

The Mad Guru

I had my first recognizable spiritual experience when I was 12 years old. After school, in the small Nebraska town where I grew up, I used to hang around the comic book rack at the local magazine store. Before TV, comic books were a primary source of adolescent heroes and villains, and in the pages of *Superman* and *Scrooge McDuck* and *Archie* I found the images that filled my dreams. The cartoon body of Veronica was my first object of desire.

One day I was leafing through the comics when suddenly I saw a face looking out at me from the cover of a new magazine. I was immediately transfixed. It looked like a cartoon face, but there was something different about it. The face was not just funny — it went deeper than that. It was only later I realized that for the first time in my life, that face had given me a glimpse of the absurd. It was a major revelation. The absurdity was in the face of my first spiritual teacher, Alfred E. Neuman, who was smiling out at me from the cover of *Mad* magazine.



At first you might see the silly grin and freckles and think that this is just a stupid kid. But after careful study you begin to grasp that Alfred E. Neuman has both deep wisdom and realization. No matter what is going on around him, he remains equanimous. In the midst of incredible chaos with speeding cartoon characters in a blitz of foulups, mishaps, natural disasters, wars, aliens from space, food fights — still, his expression never changes. His face remains open and accepting, a detached observer of this insane world.

His teaching is simple and direct. Three little words of wisdom: "What — Me Worry?" Alfred E. Neuman is the Meyer Baba of the West! Meyer Baba said, "Don't worry. Be happy." Alfred E. Neuman simplified it to, "What — Me Worry?"

In some ways I think my entire spiritual path has been an attempt to become more like Alfred E. Neuman. To be able to look at the absurdity of the world and remain calm, and grin. However, when I ask myself what is meant to be a rhetorical question or mantra, "What — Me Worry?", I still answer back, "Yes — Me Worry." But I think I'm getting the grin down, and maybe once I've mastered that, the mental state will follow.

—Scoop Nisker

Condom Nation

Sex has always been a difficult subject to teach in American schools because, unlike most courses, which are how-to — Math, Reading, Writing, etc. — sex has always been a why-not-to course.

In many schools it is little more than an arcane description of human "plumbing," primarily because teaching why not to necessarily entails teaching *how* to do what it is you're not supposed to — which, in the minds of some parents and educators, is the quickest way to insure that students *will*.

For example, in Massachusetts, often thought of as one of the least reactionary states, attempts to offer birth control information are met with strong local resistance. Students are frequently told in school that contraceptives exist, but not where to obtain them or how to use them.

This dilemma appeared most graphically in a recent court battle in Tennessee which had nothing at all to do with sex. A group of fundamentalist Christian parents successfully sued their board of education and the state of Tennessee, claiming they were victims of religious discrimination because the textbooks their children were required to read in public school reading classes promoted such radical ideas as vegetarianism, the equality of women and world peace.

Among the objectionable books cited in the case were *The Wizard of Oz*, because there's no such thing as a good witch, and *The Diary of Anne Frank*, because it promotes the toleration of all the world's religions — ideas these "victims" did not want taught to their children. According to the ruling by a Federal District Judge, the students will be allowed to withdraw from classes in which objectionable material is used.

Separate sex education classes are being planned for the children, and textbooks will be provided free of charge by the makers of Cabbage Patch Dolls. The parents have invited the stork who originally brought them their bundles of joy to serve as a guest lecturer, and Attorney General Meese, whose recently-released report on pornography is being sold in brown paper wrappers at Christian bookstores, will give a special workshop on The Joys of Censorship.

Unfortunately for the parents in Massachusetts and Tennessee, someone may soon be giving their children a far more explicit idea of what it is they're not supposed to be doing. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop — who has decided that where sex is concerned it is not true that what you don't know can't hurt you — has called for detailed sex education to begin for children as young as six so they can be taught how to protect themselves from exposure to the AIDS virus.

At almost the same time, the National Academy of Sciences released a report predicting that beginning in 1990 almost 60,000 Americans will die annually from AIDS and calling for an expenditure of \$2-billion on education about the disease, including precise information about how it is transmitted.

Neither the Surgeon General nor the

Academy is likely to encounter serious opposition. According to a 1985 poll by Louis Harris, 85% of respondents want sex education taught in schools.

There are, of course, only two ways to slow the spread of AIDS, the use of condoms and abstinence, and the consensus about sex education will doubtless break down over which of the two methods is promoted in the classroom. The Surgeon General, to the surprise of many, appears to be "pro-condom," although others in the Reagan Administration are urging that the following label be placed on packages of rubbers: "*Surgeon General's Warning: Quitting Sex Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health.*"

For those who will not quit, the Surgeon General recommends the use of rubbers for vaginal, anal and oral sex. No recommendation has been made concerning whether the ribs should be worn on the inside or out for the latter.

In New York, sex and students' understanding of it is suddenly of great interest because of the revelation that the City's School Chancellor quietly instituted a program in 1984 to dispense contraceptives to students in high school health clinics. The New York program was begun in part on the basis of a study of a highly successful 3-year program to reduce pregnancy in Baltimore. There are other similar programs in St. Paul and Chicago, and nationwide a total of 17 health clinics in high schools dispense contraceptives and 32 others write prescriptions.

A representative of the archdiocese of New York promptly denounced the program as "genocide," though he now claims he was misquoted and actually meant it was "spermicide." Secretary of Education William Bennett said the program encouraged sexual promiscuity, and one member of the New York City Board of Education announced her opposition because, she said, dispensing contraceptives would make it possible for "students to have sex in the schools."

Apparently they believe sex is less difficult when rubbers are employed.

The majority of contraceptives prescribed and dispensed in health clinics in schools and privately are birth control pills, but much of the condemnation has been directed against condoms because, as Norman Podhoretz angrily pointed out, dispensing condoms is a case of "two for the price of one." They both curb the spread of AIDS and prevent teenage pregnancy. This "two for one" scenario is infuriating to many reactionaries who are in favor of abstinence and would like to see sex education classes become exclusively morals classes.

One reason may be they already have a "two for one" agenda of their own. Since, in the public mind, most victims of AIDS are gays, prostitutes and drug-users, not only can children be shown in morals class that "aberrants" receive swift earthly punishment, but also an Orwellian re-ordering of legal history creates a convincing rationale for the kids about why homosexuality, prostitution and the use of specified drugs are against the law.

These moral historians have found an ally in

their fight in the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, which denounced homosexuality as an "objective disorder" in a recent statement concerning the church's stand on the subject.

The document said that "in 1986 AIDS cannot be ignored in any consideration of the moral and ethical issues raised by homosexuality," and denounced the "deceitful propaganda" used by pro-homosexual groups.

"When civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has the right," the statement said, "people should not be surprised when irrational and violent reactions increase."

According to a Vatican spokesman, the church will tackle the issue of the use of prophylactics by gay women in a report next year.

Dispensing contraceptives and counseling students about birth control in high school clinics is not the only birth control program presently being employed in the nation's schools. There are a number of programs which encourage something called "outer-course," which bears a remarkable resemblance to what used to be called heavy petting, and one program which encourages junior high school students to "just say no."

Nancy Reagan, who has had such astonishing success with her drug message based on the same premise, has agreed to join this fight also. As she indicated recently, "This is something I believe in very strongly. I've been saying no for more than thirty years."

These various programs have been instituted because the number of teenagers who are sexually active increased by two-thirds in the 1970s, and nearly two-thirds of unwed sexually active teenage women either never or inconsistently practice birth control. Two of the most popular methods of birth control are withdrawal and rhythm, and one of the most common reasons young women visit birth control clinics is for a pregnancy test.

The increase in sexual activity is not, however, a result of the availability of contraceptives. In 1982, one in ten teenage women became pregnant (1.1 million), 16% more than in 1973, but nothing approaching the percentage increase in sexually active teenage women. Interestingly, the birth rate has been declining among unmarried black teenagers while it has been rising among unmarried white teenagers.

It is safe to assume that, as in the case of drugs, the mass media will soon discover this new "epidemic" now that it has "spread" to the white community.

While millions of dollars are being spent to prevent teenagers in the U.S. from becoming pregnant, millions more are being spent by people only a few years older attempting to have children. In New Jersey, a woman is contesting custody of a baby she brought to term for another couple who paid her \$10,000 for the child. The child, called Melissa Elizabeth by her father and Sara Elizabeth by her mother, is one of thousands of children conceived annually in the U.S. through artificial insemination, in this case because the woman in the couple was unable to conceive.

One of the other methods available to infertile couples is in vitro (laboratory) fertilization, which may involve husband's sperm/wife's egg, wife's egg/substitute sperm, husband's

sperm/substitute egg — 16 possibilities in all. The cost for in vitro fertilization is \$3,000-\$5,000 per try, and with a success rate of 20% the cost can run as high as \$100,000, not to mention the embarrassment.

In most clinics, as soon as the woman ovulates, the man is escorted from a waiting room, where he is seated with others like himself, to another room where he is supposed to produce sperm in 30 minutes. For the unimaginative male, some clinics provide *Playboy* magazines and an old brass bed.

So \$10,000 for a surrogate might, therefore, seem like a bargain, but there is always the possibility, as in the New Jersey case, that the woman who carries the child to term may decide to keep it.

There is also the possibility that the child may be born handicapped. In 1983 a man from New York hired a married woman from Michigan to have his child. She was artificially in-



seminated and gave birth to a microencephalic child who was retarded. The man claimed the child was not his and that the woman had been having sex with her husband and demanded a blood test.

Phil Donahue had the man, the woman and her husband on his show and announced the results of the child's blood test on the air. It turned out that the father was Danny Thomas.

In October in San Diego, a woman who, according to her doctor, ignored his instructions and gave birth to a dead child, was arrested and charged with "fetus abuse." A prosecutor claims that tests done on the fetus showed the presence of amphetamines in its system. In addition to signs presently posted in California bars warning pregnant mothers about the dangers of drinking, authorities in San Diego have deputized several hundred bartenders and authorized them to make citizens' arrests.

If teenagers are confused about sex and its increasing dangers, they are not alone. That is why the TV networks have finally agreed to carry public service announcements about sex, in spite of their refusal to air similar messages about birth control several years ago.

The first message, which will air this spring on CNN, was produced by the Department of Education and features actress Brooke Shields. In the announcement she says: "Sex. Somebody told you a little bit won't hurt you... they lied. Sex in any amount can kill you. It can destroy your life. One time, that's all it takes. And you'll be ruined for life. Sex... the Big Lie. Dial 1-800-ABSTAIN."

—Robert Myers

Snitching on Drugs

After attending a deputy sheriff's church lecture on drugs, Deanna Young, 13, turned in her parents to the local Tustin (Orange County) police for alleged drug use. The Youngs were charged with possession of cocaine; their daughter was placed in protective custody.

In the weeks that followed, several other children across the country—the youngest was age 5—turned in their parents for drug use.

On November 27, 1986, Thanksgiving afternoon, because of her particular success with the Tustin police, Deanna was selected by Deputy Sheriff Robert "Big Bob" Schaffer to kick off the third in their series of children-only programs under the auspices of Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education).

The following is a partial transcript from that opening session held at the Tustin Holy Pentecostal Church.

Deanna: ...I've brought my clippings. Here's one that says I "ignited a Hollywood frenzy" — you know, the bidding war I set off by turning in my Mom and Dad. Nine movie production companies called me the day the story broke. Judy Silk, the lady from Dick Clark Productions, is my very fave. She told everyone I'm "a one-of-a-kind situation and you have to move quickly. It would be great if we could have a happy ending."

Child's Voice from Audience: How do you, like handle all the attention and everything?

Deanna: I have my own staff. Sheriff Big Bob is my agent. His cousin is my image consultant. Lieutenant Orloff is just super as my very first accountant. In fact, except for that jerk from Lorimar Telepictures who had the nerve to say I'm asking for too much money, everybody's been totally awesome.

Here, listen to what the First Lady Nancy Reagan says: "I hope her parents realize just how much she loves them." And I would've loved them even more if they didn't hassle me. I bet they're sorry they didn't buy me that pair of Fila shoes *now*. It's such a drag having ex-hippies for parents, with their big lectures on human rights, whatever *those* things are. They probably adopted me from some wonderful insider traders. Anyway, I taught Mom and Dad a lesson *they'll* never forget. Any other questions?

Child's Voice: There's a friend of mine who's thinking of turning his parents in for drugs. Do you have any special advice for him?

Deanna: Yes. You should never forget that it's okay to have your own personal reasons for snitching, as long as you don't mention it to the press. You should only explain that you're doing it for their own good and that your parents are weak and need help.

Child's Voice: But didn't you feel guilty? I mean, I would feel guilty. Didn't you feel guilty?

Deanna: Well, at first I did, a little, but then I read this story about me in the *Los Angeles Times*, and it made me feel better. They quote this fancy psychotherapist named Thom Waner, who talks about how kids know that "feeling blind loyalty just because they're your parents" is no longer acceptable. ...

—Janet Bode