to establish a center where we could create the school we had in mind. We then expected to receive the ideas and insights (via meditation) that eventually would enable us to find and to acquire a suitable place. Following this, we would design and build the needed facilities. We assumed that our part of the work would be to apply to various foundations and authorities for money and permits. During this period, our group maintained the confidence that we would receive the help needed for our plans to fall into place.

The fact that some members of the group stood out and were listened to more than others created some unfortunate feelings and actions within the group. As probationers and disciples, we all strove to achieve as close an alignment with our souls as possible. Yet now we had to deal with the fact that some members already seemed to have established a closer relationship to the soul than others and therefore were at a higher level of spiritual development. Envy, jealousy and suspicion are very human reactions of the personality, but they are not reactions one willingly confesses to, least of all students of the Ageless Wisdom. Those who might have had those thoughts did not express them openly, but pushed them into the group subconscious, so to speak, to smolder beneath the surface. Another response that emerged was the desire to be as close as possible to those who demonstrated the greatest capacity to receive valid meditative impressions. This led to a certain amount of competition and emulation, which also slipped into the group life.

The tendency to compare oneself to other group members increased because of the fact that almost half of the members of the group had family bonds to each other and were close to Niels whose influence in the group had always been significant. In addition, a delineation within the group developed because almost half of the group members lived at Elves Farm and had easy access to each other, while the rest had to travel long distances every time there was a meeting.

The overall result of these psychological mechanisms was the emergence of a subdivision of the group into a "core-group" and the rest of the participants. The preconditions for belonging to either part of the group were never defined, and it was never made clear who belonged where in this undefined hierarchical group structure.

By placing too much focus on those members of the group who were capable of receiving the clearest meditative impressions, the rest of the group began to feel at ease with not receiving anything important. The thought was, "When someone seems to be closer to the "truth" why make the effort to try on my own?" As a result, a certain degree of credulity and a lack of critical thinking and common sense emerged during this phase of the group life.

In addition, we experienced the almost inevitable consequence of beginning soul contact – we came to feel that our group had been specially chosen by the Masters to work through specific tasks. At the same time, we had to deal with a growing awareness of humility. This dichotomy created within us a lurking insecurity – a fear that we would not be able to "go the course". The great gap between our dreams and aspirations on the one hand, and our actual physical and financial capacity to create a spiritual center at the Elves Farm on the other hand was indicative of the group's inner conflict and of all the mixed feelings involved in our endeavor.

Over time, however, the group moved away from this unrealistic group vision. Through group meditation, Soul Therapy, and various forms of occult exercises, we gradually opened to a certain degree of consensus in our meditative impressions. We learned to rely on an equal sharing of impressions, which empowered each group member to experience acceptance within the group life. Each one in the group began to realize that his or her contributions to the group were important and valued.

GROUP PURPOSE

Development of the group's purpose

Having a purpose is a fundamental prerequisite for all group work. The group purpose, a common spiritual impulse overlighting the group's work holds the group together.

Before going into the description of the purpose of the group, it is important to distinguish between the inner spiritual purpose of the group and the objectives of the group. The purpose for our group had always been evident and understood by all group members as the intent to bring the Ageless Wisdom teachings to all those who were able to respond to the teachings and to help them find their way to the Soul. The objectives included the ways in which the group chose to manifest its purpose by living according to the Ageless Wisdom and by providing teaching, study, and guidance for students.

When we established the Center for the Inner Dimensions of Life at the Elves Farm, we toned down the esoteric terminology in our written statement of the group purpose. We did this in accordance with our intention to reach out to business life and to others who were not acquainted with the Ageless Wisdom.

However, the unwritten long-term vision of the group was that it would eventually become the Scandinavian esoteric school as described in the Alice Bailey books – or at least a forerunner of this school. Niels Bronsted had already developed his esoteric school, and it was more or less assumed that his sons and some of the other young people in the group would carry Niels' initiative work into the future.

During the group's expansion period, the group's vision and objectives also expanded. We became aware that our group might become a kind of prototype - an example for other groups interested in forming an esoteric group. We also considered that there might be more general, global perspectives to our work in which esoteric teachings and the more extroverted business activities might meet. Thus, the group began to sense that there might be a worldwide perspective and contribution inherent in its endeavor. At the same time, this expanded global vision impressed some members as unrealistic, and they could not see themselves as active participants in such projects.

About the time we bought the Elves Farm, we worked quite intensely on the formulation of the group's various objectives and structuring our work accordingly.

A rough list of the group's objectives might look like this:

- Exoteric objectives:
 - Offering lectures, courses and schools on the teachings through the Centre for the Inner Dimensions of Life and the Academy of the Inner Dimensions of Life
 - Establishment and operation of the retreat center
 - Maintenance of the property
- Esoteric objectives:
 - Subjective work relating to the activities offered
 - Being a prototype for esoteric group work
 - Becoming a center for the Ashram to work through
 - Cooperation with other esoteric groups
- Internal, social and developmental objectives:
 - Meditation
 - Study of the esoteric teachings
 - Self-development through group therapy as well as individual therapy

Extended group discussions of these many and varied objectives might have been a key factor behind the emergence of a certain frustration within the group, and we were further frustrated by the fact that this whole project had not turned out the way we had hoped. Each of the objectives listed above would individually require much dedicated effort in order to unfold and to eventually manifest. However, we were a relatively small group of people who worked on this in our spare time. With several objectives to choose from, the overall effort became scattered and unfocused. In addition, it was natural for members to attach themselves more closely to one or other of the given objectives. The abundance of objectives called for a completely different kind of dedication from the individual members, who now had to take responsibility for defining, developing, and manifesting several different objectives rather than focusing on one main effort.

Also at this time, the group leadership was not clearly defined. The lack of leadership was actually the group's conscious choice, as we regarded leadership to be part of the groups' as well as the individual members' development - to find his or her own contribution to the group and to take responsibility for it. Yet, the diffused objectives together with the lack of leadership created a great deal of uncertainty as to what the group actually wanted to accomplish.

It must be concluded that after we started expanding our objectives, we never again reached the same level of common understanding of our purpose and service work as we

had when the whole enterprise had been based on Niels' strong vision of a Scandinavian esoteric school.

Again, a comment from Lucille Cedercrans on alignment and agreement with group purpose is to the point. Even though the comment was addressed to a group that Cedercrans was working with, it directly applies to the way our group related to the question of purpose:

Lucille Cedercrans, The Disciple and Economy, chapter 13

"Master John

You have been given so much instruction ... which has been given, not only to this group, but to any who are attracted to it. The difficulty is in bringing the concepts of the Wisdom, which you have grasped in one area of your mind, down into their applied techniques or science within your very bodies, within your energy, force, and substance, and particularly in your deeds.

...

... a one-pointed effort of the group in any direction has been utterly impossible. This is where I see your greatest obstacle, your greatest problem as a group.

It is not even so much the fact that you disagree in these various areas, but that regardless of discussion, agreements are not reached in certain areas. Even when there appears to be agreement, it is only an appearance. You see, in order to apply the higher concepts and make them work, all those who are within the group (that is all who agree to be a part of the group and a part of its integration) have to work together in a one-pointed focus in order to materialize any aspect of The Divine Plan for humanity. That is to materialize in a process, in a sequence of order, and to have to work so that you can see it. Here it is in manifestation; there is no question about it.

What happens here is that the principle (more often the concepts even above the principles) is sometimes accepted and agreed upon, but there is never a complete agreement within that which considers itself to be a group as to the working out of that principle, its application. When one, two, three, four, five or whatever the number might be attempting to work out a particular concept or a principle into physical plane manifestation, using their vital life energy to do so, several things happen.

Either (and I should not say either, because they happen simultaneously) some members of the group are not in agreement with this and they withdraw from it or they do not leave it alone. They direct negativity toward it. They do not mean to, not realizing the destructive effect of their focused energy, force, and substance, but nonetheless this happens.

Then others agree to go ahead with it, but they do not take any definite part in it. There is no defined interrelated intelligent activity or effort being made. This one does not know what that one is doing, what he is going to do, what is the goal at which he is trying to arrive, and how it relates with the activity that every other individual is moving into. You scatter your energies. You defeat every effort which you move into to materialize anything, good, bad or indifferent, because you cannot come into an agreement. If even two of you could achieve an agreement and then divorce yourselves from the rest of the group and work together to manifest this, you have had enough teaching, have brought in enough energy, and you have enough power potential to manifest it. But this is not what happens. ..."

So, we were not the first group in the world to go astray concerning agreement and manifestation of a purpose. I strongly recommend any group that meets this kind of trouble to study this chapter carefully.

Service Work

The discussion of purpose also includes the issue of service because it is through service that the purpose is manifested. Originally, the group required that members were engaged in some kind of service activity within the framework of the association. "Service" was seen as having to actively support the association by performing a needed task. Some examples of service were editing and publishing programs, magazines, recordings of lectures, etc.

When the association was transformed into a fund, we no longer had a membership to care for. In addition, when we moved the activities to the Elves Farm, we experienced a huge drop in attendance of our activities. As a result, many of the specific service tasks disappeared or became more invisible. The loss of service opportunities within the group together with the extensive list of different objectives resulted in a blurred concept of service. Group members became unclear as to their contribution to the group and of the main service of the group itself.

From an overall point of view, there was also a positive aspect about this experience for the group was forced to realize a deeper meaning of service. Service is not only about doing voluntary, unpaid work in support of a small association. One can serve in all walks of life – through our daily work, our activities and through our subjective (meditative) practices as individuals or within groups. Esoterically speaking, service is actually not a certain kind of activity. It is a state of mind and an expression of a group's or an individual's degree of alignment with the soul.

A personal comment

A thought that occurred to me while writing this report on the group's history is that our main service to humanity may not have been, as we thought, to create an esoteric training center or an esoteric school. It would of course be wonderful if we had succeeded in doing that. Looking back, I think that our real service has been the group work itself, during which we tried to find our way through all the problems that arose within the group life and to solve them at some level. In this way, our group's life experience actually turned out to be a prototype for group work – which was one of our many purposes, although not the one that we were initially most excited about.

Cedercrans points out in several places in her books that when we as disciples solve a problem, either for ourselves or as a group, we make it easier for others to solve the same problem. The solution will then be a thought form in "cyberspace" which others can tap into and apply to their own work.

I am not sure that everyone in the group would agree with me on this perspective, but if I am right, then our project and group endeavor actually succeeded in at least some ways.

LEADERSHIP

Within any group there has to be some kind of leadership dynamic. In my opinion, our group process involved the transformation from "top-down management" to a more equal status in which each member of the group was urged to take responsibility for his or her own functions, and where common decisions were an expression of true cooperation.

At the beginning of our group life, Niels was the undisputed leader of the group. In the Theosophical Association, he had been a member of the board. In the Esoteric Center of Scandinavia, there was also a board, and everyone in the management team – which also constituted the group – became members of the board. Yet, we still turned to Niels for leadership. He was the one who knew everything about the esoteric teachings, and his Esoteric School was our most important activity. It was his vision of a future esoteric school that had initially attracted us to join the group. This was a very traditional type of leadership – one essentially based on power and magnetic attraction. Those of us who were "ordinary" members had no real sense of democracy and participation in the group decision-making process; rather all the important issues were discussed, and often decided upon by an undefined inner circle, before members were involved.

As the group developed over time through the process of group meditation, Niels' leadership gradually phased out. However, a new leader did not come forth. The "ordinary" members of the group would turn for leadership and guidance to those who had the clearest impressions from the meditations. But such a leadership was never openly confirmed. Thus, a general uncertainty arose within the group as to whether there was a leader or a leadership group and who they might be.

For a while then the group tried to organize its life according to the "three spiritual aspects" – will, love, and intelligence. The group members were assigned to the head center (first aspect), the heart center (second aspect) or the throat center (third aspect). Those who made up the head center were expected to take upon them the leadership function and to hold high the group purpose. This, however, never worked out, probably due to a lack of acceptance by the rest of the group.

Basically, the leadership of the group was not at all to the group's satisfaction; we had great difficulty solving the issue of leadership. Over time, however, the experiences we shared together gradually helped us move to a more democratic approach and attitude. Eventually almost all of the members would find the courage to express their views and participate in discussions, even when there were disagreements.

The improved independence of the individual members of the group may also be seen as a result of our group meditations. Time, experiments, and the constant meditative focus and subjective work helped us to overcome differences and enabled us to progress without one particular person or group of persons assuming leadership.

The ultimate model for leadership is obviously the way in which the Spiritual Hierarchy itself is said to work, having both a vertical and a horizontal level of functions. In "true hierarchy", the leader of the group is not designated as in a traditional leadership model,

but is the one who holds this function naturally as an expression of his or her level of development. On the horizontal level there is a general acceptance that group members with a lower vertical level of development may have better skills in some areas than those holding a higher vertical position, and that the management of these areas will naturally be left to those members. True hierarchy implies that each member of the group is able to acknowledge the level of development of every other member of the group as well as the development of the individual self – an insight that we as a group did not possess.

In my opinion, finding true leadership involves a process of group development. Our group eventually reached a form of management that did not encompass a vertical leadership. We based our decisions on meditative consensus combined with functional leadership. We meditated together on the particular subject to be decided upon, often several times. Then we shared our impressions while endeavoring to find the group synthesis that would be a guideline for the final decision. Functional leadership involves a process of "self-management" in which the responsibility for specific functions or tasks is allotted to the persons who offer to take on those tasks. The functions or the tasks will then to some extent be adapted to those who are competent.

What is lacking in this kind of leadership is the overall guiding function that constantly holds the group's activities and progress up to the group purpose. To alleviate this lack, we attempted to make plans for the group work. This included the choice of work in accordance with astrological and cyclic energies. Eventually we formed yet another working group with the sole task of producing a semi-annual plan for the weekly group meetings and making sure that group decisions were implemented. This plan turned out to be quite an efficient way of ensuring progress in our work.

A personal comment – an esoteric perspective

In my opinion, we came as close to a successful model of group leadership as was possible for us at that time. Although many of us felt the lack of leadership, I think we have to thank those who could have taken on a strong leadership role, but chose not to. A true vertical leadership is only an option when those who conform to it are able to assume leadership of their own lives and their own expertise and are not just waiting for a top-down command that tells them what to do. Lack of leadership is actually a necessary phase in which the individual members of the group start to understand their own contribution and take it upon themselves to be responsible for its manifestation within the group life.

Once again, I will refer to Lucille Cedercrans' book Leadership Training for further investigation of true esoteric leadership. Below is my version of some of the main points of this book and a few notes on the requirements of a group that consciously applies itself to group leadership according to this new paradigm. I strongly recommend any group to study the book to learn more about this topic.

Like most esoteric students know, there is an overall shift of paradigm taking place as we are moving out of the Age of Pisces, which is dominated by the sixth ray, and are moving into the Age of Aquarius, which will be dominated by the seventh ray. This paradigm shift also applies to the way leadership is expressed.

According to the old paradigm, which we are all still mainly subject to, leadership is based on competition. There is a hierarchical structure of the organization and of responsibility by appointment, i.e. appointments are the result of battle for favor and power and financial resources. This kind of leadership is linked with the traditional sixth ray type of organization which, according Cedercrans, carries its own death, because it is based on physical form and structure and thus always will be subject to birth and death.

Traditionally the function of leadership is to manage an organization or business, which includes holding the purpose, making final decisions, delegating tasks and providing guidelines for the overall operations of the organization. With leadership comes also the overall overview of the organization's finance, production and marketing.

Cedercrans calls the new paradigm "cooperative leadership". The basic assumption in this kind of leadership is that every single individual in an organization has a specific function to perform, a specific part to play, which is his or her divine purpose. It is then the task of each individual to discover this function and take responsibility for it. Of course, everybody else's function and endeavor to realize and implement it is equally important, and all are obliged to cooperate with everybody else's function as far as possible. The function of the leader is primarily to be inspired from the level of the soul and to inspire employees and coworkers to follow the ideas - not the person. This kind of leadership will eventually lead to a seventh ray organization that is ethereal, formless, and therefore flexible and durable. This type of organization relates to humanity through the individual in the group.

However, we are not able to appropriate this new paradigm, just because we know it. Some prerequisites will have to be established before a group or an organization etc. will be able to work according to the new ways. There must be acknowledgment and agreement of a purpose that the group is gathered around. This focus has to be sustained, and each must play his or her part in the manifestation of the common intention. Each member of the group thus has to understand his or her own function, define it clearly for him or herself and for the group and must then seek to cooperate with others and their special functions.

METHODS OF WORKING

Form of meetings

The Group's way of working together developed along with the changes within the structure and inner life of the group.

In a typical meeting of the board of the Esoteric Center, Niels presided. The meeting started with a brief meditation, which was read aloud and was followed by a recitation of the "Mantra of the Disciple". There was no agenda sent out before the meeting. As a result, we would discuss the items brought forth by those attending the meeting. These items were usually of a practical kind relating to the operation of the association. We held the meetings in private residences, the group members taking turns as hosts. Light refreshments of tea, coffee, rolls etc. were prepared by the host.

In a typical group meeting held at the Elves Farm, we would always begin the meeting by listening to a piece of classical music in order to quiet our minds before moving into meditation. The theme of each meditation was adjusted according to our specific agenda for the day. Sometimes we conducted psychological processes or group soul therapy instead of or as part of the meditation. After the meditation, we shared impressions and then continued with the agenda. A planning group was in charge of drawing up the agenda, focalizing discussion, and recording any decisions made. At each meeting, we also discussed any practical matters concerning the group life. We would all sit in a circle around a table on which were lighted candles. After the meeting, we had a more informal, socializing time together with tea and snacks.

Three or four times a year, we would set aside a whole day or weekend for meditation, study or discussion of the group's development in matters of organization, leadership, self-development, etc. – topics that we did not have time to address in depth during the weekly group meetings. Various members of the group offered to organize and to lead these retreat-days.

Meditation

Our meditation practice also developed over time. In the beginning, it was hardly a meditation, but rather a moment of silence followed by recitation of the "Mantra of the Disciple"

After a while, group members began to take turns reading a meditation format out loud. Gradually, however, we became more confident in leading meditation and did not have to read from a written format. As the group developed its meditative skills, the meditations would always be in alignment with the agreed-upon subject at the time. Initially we tended to let those few who "were the best at it" lead the meditations. Later on, almost everyone in the group led meditations, depending on who had a particular relation to the meeting's subject. No two meditations were the same. The basic elements – relaxation, linking from heart to heart around the circle, aligning with the group soul, the Hierarchy, and the planetary antahkarana, and the final distribution - were always part of the meditation. However, the one guiding the meditation was free to lead it in his or her own way as long as the format was adapted to the chosen group subject or need. Usually the objective of the meditation was to receive impressions concerning our activities and group life. At other times we used meditation to explore psychological group processes or experimented with spiritually oriented exercises.

The consistent practice of meditation was of the greatest importance for the group in every respect. In our opening meditation at each meeting, we strengthened the group energy field and aligned with the inner dimensions, and we were then able to maintain a relatively impersonal attitude throughout the meeting despite differences in opinions. The importance of this aspect of the group life cannot be overstated. It is perhaps the greatest achievement of the group - that it established and maintained a strong group field until the time when the group activities eventually came to an end.

"Soul Therapy"

"Soul Therapy" is a therapeutic approach based on a technique described by Lucille Cedercrans which had an important influence in the development of the group life. The

technique as found in The Nature of the Soul (chapter 8, page 108) was designed to help aspirants shift their consciousness from an emotional to a mental polarization, and it became a key element in the practice of "Soul Therapy" within our group. "Soul Therapy" was the focal point of a therapy business that one of the members of the group had developed in 2005, and at the time, the group functioned as a willing laboratory. All the members were offered therapy according to this method, which provided group support for psychological and spiritual development. Later on, this method was also integrated into the group life as a psychological tool to deal with the unconscious blocks to the group's progress.

Regular soul therapy sessions with both individual members and the group as a whole proved to be of invaluable support for the group life. This approach contributed greatly to the fact, that despite difficulties and different temperaments, the group members were able to maintain not only right relations, but also good relations with each other.

CLOSING REMARKS

If somebody had asked me only a couple of years ago if the group behind the Center for the Inner Dimensions of Life would ever dissolve, the answer would have been NO! We had a strong and coherent group field. We were dedicated teachers of the Ageless Wisdom. And we had beautiful, suitable surroundings where we could develop a center for meditation, retreats and teaching. What could go wrong?

As it turned out, the group no longer exists. Maybe we actually fulfilled our divine purpose; maybe we did not. We are all at any time in the process of learning, and all I can say is that we did our best.

I will leave the final words again to Lucille Cedercrans. There is much hope and consolation to be found in this quote:

Lucille Cedercrans, Nature of the Soul, lesson 6, p 82, 83

As stated previously, disciples who are thrown together in the life of the personality, to work out some aspect of the Plan, often meet with great difficulty. There are differences in personality reactions, differences in opinion, in type and method of work, and in ray makeup. This causes friction where the attention is focused in the world of form.

The aspirant learns first that his brother is a Soul, and therefore they are both a part of the One Life. He then learns to attach importance only to the Oneness of the Soul, and to attach no importance to the differences of the persona. This is at first difficult, since the aspirant has been concerned with the affairs of the persona over a period of many lifetimes. It necessitates a placing of values upon the constant realities, rather than changing conditions, an attainment of right perspective.

This is most easily facilitated when the aspirant can lift his focal point of attention above the area where old thought-forms can influence him. His task is to stand steady in the Light of that Truth which he is attempting to embody. He begins to actually take up his residence in the head, that place where he practices his daily meditations.

Here it is possible for him to abstain from criticism in thought, word, and deed. He goes even further and recognizes neither vice nor virtue in the persona. Thus, his focal point of attention is shifted beyond the mask to the reality, and Truth communicates itself to him. He is neither attracted nor repelled by the persona, but is at-one with the Soul, thus right relationship on the plane of the personality is the natural manifestation, and the disciple finds that he is free to work in harmony with any and everyone.