

Irit Shimrat - Honey versus Vinegar

What can we do to protect ourselves and others from the powerful and well-financed agents of social control striving to label, incarcerate, electroshock and medicate those of us society finds difficult to deal with? Alone and with others, I have tried to work towards this goal in various ways, including helping to found, and then coordinating, a provincial antipsychiatry organization; editing a national antipsychiatry magazine; travelling around the country speaking to and with, and interviewing, psychiatric survivors; discussing the issue of what's wrong with psychiatric "treatment" on radio and television, in newsletters, newspapers and magazines; and writing a book about my own and other people's activism in the mad movement. I feel that all of these endeavours were effective in raising consciousness about psychiatry. It is extremely important that our voices be heard, as a counter to the pro-psychiatry propaganda informing the mainstream media. Systemic abuse must be exposed. But as I grow older and more experienced, I feel increasingly that the very most important thing I can do is explore and promote alternatives to psychiatry - which are exciting, wonderful, and as infinite in scope and number as the other side's fake diagnoses. Exposing the outrages perpetrated upon us in the name of treatment is vinegar. Finding out - and letting people know - about kinder, gentler and far more effective ways of dealing with emotional and mental problems is honey. I am not alone in liking honey a lot better. The basic stance of being against something - of trying to destroy something - can be bad for the digestion and the disposition. Certainly I can present, and have presented myself as a person who wants to bring down psychiatry. But for me it's important to remember that many people value psychiatry and are certain that it has saved their lives. I have nothing against these people and don't want to make them feel stupid or angry. And I believe that, by helping to make it known that there are choices other than the ones they've encountered so far, I might be able to affect their beliefs and practices. Better yet, I feel confident that I can be of use people like my younger self, who have had their spirits crushed by psychiatric "help" and don't yet know that real help exists.