

## The Jerusalem Post - May 22, 1992

### “The holiness of silence”

*Psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo is convinced that learning to listen intently to one another is our key to therapeutic understanding, writes Judy Stonehill.*

When Claudio Naranjo was a child his mother did not reveal to him that the family was supposedly descended from King David, because she was afraid it would go to his head.

“She did not want me to become messianic, vain and self-important,” explains the psychiatrist, Gestalt therapist, meditation teacher, writer and musical philosopher. Perhaps his mother had the right idea, because by the time her son did learn about his heritage, he had thousands of followers on several continents.

Naranjo is currently visiting Israel for three weeks at the invitation of Gedelia Fler, an American rabbi and teacher of Kabbalah who met him in Berkeley, California.

The 59-year-old seeker grew up in Chile, where he studied medicine at the University of Chile. Later, he studied in the US, where he acquired citizenship in 1974.

Naranjo manages his various interests with seeming ease. All, he explains, are united by the importance of silence and listening.

After studying psychiatry, he took up Tibetan meditation with Tarthang Tulku, a Tibetan monk who created an institute of meditation in Berkeley. As one of the three successors to Fritz Perls at Esalen, a spiritual growth institute in Northern California, Naranjo incorporated his meditation experience into gestalt psychotherapy.

“Esalen was a place that blended education, psychotherapy and the arts,” explains Naranjo, “art for the person’s not for the art’s sake.”

Naranjo has created a unique therapeutic framework at Esalen. He pairs off participants in groups of up to 70. Each dyad (pair) works as a team. Each, in turn, assumes the therapeutic role and listens intently to the other. The role of the therapist in such a setting becomes supervisory.

“Both persons in the dyad learn to listen, which is a form of meditation, paying keen attention to the mind, without trying to manipulate it,” Naranjo explains.

“Letting people help each other is the democratization of psychoanalysis,” he explains.

Although Freud had the gift of listening and allowed the patient to be alone with his problem, many therapists who came after Freud were too eager to help and understand, rather than simply to listen. Bringing meditation into the listener’s role acts as an amplifying factor, Naranjo explains.

Naranjo believes that psychoanalysts need not monopolize the idea of understanding, saying that only a professional can interpret material. The psychiatrist believes that any two people concentrating on a personal issue of one of them can be helpful, as long as the interpretation is presented in a non-authoritarian, democratic manner.

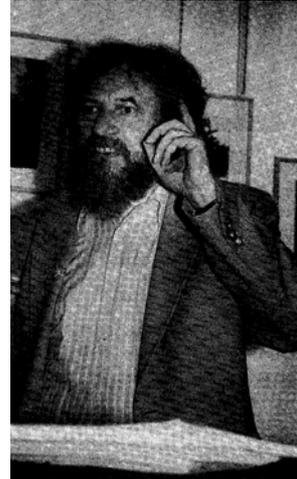


photo by John Bryson

Naranjo was named after Claudio Arrau, one of the great pianists of this century. He compares his parents' home in Chile to the Mendelssohn home in Germany of the last century. "It was more of a salon. All the world class musicians who came to perform in Chile came to our home."

His mother was an amateur pianist and the first woman lawyer in Chile. His father was treasurer of the province.

When Naranjo was six, he began studying piano. By 10, he was learning musical composition. But it was not till many years later that he integrated his musical background with his spiritual training in meditation.

"The most important person in my life was Ichazo, a Bolivian Sufi [Islamic mysticism] master. Ichazo sent me out into the Chilean desert alone for 40 days, after the tragic death of my 11-year-old son. "If his death was to have any meaning, it could only be in my own inner rebirth," Naranjo says. "And that is what began in the desert."

Later, Naranjo was influenced by the Chilean sculptor Tótila Albert, who himself underwent a spontaneous spiritual transformation after the death of his father. At the end of his internal odyssey, which lasted 10 years, Albert claimed to perceive words written in the music of Beethoven.

Says Naranjo: "Albert had a keen intuition that Beethoven had undergone a deep spiritual journey. He explored Beethoven's music to see if he could reconstitute, or decode, the musical language. Eventually, Albert heard words in the music – German words. It was an awesome experience, like meeting a ghost."

Popular musicology, Naranjo explains, contends that music does not say anything, that it has no meaning beyond its sound, that it is pure art, the abstract pleasure of the ear."

But "this popular notion goes against the sacred origins of music," he says, "which were to elevate consciousness." Naranjo believes there is a grammatical structure in music which can be deciphered. Once deciphered, the listener can appreciate the spiritual experience of the composer.

Naranjo has constructed a theory to answer the question: How does music express experience? He explains the grammar of musical language. Each of the seven notes of the scale is connected to a quality of experience. Each of the 12 notes in the chromatic scale can be connected to the others, forming 11 ascending combinations and 11 descending ones. These intervals are the letters from which the music is made, forming words, then sentences.

"Sound is the most direct expression of holiness, outside silence," Naranjo explains.

"Sounds says 'I am.' It is more powerful than visual symbols or words. Music is the expression of spiritual experience and should be listened to as if someone is telling you something very wise."

Naranjo defines himself as "a special kind of Jew." Because my grandmother experienced pogroms in Vilna, she suppressed Jewish consciousness in my mother and, subsequently, in me."

But when he was 16 and lying in bed for 40 days suffering from typhoid fever, Naranjo read a book about the Kabbalah. Ever since then, he has had a deep longing to know more.

This is Naranjo's first visit to Israel, and he is "drawn to coming back," maybe even next year, though he can't explain why.

Naranjo's books include Techniques of Gestalt Therapy, The Healing Journey, Ennea-Type Structures, The One Quest and The Psychology of Meditation (co-

written with Dr. Robert Ornstein). He is currently writing an autobiography entitled *Up and Down the Holy Mountain*.

Naranjo will deliver a lecture in English on “Music and Meaning” at 8:30 Sunday, May 24, at the Zionist Confederation House, Emile Botta St. (behind the King David Hotel).

During his stay in Israel, he has also been conducting “Interpersonal Extensions of Meditation” workshops.