

”HEALING A COLLECTIVE”

A PsychoPolitical Action Project,

The village of Bakuriani, Republic of Georgia, 1994 - 1998

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INTRODUCTION

The project “Healing a Collective” was born in August 1994, after a visit to war torn Georgia. What brought me there? In my work as a transpersonal psychologist, and as director of the PsychoPolitical Peace Institute in New York and Zurich, I gave a series of lectures in Moscow in 1990. Two of the participants were from Georgia. One, the doctor in charge of Bakuriani hospital, spent four weeks in 1991 training with me in New York. During his stay, back in Bakuriani, several people belonging to his ethnic group, Ossetians, were murdered. I became aware during this crisis of the complexity of the situation. My concern and interest grew and deepened and prompted me to visit him in Georgia three years later after its war. In August 1994, my first visit took me from fascinating Tbilisi via 18 police roadblocks to Bakuriani in the beautiful Transcaucasian mountains.

In 1986, Bakuriani was a world renowned ski resort where Russian Olympic teams trained. In 1994 it was a desolate village without heat, electricity that was only available maybe a few hours daily after 11:30 pm and drinking water that was polluted when it rained.

The Intourist hotels were closed and behind wired fences. The various ski lifts were falling apart. After the murders in 1991, out of 5000 people, 2000 were left. Bakuriani hospital, once a thriving 26 bed hospital, now had empty shelves, no heat, no warm water, the roof was falling in, no patients could be treated.

Food was a scarce commodity. Yet, I was treated with true Georgian hospitality and open heart. As the Georgians say “The Guest is the God” and given their best.

What I encountered on my first visit in 1994 touched me deeply: It motivated me to initiate a three year project in the village of Bakuriani. I asked myself the following questions:

How do you assist a village collective to get out of a depression? How do you catalyze empowerment in a collective which was disempowered (communist system) for so many years? How do you motivate a paralyzed and traumatized collective to take responsibility for both its past trauma and its future? How do you initiate self help, both psychological and material, based on individual empowerment? How do you do all this within a transpersonal framework?

There were many more questions. First of all I needed to explore and assess my personal motivation. After deeply questioning within, I came up with the following:

I would like to develop a case example for “Psychology of Nations,” a new psychological approach (I am developing over the past years) to view nations and humanity as a whole.

I believed that the villagers of Bakuriani could be brought out of an emotional depression, that individual and collective growth could be motivated and initiated.

A deep connection with my Georgian friends, their family and their life.

A great challenge to allow this project to grow, remaining faithful to the principles of the empowerment of the participants (both the receiver/giver in Georgia and us, the initiating giver/receiver). All of us givers/receivers would be in for a great learning and growth process.

Flashbacks, déjà vu, while in Bakuriani on a past life in the 12th century in this country and with this group of people.

I then presented the idea and the basic psychological concept to students and colleagues, many of whom participated and supported the idea of a psychopolitical action project.

The project then was scheduled over a period of three years and followed these underlying guidelines:

Provide information training, material and financial help as well as to support decision making processes. To empower the individual and community to take charge, initiate and catalyze impulses for self help. To offer a transpersonal approach to existing ethnic conflicts as well as possibly addressing the collective depression.

It was decided to allow the project to grow organically based on this principles. A time limit was set. The project was to begin in December 1994 and to end the latest in December 1997. It was divided in the following seven phases which corresponded to our regular visits to Bakuriani.