

***Credo: R. D. Laing and Radical Psychotherapy* by Andrew Feldmár**
A review by Leon Redler

I found reading *Credo* inspiring, even therapeutic, and I think it could be so for many who read it with an open mind and heart. I think that may be so for the psychotherapists, trainee therapists and people considering psychotherapy, who may be among its main *initial* readers.

We're given intimate details of R. D. Laing – the radical physician, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and then well-known author and public speaker – and Andrew Feldmár, a young aspiring psychotherapist who gave his all, with clarity of aspiration and intention, to learn from Laing, and who went on to become a prolific author, teacher and radical psychotherapist in his own right.

It's written with careful, attentive observations and questioning of self and others, and with a clarity of intentions and aspirations. It has a lot of jargon-free, undogmatic, uncommon sense. And it's written without attachment to any particular theory or system of thought, while being informed by a critical reading of many texts, and by Feldmár's close relationships with Laing and with Francis Huxley, social anthropologist, and also learning from their colleagues, Drs Hugh Crawford and John Heaton.

Credo is not an autobiography, the author notes, but it surely has many engaging autobiographical passages. I'll pick up on Andrew's decision to come to London, in 1974, to open and immerse himself in whatever R. D. Laing was ready to offer. It proved to be an intensive, unique and rich apprenticeship!

Credo conveys their shared commitment to freedom, to be who they are and their sense of the need to realise that our limited, conditioned reality is like a dream ... and to wake up from that dream ... to the truth of who we are and to the intelligence and love that are otherwise obscured.

Meditation was part of that journey for Laing and Feldmár. It included attentiveness to body, breath, thoughts, feelings, and all manner of habitual ways of being, including one's attachments and aversions. In the service of being free from being bound by these ... and for the sake of awakening ...for all concerned.

Andrew describes his early difficulties relating to Laing:

"My talks with Ronnie often start disastrously and I feel clumsy. I am embarrassed ... I have to work my way through shame, but I long for the inspiration, so I don't avoid these challenges."

The relationship develops into one of mutual trust and respect. Andrew writes:

"He (Laing) could sense that I understood him when so many people misunderstood him ... (I) chose my words carefully, I thought things over, and I wasn't afraid to ask questions. I respected him, I didn't ask for more than he was giving, and I was careful not to overstep his

boundaries. He was a person who finally showed a reflection of myself like no one ever had before. He was very strong, and if he liked me, I could believe I was actually worthy of love. He spoke to me as though I was more educated and intelligent than I thought I was. As a result of the year's intense work with him, I got to the point he saw me at, from the very beginning."

Andrew recognised Ronnie (Laing) as

".. brave, honest and spontaneous. A dangerous man, who was always immediately prepared to say whatever he thought ... There were many who misunderstood him—maybe because if you took him seriously and actually understood him, you had to change your life or at least consider why you wouldn't."

These are key passages to understanding their singular and deep relationship.

Part of Feldmár's apprenticeship was experience in the households of the Philadelphia Association, communities intended as place of asylum and refuge.

Laing, at the time, was considering how patterns in regression could be linked to intra-uterine and perinatal experience. Andrew describes a young man, whose skilful therapist was attending to him in a household where he was regressing. This included fierce insistence on breaking windows, sitting on the floor and only eating food from the floor. They saw this as potentially a transformation of placental nourishment and excretion. It took a long time, and emptied the household of all the others, but the young man, to Andrew's amazement, in fact "came to his senses and was cured"

Insisting on trying to fit a person into one's usual format and style of practice, rather than finding whatever offers the best chance of their release from constraints to flourishing, is not skilful means.

Andrew notes that "It is easier to pay attention to those who are already doing what we want them to do because we need a lot of patience for those who can't do it yet."

After speaking of families where children can grow up to be spontaneous and authentic, and saying such families are rare, Andrew writes:

"... Most people, including me, can only find the way to being authentic by spending an extraordinary amount of time ... where one is shielded from other people's opinions, desires and wishes, and can finally pay attention to one's own heart. 'Listen to the silence of one's own heart!' as Mother Teresa taught. But we have neglected our hearts for years, so why would it speak to us now, just because we are suddenly paying attention? We have to reassure our heart that from now on, we will never neglect it again and then, miracle of miracles, it just might start speaking."

A beautiful and inspiring passage that rings so true!

I'll end here with a short quote from the last sentence of the book:

"...I am 80, yet I still practice being courageous, loving and just listening."

Well, I am 86 ... and it has taken me most of my life to so practice ... as best I can ... a work in progress ... so to the last sentence in the book, I say "Halleluja" and "Amen."

Thank you.

Leon Redler

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Leon Redler is a physician, practising as a psychotherapist in London and engaged in ongoing researches. He was engaged with the Philadelphia Association's (PA) residential community at Kingsley Hall (1965–1970) and co-founded the Archway communities (shown in the *Asylum* film, 1972). He's a former chair and life member of the PA; a founder of Diorama Arts (now ODAC) and of the Diorama Zen group; a Trustee of ODAC and a Research Associate at SOAS. He's the author of several papers, including 'Open, Empty and Other' and 'We All Go Astray' and co-author, with Steven Gans, of *Just Listening: Ethics and Therapy*.