

## **Tripping Through The Twilight Zone**

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The ads for Silva Mind Control are not modest: "...through alpha wave function you can learn to control your problems and improve your life...control your health, memory, weight, sleep, headaches...get higher grades...tap your creative potential...develop ESP."

Similarity, during 40 hours of instruction that I attended over one week at a cost of \$175, Silva Mind Control was billed as the answer to psoriasis, traffic congestion, arthritis, oversleeping, atheism, nearsightedness, glaucoma and cancer among other ills. but more than that, the dream held before us by the instructors was that Silva Mind Control could turn each of us into functioning psychics able to see into the problems of our fellow man, yea, verily, and even heal them, OR OUR MONEY BACK!

After that week, I don't want my money back.

We met in a conference room of the Beltsville Holiday Inn. Our meditation was disturbed each night by reverberations from the band in the motel night club and by kitchen workers who, from time to time, would sneak a look at the class.

The instructor, an erstwhile electrical engineer named Donald Anderson, embroidered on the ads at the Monday introductory lecture, at which some 60 outwardly ordinary people had paid \$3.00 each to hear why they should pay \$175 more for the full course.

Anderson mainly cited case histories, like that of George, The American University student who, using Mind Control got an A on a sociology test he hadn't studied for by literally imagining his professor dictating the answers to him. (I later met George, an inspiring Mind Control instructor, and he averred that it was all true. I also met another Mind Control graduate who had tried George's method and got a D for his pains.)

There were other stories about Mind Control alumni: The mother who informed her hotrodding son that his distributor casing was cracked--without ever seeing the car: a Philadelphia doctor who diagnosed his patients before they arrived: a National Institute of Mental Health research psychologist who had come to the course to scoff--and then had seen his grandmother rescued from death's doorstep, apparently by extrasensory perception (ESP).

The NIMH psychologist, Dr. Richard Green, Said in an interview later that "very little" of what was claimed for Mind Control could be scientifically demonstrated.

But he added that he would be "charitable" in assessing Silva Mind Control. "Setting aside the mythology involved in the course, most researchers agree on the validity of ESP events. Mind Control does get you to a state

where these can occur."

Green said that during the course, a fellow student had warned him during a psychic drill session that his grandmother was having a near-fatal seizure. To be safe, Green had called an aunt, who lived near the grandmother, and asked her to check on the 94-year-old woman.

When the aunt arrived she was barely in time to call help. The old woman had fallen on the floor, her face becoming blue and twitching, in agony from pain in her leg--just the symptoms Green's classmate had stipulated and all more or less as Don Anderson told our class.

There was also a part of Green's story that Anderson hadn't covered. "About a month later," recalls Green, "I went back for a sort of refresher course. My grandmother had been brought back from the hospital, but was bedridden, and couldn't even sit up. The doctors didn't expect her to live."

"I gave her name as a case again. The woman who did the case said that she could see clots in the grandmother's left lung and that the woman was having trouble breathing. I asked her if she could send help, and she did so in a sort of childish way, imaging that she was patting the clots with a cloth and saying, "Pat, pat, all pink."

"When I got to my grandmother's apartment she was sitting up for the first time. She said she felt much better. Today she's alive, as active and alert as she was before the first attack."

Green said he now feels his grandmother had a blockage of the left lung that cured itself on the day the Mind Control classmate was saying, "Pat, pat, all pink." I can say it wasn't a coincidence...I can only say that is happened."

At the Monday night lecture, Anderson also gave us a glimpse at the methodology--no equipment, just the logging in of "flying time" in a self-induced pleasurable state of relaxation while building up the ability to visualize and imagine--and a gloss of the scientific interpretations of why it all happens. "We're not going to get too heavy on this," said Anderson, explaining that the basic idea is that in a condition of relaxation, the mind generates more alpha brain waves. When generating these waves, he said, it heals itself better visualizes more easily, and is more open to ESP.

We also received a thumbnail sketch of Jose Silva, the Mexican-American ex-waiter with three years of formal education who parlayed his parapsychological methodology into a nation wide franchise system that turns out psychics almost as fast as McDonald's turns out hamburgers. Almost 50,000 persons have taken the course in five years, 14,000 of them in the Washington area. Fifteen of us signed up for the full course that night.

The four week night sessions--Tuesday, Wednesday,

Thursday and Friday--stressed lectures maintaining that Nils Bohr, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison and others had, wittingly or not, used Mind Control techniques to gain insights. Several times each night we also descended by stages into the mood of relaxation to the 10-cycle-per-second beat of an alpha wave-like buzz played on Anderson's portable cassette tape recorder.

The "calm state of relaxation"--also known as "Level 1" from the 3-2-1 countdown procedure used to get there--was just sort of an eyes-closed, day-dreaming state, made more relaxing and pleasurable and allegedly alpha-wave producing ("deepened") by visualization of idyllic scenes and other exercises.

In one exercise we imagined a clock on our "mental screen." We could, Don said, use the body's subconscious awareness of time as an alarm clock by mentally setting the clock's hands at the hour we wished to wake up, and then pulling the alarm button.

Also while "at level" we could suggest to ourselves that a headache, if we had one, was going away; through similar suggestion procedure, he said, we could also "program ourselves" to stop over-eating or smoking--indeed, eradicate virtually any malady. There seemed to be no problem, not even nearsightedness or procrastination, for which help was not offered.

Toward the latter end, Don would read a series of aphorisms, while we were "at level," such as, "I will never allow myself to develop...arthritis...diabetes...glaucoma...or the disease known as cancer," and, "...my increasing faculties are for serving humanity better...Every day in every way I'm getting better and better and better..."

"Try it, you'll like it," urged Don after explaining each procedure. I tried the headache remedy and, to my stupefaction, exorcised one of the throbbing sinus headaches I get, which usually don't succumb to anything but a massive dose of aspirin. My mental clock, however, turned out to be running almost exactly a half hour behind Eastern Standard Time, resulting in several mornings of havoc. I have had no appropriate opportunity yet to test another procedure called "glove anesthesia," which is reputed to halt severe pain and even bleeding.

We were told ("programmed") by Anderson to expunge malevolent thoughts by saying "cancel, cancel." That was to erase them from our brains ("multi-million-dollar computers").

This clean thinking ("elimination of negative programming") and the aphorisms were our introduction to the fervently moral, and ultimately religious, harmonics surrounding the Mind Control message.

Anderson came on strong with the pitch Wednesday night, exhorting us to go forth from Silva Mind Control and de-pollute rivers, reform our education system, and bring

peace to Vietnam and peace to Ulster, among other items. "We've got to take a stand," he said. "It's got to start with us." "It's got to start with us."

Mixed with the ethics were increasing illustrations from Biblical depictions of Christ as faith-healer and Mind Controller. Christ, Anderson paraphrased, had told his followers to be as little children, meaning, to Mind Control aficionados, that we should recover the easy use of the alpha brain wave state that children have for visualization and imagination. Christ also taught that the "Kingdom of heaven is within," a reference, Anderson would have us believe, to the octave of brain cycles in the alpha range.

But it was left to Ron Williams, area coordinator for Silva, to really spell it out as we prepared for the ESP exercises on Saturday. "Christ told us to go forth and cleanse the lepers and heal the sick. Well, I don't know about you, but that's not what they were doing in my church." Mind Control world, he said, bring us back to the meaning of religion that Christ had proclaimed.

During the week the 15 students got to know each other and compared notes on why we'd come. Carol had come with a "terrible sense of urgency" after hearing about the course from friends. She hoped it would help her understand her stepdaughter. She and her husband George drove down to Beltsville each night from Annapolis.

Ted a government microbiologist who was going through the course a second time, hoped it would help him learn to play the organ (it hadn't the first time). Beverly was there with Michael, who had taken the course before. Mind Control, they said, had brought them together via an ESP message that Michael sent.

For Marcia, who was at the course with her husband and high school-age daughter, the course tied with her work on a master's degree in art history that had defined Western artistic tradition as becoming farther and farther estranged from the inner conscious. She felt, like many of the authors she was reading, that it was time to reverse the trend, and hoped that Mind Control was a way to do it. Larry, a freshman college student who took the first two-session portion of the course (it was all he could afford), was following up on a longtime interest in the occult and ESP.

One subject we discussed during break times was where all the money goes. It was clear that there was plenty coming in, even with special discounts for students and couples and with special arrangements sometimes made for paying on time (Silva Mind Control takes Master Charge and Bankamerica). The only overhead appeared to be meeting room rentals, advertising and coffee that was served twice.

Area coordinator Williams later said that the instructor gets "about \$400" plus health and pension benefits for

the 40 to 48 hour course. The remainder, he said is divided between the national office in Laredo, Texas, and the local office goes to research organizations, he added, and 5 percent of each tuition is a royalty paid to Jose Silva's family.

Despite a seeming diversity of age and dress style--jeans to blazers--the students had some things in common, chief among them perhaps being able to afford the course. Another common strand was wide reading on sleep research, alpha state meditation and ESP. We had one astrology buff and a Yoga devotee who amazed hotel guests by standing on his head in the hallway during class breaks.

When Anderson asked at the introductory lecture how many had read books by or about Edgar Cayce, the Kentuckian who claimed to have cured people by going into a hypnotic trance and then prescribing for them, fully half the hands in the house went up.

These were people who were ready to believe, and by Thursday my continuing cynicism was beginning to grate on some of my classmates. "Are you still skeptical?" one girl asked as I tried to put a few questions to Anderson.

The answer is that I was and I wasn't. I'd come on an assignment. I was looking for quackery. But by week's end I was hoping with everyone else that it did work. Not that I really expected to be vouchsafed against cancer or to gain a knack for miracle cures. It would be enough, I thought, if I just learned how to concentrate a little better, have somewhat faster recall of anecdotes and statistics while writing, and maybe just enough ESP sensitivity to probe a bit more effectively when questioning news sources.

The Saturday setting was surreal--the pool lounge of the Sheraton Silver Spring, where we were combined with another class. Out the 9th floor windows, beaded with early morning rain, the Maryland countryside met the sky at a misty horizon. Through another glass wall was the limpid, splashless, aquamarine pool.

During his introductory homily against the sin of skepticism, Don told us that we would only be convinced by our own experience. "I could walk across that pool and it wouldn't mean anything to you if you couldn't do it yourself. In fact, I have walked on water." The class looked at him, at the pool and back at him. Was he going to? "Of course," said he, dropping the punch line, "It was very cold out on the day I did it."

The mixture of the madcap and the mystical was a constant feature of the course, used to weave in the theme that Mind Control was not, in Anderson's terms, "Far out...kooky." It was the method of presentation led us to believe, a middle-road approach, between palmistry and

astral projection to the more extreme side, and yet ahead of the unenlightened who were as yet unwilling to concede the mind's true powers.

We spent the rest of the day trying to imagine ourselves inside different metals, inside plants, inside a pet animal, and then inside a human system. We pictured our mental projection of ourselves on our "mental screens": Some, the imagining came hard. "I didn't see a thing," confided one woman during a break. But for others it was all stunningly real--fantastic voyages through the tinkling atoms of stainless steel, for instance. Inside the plants, for some the pulpy cells became tangible; others claimed even to experience the musty humidity of a greenhouse.

But it was the Saturday night session that for most of us marked the departure from the explicable to the uncanny. Our teacher was Peter Kline, who, when not on a Mind Control Podium, passes on the more mundane discipline of English literature at Sidwell Friends School in Washington. He later was to put it the way many of us were to feel it; "Mind Control is confusing to me. I'm always surprised when it works. But it does work."

The night's project was to build our "psychic laboratories" in which we would work "cases" tomorrow. The "cases" would be names of relatives and friends with grave health problems. The rationale behind this had been presented carefully. ESP can be demonstrated by having people try to transmit, for instance, the number and suit of a playing card. But such trivial matters don't generate ESP signals with anything like the amplitude of a human whose survival is endangered. Our goal would be to decipher what was wrong, and attempt to send help psychically. For some this would be done by imagining an operation, or the affected area.

The initial construction phase was easy: the visualization of a room, with a view if desired, and equipped with a desk, chair, medical equipment, file cabinets, other furniture and seats for our "counselors." Counselors? Yes, counselors. Peter told us we would summon a male and a female person, identities unknown, to serve as our "advisers." They would be geniuses in all fields, universal persons, he said. They would appear in our laboratories while we were in our relaxed state via a special imaginary elevator in which the door would open downward from the top, revealing the counselor feature by feature. We, or our conscious minds, were to watch our unconscious minds create.

It was eerie. One woman who had taken the course before told me she had been badly shaken when her male "counselor" arrived wearing an animal mask. She finally got him to take it off, she said and it turned out to be her one-time analyst.

We lowered our imaginary elevator doors to the

sequence Peter read out of the course book. "...now you can see your counselor's hair...its color...the way it is combed...now the forehead...you are beginning to get an idea of the counselor's age...and now the face, feature by feature by feature..."

The level of excitement rose. Helen, a middle-aged former nurse, told me later that as her imaginary door was descending "my heart was throbbing---I felt high." Her "counselors," she said, were strangers. For some people, none appeared. Others said they witnessed the arrival of next-door neighbors, ex-roommates, old flames. Carol got Ida Lupino; Danny Kaye turned up for another student. My own "counselors" turned out to be the late Robert F. Kennedy and a girl I had known 12 years ago.

The "cases" were to start on Sunday afternoon., and during the morning the class peppered Peter with questions. Does it matter if the age and address of the "case" are only approximate? No. In fact, the name isn't really necessary. What if you don't see anything--should you make it up? Yes, in fact, everyone who does it will feel like they are making it up. What if you get things wrong? Don't worry, you will. Lots of things. But you will get more things right than you can possibly anticipate.

When the afternoon session started, Kathy, Helen and I formed a group. We would take turns being the "psychic," who does the diagnosing, the orientologist, who presents the case, and the recorder, who writes down what both say.

The first case was a disaster. I gave Helen the name, age and address of a friend of my wife's who was nine months pregnant, a fairly severe period of trauma it had seemed to me. "Would you believe," Helen finally said, "that I'm drawing a complete blank?"

There was some switching around after the first case. Kathy and I ended up moving into a group with one of the graduates of an earlier course back for a refresher.

The initial lack of success had been deflating, and as I began to give to Kathy the case of an uncle, a victim of the mysterious unravelling of the brain's action to the muscles known as multiple sclerosis, my skepticism was on the rise. After all, I was thinking, if you know the age and sex of the subject, the range of possibilities is considerably reduced. An educated guess might be right a good percentage of the time, especially if a few clues were dropped. The "orientologist" was allowed, for example, to suggest a check of a certain system, like the circulatory system, or let the person functioning as psychic know when he had identified an affected section of the body.

Kathy's analysis of my uncle was, however, to reduce the cynicism. With no prompting, her "scanning" of the body identified the head and the brain as the affected area. "There's a dark spot or part removed...it looks like

it has been eaten out..."

Later, asked to examine the rest of the body, Kathy said, "I can only see something pointing to the section of the brain saying, 'This is where it is, this where it is...'" Then she described his movement: "He's leaning forward...he's lumbering like he was rather over-weight...I get the great impression he's favoring one side, the right: he's not using his left...I don't think anything's broken..."

It was an accurate portrayal of my uncle's symptoms. But what was to be more remarkable was that she didn't portray them as clearly or quickly as other students would later. And she had, in fact, seen some things that to the best of my knowledge aren't correct. (She thought he was a heavy smoker and overweight.)

The most poignant moment I witnessed came when Sally, a later partner, tried to "send help" to a longtime friend of mine whose case she had immediately pin-pointed as paralysis of most muscle functions. "It's so sad, she said, tears slipping out of her closed eyes.

But diagnosing people I knew amazed me less than my own diagnosing of others. In the case of a 94 year old man, I saw his eyes beside his head and said that meant he was losing his eyesight (he had glaucoma). I found myself literally asking him if anything else was wrong. I can't explain it, but I actually thought I heard him say, "I can't eat." His grandson, who had given me the case, said the old man was constantly losing his false teeth and complaining about what he had to eat when he didn't have them.

Neither problem, to be sure, would be an unlikely occurrence. What surprised me more was my strong (and correct) feeling that he was otherwise in excellent health, free of heart trouble, arthritis, circulatory ailments, intestinal problems or motor difficulties. I missed that he was senile.

During the case of a boy with speech defects caused by brain damage, my tongue lolled in my mouth, my right eye twitched--the subject's exact symptoms. A hysterectomy appeared to me as an abdominal tube with a ribbon bow on it. A couple of times I could accurately describe the people involved, including acne scars and age blotches; a cigar smoker appeared puffing on one.

I wonder if any of the "help" sent was received. And I find the thought that I am wondering it, when before I would have rejected the possibility out of hand, amazing.

What does it all mean to me now, two weeks later? I haven't taken an aspirin and my weight is now under 175 lbs. for the first time in four years. I think I'm sleeping better. But no miracles. I've had only marginal success with a technique touted by some graduates for turning traffic lights green and finding parking places.

There is no research, of course, demonstrating that

Silva Mind Control alumni have better health, less cancer, fewer headaches or greater command of ESP. Nor have scientific verifications been made of the efforts of graduates to apply their powers to horse racing, the Mexican national lottery and bridge.

When a former classmate called and asked if I'd be interested in following up on my mind control by joining a "graduate group," I said I would, and I asked her what, if anything, the course had meant to her.

She said it had been the concept of offering help to other people, even if the act might seem imaginary. "I like people better," she said.

I never did find out if another classmate got what she hoped for out of mind control. "I want some proof," she said, "that life is more than what Shakespeare said, "a tale told by a fool, signifying nothing."