

*Natural Awakening*

# *Gifts of Wonderment*

*A Life of Transformative Research*

(Volume One – View)



*Tarchin Hearn*

*"Gifts of Wonderment"*  
*Volume One*  
*a fairly polished draft version*  
*by Tarchin Hearn*

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*Volumes Two and Three;*  
*Meditation/Path and Action/Outflow*  
*are still in process.*  
*and will be posted when they are complete.*

*Most of the art-work was done by Tarchin.*  
*The stone bowl was hand carved in dark Serpentine. It was begun*  
*while teaching in Zimbabwe and was completed in Australia.*

*(Unfortunately HD versions of the photos are not available.)*

*'Escher's hands' was created by Dominique de Borrekens*

*Scientific investigation is basically a mode  
of extending our perception of the world,  
and not mainly a mode of obtaining knowledge about it.*

David Bohm

*One's living is one's path of awakening.  
There is no other way.*

Tarchin Hearn

## *Preface*

*(written in late 2022)*

*I'm writing in a hut that looks out toward Mt Maunganui in the Bay of Plenty, Aotearoa (New Zealand). It's been a wild night with winds thrashing the palm fronds and punctuations of torrential rain battering the roof. Now the pinky grey light of dawn is beginning to reveal contours of cloud. Spring leaves are dancing everywhere I look; a wet green lushness of sound and smell, a growing lightness, a sense of relief of having survived the night.*

**I**t feels trite and perhaps a bit cliché to write that we are living in a historic period of immense uncertainty. After all, life as an ongoing evolving process, is inherently uncertain. Never-the-less, for people all over the world, a malaise of uncertainty tinged with uneasiness and bewilderment, seems to be staring them in the face wherever they look. A viral pandemic is turning the human social world upside down and inside out. UN climate-change conferences, repeatedly collapse in hormonally driven dust storms of intransigence, wildly hurled accusations, and insincere rhetoric. While this is taking place, greenhouse gasses continue to accumulate. Ice-caps are melting. The primordial symphony of life is sounding more and more dissonant. Pollinators are out of sink with blossom time. Soils are drying out. Fires are raging. Floods are becoming commonplace. Habitats are changing so much that participating species can no longer sustain themselves. As the pace of modern human life becomes ever more frantic, driven by fear and anxiety and increasing desperation to do something, to 'fix' things,

we find ourselves, either slipping into dark places of despair, or being seduced by promises of dictators, 'experts', strong leaders or utopianists, each one of them telling us the right way to live.

As if this wasn't enough, we are pouring more and more of our resources into funding military 'solutions': walls, surveillance, control, incarceration, invasion and proxy wars which in turn lead to floods of refugees, displaced people and damaged ecosystems. Our economies have come to depend on ever increasing extraction, pollution, destruction and fear. Stealing from the future to fund an unsustainable present, we are degrading the living world, our homes, our health care, education, and social support systems. Seen from a larger socio-historical perspective, this is nothing new. It is simply the current iteration of human struggling that has been going on for thousands of years. In Buddhist thinking, this engulfing ocean of suffering, where the very attempts to solve problems contributes to further problems, is called *samsara*.<sup>1</sup>

It is little wonder that over the centuries, yogis and meditators have opted for renunciation, withdrawing to caves or monasteries while yearning for transcendence. Today the caves and forest retreats are mostly privately owned. You'd have to book a space well in advance and pay exorbitant rates! In the pages of this book I will suggest other options, ones that might transform your sense of who and what you are, and how we might live well with each other.

Experiential understanding can only take place in and through the activity of the living that we are, and by 'we' I mean all of us together, an evolving biosphere on a particular planet circling a particular star. There is no transcendent other place or space to which we can escape, no second planet or plan 'b' to fall back on.

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<sup>1</sup> Namgyal Rinpoché once remarked that in essence, *samsara* literally means "to wander about blindly".

With such understandings we are left with two options; either to sink even further into a swamp of despair and distraction sometimes punctuated by periods of angry thrashing around, or; to embrace the world in its fullness, to cultivate love and clear seeing in the midst of whatever we are doing and at the same time to help each other on the way.

*Gifts of Wonderment* is an expansion of contemplations that have been with me since writing *Natural Awakening* nearly thirty years ago. From time to time I would jot down an essay, or a poem, some of which appeared in earlier books or postings on Green Dharma Treasury. Revisiting them now it seems that all my writings are linked and so I find myself bundling them all together in this book. You could think of it as a long drawn out message, put into a metaphoric bottle and thrown into the ocean of life, with the hope that it might some day wash up on the shores of someone's experience, helping to reassure them that in their thinking and seeking, they are not alone. Please accept this offering in the spirit it is given; a patchwork quilt of essays, instruction and poetic intimation which I hope will inspire you to embrace, to love and to wonder about this ever mysterious caravan of life unfolding, this collective dancing of all of us.

Inevitably the book is somewhat autobiographical but in a non-chronological manner. It arises out of what, I now see with appreciation and gratitude, has been a rich and full life of exploration – a wholeness of living.

Growing old in the garden of Orgyen Hermitage,<sup>2</sup> in the the lea of the Kaimai range that encircles the Bay of Plenty, my days involve weavings of cancer and ageing faculties, study and contemplation,

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<sup>2</sup> Orgyen Hermitage is a small two acre property, located in the bountiful land of Aongatete, N.Z. It is where Mary and I currently live.

life reviewing, writing, mentoring, and sharing with whoever comes by some glimpses of vision of how we humans could live. My hope is that these writings synergise the already present beauty and wisdom of whoever reads them. May love and clear seeing bless us all.

*Come, my friend,  
come and ramble with me  
through the fields of my life interests.*

*Meandering along the pathways  
of our unfolding aliveness,  
We will see various flowers and creatures,  
landscapes and scenes of adventure,  
personal becomings and planet wide evolvings.  
Sometimes strolling with ease,  
sometimes climbing with exertion and deep gulps of breath  
and occasionally  
gliding so effortlessly that it might seem we could fly.*

*Let's walk together;  
your life interflowing with mine  
and let's see what we can discover,  
and through our walking,  
Let's see what together we create.*

# *View*

## *The All-Embracive Ground*

*In the immeasurable expanse of nature-in-process,  
In faith and trust and wonderment,  
We give ourselves to this suchness,  
This seamless mystery of birthing/dying.*



*"One's view of things is all-embracing."*



## Transformative Vision *a foundation for meaningful living*

In both Buddhist philosophy and in modern systems theory, a vision of the dynamic interdependence of multiple domains and dimensions of existence is understood to be essential for deeper understanding and meaningful exploration. Such a vision contrasts to the more self centred, stratified, and generally unexamined view of popular culture. For many people, the very idea that so called ordinary people should or even could have a radically inclusive view of life and living is sadly undervalued, if not in some parts of the world, actively suppressed. Living with a grand all-embracing vision is often dismissed as being impractical, or overly conceptual, or too complex, or too idealistic. It's fine for outstanding artists, poets, dreamers, mystics or theoreticians – that's their business – but it's not seen as being useful or relevant for the rest of us. *Gifts of Wonderment* begins by challenging this assumption.

Much more than a transient moment of inspiration, such vision changes our attitudes and understandings about everything. The breadth and depth and richness of our view of life and living, shapes our world, the way we act and the way we feel. Embracing these knowings can become profoundly transformative. Taking them deeply into our hearts, joining them with empathy and caring, we can begin to cultivate a way of living that informs everything we are and everything we do. In Tibetan Buddhism this is called sacred outlook and is considered to be an essential underpinning of all

practice. Transformative vision provides a foundation for meaningful living – an unpretentious life of dharma.<sup>3</sup>

In this first chapter I offer a number of essays and writings which hint at a manner of living that is broadly inclusive and radically life affirming. Although they were written at different periods in my life, I hope that together, they may stimulate your thinking and viewing and through this, prepare the ground for the main body of the book that follows.



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<sup>3</sup> Dharma (Skt.) is a word with many nuances of meaning depending on who is using it and in what context. In Buddhist usage it often means truth, teachings of Buddha, phenomena and sometimes even 'thing'. *Dhar* derives from *dhareti* which means to hold, support, nourish or even cradle. *Ma* is the root for mother. In this sense, dharma is that which holds, supports and mothers us. The phrase life of dharma refers to a way of living that deepens our understanding of that which holds and supports us, while simultaneously cultivating our skills in mothering and supporting others.

## *Mirrors of Metaphor*

The world that we are and in which we dwell is an interweaving of myriad domains and dimensions: micro and macro, physical and mental, individual and collective. The whole in its entirety could be portrayed as a fantastic mansion of metaphorical mirrors. Here, everything and everyone, at every level of being, is responding to countless other reflective respondings – an entanglement of responsive viewings with no absolute beginning or end. As wise men and women in contemplative traditions the world over have said or intimated; 'reality' cannot be captured in words and symbols. Even after a lifetime of deep investigation, this mystery of life and living in all its fullness remains indescribable, ungraspable, and fundamentally inconceivable. Buddhists refer to this beyond-words-wholeness as *tatha* (Skt.), 'suchness' or 'thusness'.

A number of years ago, whilst contemplating metaphor and the essential part it plays in our search for meaningful understanding, the following reflections emerged.

*The inner tangle  
and the outer tangle,  
This generation is entangled in a tangle,  
So pray, Gautama,  
Who can untangle this tangle?<sup>4</sup>*

Metaphor and meaning are slippery subjects. So too is money. Money is a currency for exchanging objects. It is countable, measurable, gross and specific. Metaphor is a currency for understanding. It is ephemeral and approximate, subtle and

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<sup>4</sup> These verses are found at the beginning of the *Vissudhimagga*, which was written by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century. It is one of the earliest comprehensive compilations of Buddhist teaching and practice. In the Theravadin traditions it is still used today.

pregnant with nuance and intimation. Money is a blunt instrument to facilitate living in a fantasised existence of conventionally defined edges and graspable properties. Metaphor is a language for facilitating universes of interpenetrating worlds of lived experience in all their ungraspable fullness. It is sometimes said that money is for realists and metaphor for poets and dreamers, but in the end, money itself is a product of metaphor.

Metaphor is a mystery that can lubricate and gather together an immense dance of becoming, an emerging symphony of felt-sense understanding. In the subject~object market-place world, anyone can buy stuff with money. Some even believe that given enough of it, they could buy anything. It takes deep calm, bright awakesness and a solid base of life affirming relating, to fully unfold the art of metaphor.

Indenturing ourselves as apprentices of wonderment and awe in the studio of all embracing life – the only real guru – we begin to discern and more richly understand the inner and outer tanglings or weavings and how they interrelate. The following poem emerged during a period of contemplating metaphor, the art of teaching dharma, and my relationship with my root mentor and teacher, Namgyal Rinpoche.

*He was a purveyor of metaphors,  
buying and selling to all and sundry,  
wandering widely, he set up shop,  
in village greens, in conference centres,  
in living rooms and places of time and knowing  
that lacked geographic coordinates.*

*He dealt in metaphor of all kinds;  
the cheaply mass produced fads and popularisation  
but he also had an extensive range of useful ones,*

*for cleaning and removing stains, for unsticking  
and lubricating squeaky hinges,  
for collating and organizing data.*

*He had metaphors with hand grips and ergo-metrically  
designed straps and quick releases.*

*Some were big.*

*Some were massive.*

*He had light ones and dark ones and ones  
that were both light and heavy, dark  
and dancing, all at once.*

*Some allowed you to see all the way to Betelgeuse.*

*Wherever he went, he was always interested in the old and rare  
but also the new and innovative  
and he carried an uncanny knack of  
sniffing out ones that people packed around with them,  
or had stored away in dusty cupboards  
forgetting they were even there.*

*His personal collection was extensive and it  
was rumoured that he had some that were  
so refined you could place one on the finest balance,  
and its weight was less than the lightest feather.  
A collector and dealer, a connoisseur of connoisseurs,  
moving with ease through the lives of countless modes of being.*

*Yet few know where he came from.*

*He seemed to just appear,  
and then, with a smile,  
he'd gather all his wares and stuff them into a tiny bag of blackness.*

*I say blackness,  
but, actually,  
I couldn't really make it out.*

*It wasn't like anything else in the world.  
It was silky and soft and heavy and encompassing,  
and everything went tumbling into this bag of silence,  
this unseen baggage of belonging and vastness.*

*Looking around, he'd grin and then,  
tossing his bundle in the palm of his hand,  
he'd pop it into a pocket,  
right next to his heart.*

*Some people said that he lived in a far away place  
that had no need for metaphor,  
that his own house was simple and unadorned.  
It was even thought by some with wild imaginations,  
that he lived in the bag of blackness, or the shirt pocket!  
Of course, there were always gushy mushy types  
who thought his home must be his heart.*

*To me, he was a purveyor of metaphors,  
a travelling tinker, a mysterious vagabond,  
who trod the roads and byways of our lives.  
He once allowed me to carry his bag.*

*Truth be said, I think he saved my life.*



## *Evolutionary Roots, Manners of Living; Dawnings of Natural Reverence and Respect*

*"The development of a living system, that is the life history of an organism (its ontogeny), occurs in a systemic form as a history of structural changes around the conservation of the manner of living that defines the organism as a living system of a particular kind." — Humberto Maturana*

Conventionally speaking, each one of us began as a foetus in the medium/milieu of a mothering womb. This evolving system of cellular relating, foetus~womb~mother~world, is a living expression of an intimate reciprocity, a creative conversation linking everyone and everything – multiple domains and dimensions of inter-being~inter-knowing. We might call it biocracy-in-action. Biologist Humberto Maturana referred to this evolving dynamic as a matristic system, a manner of living that is rooted in what we might think of as 'cellular trust'; where every component: molecular, organelle, cellular, and multi-celled collective, contributes a 'voice', where every participant is 'heard' and responded to. Insides are speaking to outsides, selves to others, micro realms to macro realms; and all of this going on simultaneously. From the beginning, we are a dancing of many domains and dimensions, a dynamic organism-medium-evolving-process; a virtual demonstration of cellular faith/expectation that the ground of a supportive world will, in the spirit of a Celtic prayer, rise up at the right moment to meet our step. There is an extraordinary attunement to all of this.

For modern humans, around the time of birth and shortly thereafter, this manner of living, this systemic responsive multi-levelled attuning, begins to be increasingly shadowed by something different, a way of being, characterised by a solidifying sense of

separation, hierarchical categorisation, and control. Maturana referred to this as a patristic system.

*We were gestated and born in a biology of love.*

*We were cultured and grown in an ambiance of hierarchy and control.*

*We woke up in the parliament of biocracy-in-action.*

*We matured in the living mystery of love and clear seeing.*

*We blossomed and bore fruit*

*as wonderment unbound and blessing everywhere.*

*The children and grand children of our meeting*

*are gestating and birthing in a biology of love.*

*Ahhh !!!*

*Presence presenting,*

*This magnificent story,*

*Our living,*

*Our lives.*

The life cycle of many organisms involves multiple stages of metamorphosis or transformation. Each stage expresses a particular manner of living. Think of tadpoles and frogs, or caterpillars and butterflies; aquatic creatures to terrestrial; leaf munching creatures to air born flyers. In these situations the shape and functioning of the body is dramatically changed congruent with the changing manner of living. A human being also grows through stages though our body doesn't appear to undergo such a dramatic change. Perhaps puberty and old age could be regarded as human expressions of metamorphosis. For us, the big transition is from a predominantly nurturing matristic manner of living, to a patristic manner with definitions, rules, and control. From a manner of living characterized by mutual love and trust to a manner of living based on performance, achievement.

Since matristic and patristic overlap, we end up with a mixture of



both which can be a source of much of the confusion and ambivalence in human adults. For example, we need to love and be loved, to nurture and to be nurtured yet at the same time, we also feel a compelling need to control. This ambiguity has often manifested as antagonism between these manners of living. Because the matristic manner tends to compromise and collaborate and the patristic or patriarchal tends to demand that it gets its own way, modern human adults seem to be drifting further and further away from recognising our ancient biocratic roots.

At conception and shortly thereafter, what we as observers call mother and foetus, is really a seamless continuity, a dance of biological relating, with no rigid boundaries, no self or other. This choiceless situation is continuously fresh, life-in-process, finding its way depending on situation and circumstance.

Each woman (particularly with their first child) gradually and experientially discovers for herself what it actually means to be a mother. The knowledge~skills of being a mother arise through the activity of mothering. Such wisdom isn't something that can be conveyed in a 'how to be a mother' book. There is no predetermined timetable for this learning; no rules and no guaranteed outcomes. The same holds true for the foetus as it grows towards birth. This mutual collaborative growth of foetus/mother is the current expression of an organic process that has been present on earth for millions of years.

The patristic control manner of living is very different. This is carried from generation to generation through cultural elements such as architecture, engineering, institutions, writing and story telling. We could think of these as various tools (ie existent laws and cultural traditions) for preserving or channelling likely ways of understanding and doing things in the future. At some point in its

life journey the young organism, having been gestated and grown in a matristic manner of living, increasingly finds itself in a medium that is pre-structured so that the manner of living becomes one of trying to fit in, rather than one of co-evolving creatively with other beings.

Given this situation, it becomes important that we consider the kinds of cultural structures we would like our future generations to grow into. This is a choice that we humans have to make. It's not optional. We either intentionally, and hopefully wisely, participate in shaping the manner of our living, or we unintentionally and perhaps stupidly and shortsightedly, participate in shaping the manner of our living.

From a deep-ecology perspective, the fact that I am writing this and you are reading it means that we have successfully navigated the great transition of birth. We have emerged from the womb of our mother, cutting the umbilical cord while at the same time reconnecting, thorough myriad metaphoric umbilicals of connection: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, with the larger womb of the world. And so, while 'metamorphosing' from one manner of living to another, the relationship of reciprocal inter-knowing-in-action-evolution continues to grow and expand. Looking at our life journey from a Buddhist perspective, the matristic manner of living could be seen to provide one's underpinnings of trust and settledness, what a meditator might think of as effortless *samatha*. The patriarchal manner of living could support and underpin capacities for discernment and investigative enquiry, a natural and uncontrived *vipassana*.<sup>5</sup> To be a healthy human adult, we need them both to work collaboratively together in

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<sup>5</sup> For extensive description of *samatha* and *vipassana*, see chapter 3 of "*This Nectar of Naturalness*".

harmony. At that point we might begin to discern some of the biological roots of what I think of as contemplative science.

*Respect for nature  
Love of life,  
The blessings of the human birth,  
Born from nature all of us  
I will remember and give thanks,  
I am a human being,  
Endowed with nature's gifts,  
Unique, alive, each one of us,  
I will remember this.*

*(Lama Chime Shore)*

Human beings are conceived and gestated in a human universe. The womb in which we began is the interior of another human being (our mother). This was us; a tiny cluster of cells growing into community, whilst communing with a surrounding community of human cells. Around the time of birth we simultaneously entered, and are entered by, a universe of non-human microbial life, which is drawn inside through breath and swallowing and wrapped around the outsides, coating our skin. The collective we come to know as our body is expanding in complexity. From now on, the womb in which we gestate involves the entire the living world, a symbiosis of myriad creatures, mutually communing and shaping. We adapt to the womb of the world, as the components of this womb adapt to us. What we call intelligence is the result of inter-responsive creatures; realms inter-penetrating realms – volumes of sentience – appearing and disappearing according to changing situations and circumstances. *Samsara*, the conventional world with all its struggles, arises with humans tending to ignore all the other partnering

creatures. By focussing more or less exclusively on humans our sensitivity to the interdependent living world atrophies and we become specialists of human culture – a mono-culture of humans – oblivious to the culture medium that is the rest of this living world.

Long ago, our socialising ancestors migrated across the earth on foot. This pace of travel was slow enough to observe the country and creatures, to hunt and gather and to have a sense of continuously being at home in sentient world. Gradually, through being this manner of living, we expanded our home territory, most likely beginning in Africa but eventually populating much of the planet. As we journeyed, we learned new environments. We tuned to them and a natural reverence and respect, creature to creature, was the texture of this 'suchness'.<sup>6</sup>

Today we travel fast with not only little opportunity to tune in to the living world that supports us, but with little inclination to do so. Enclosed in carapaces of technology, instead of hunting with intelligence, we blindly harvest. Instead of gathering with discrimination, we plunder with lust and greed. And so we have fallen out of tune with this womb of suchness – this *tathagatagarbha* – and suffering of everyone is our reward. Our manner of living is no longer one of life affirming communion, but one of manipulating inanimate objects and seemingly less than sentient creatures.

How could it be possible for a healthy foetus to develop in an inanimate or deadened womb? If we see ourselves as a continuous journeying of gestation, then the world is our womb and the cells

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<sup>6</sup> *Suchness* refers to 'reality as it actually is', 'such as it is', 'magnificent and splendid as it is' – a dynamic all inclusive continuously gestating systemic wholeness in the act of knowing itself. Suchness is buddha nature in action. See my essay "[Translating Suchness](#)"

that compose it are all the expressions of multi-domained inter-dependent evolving living process. Living wombs nourish living things. Dead wombs nourish deadened things. Our modern market, money and celebrity obsessed culture has lost touch with the sentience of our environment/womb. We have come to see a world of objects that exist for our use and pleasure. By deadening the womb of the world we deaden ourselves. This is perhaps the most urgent problem facing humanity today. While embedded in an evolving planet-wide ecology of beingness, can we free ourselves from our human chauvinism and really appreciate other animals and organism as communing creatures in their own right, all of them and all of us together?

*I pray to the wetlands,  
I pray to the deserts,  
Include me in your embrace.<sup>7</sup>*

*I pray to the rainforests,  
to the grasslands,  
to the tundra, and the boreal forests,  
Bless our families with health, curiosity, and great compassion.*

*I pray to the coral reefs,  
to the tidal fringes,  
to estuaries, deltas, benthic depths and the great oceanic empty zones,  
be firm in the midst of our extending human madness.*

*I pray to the volcanic hot zones and the boiling mud pools  
to the icy caps and mountain peaks,  
to rolling hill country,*

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<sup>7</sup> In this poem I refer to numerous biomes: wetlands, deserts, rainforests, grasslands and so forth. As you contemplate these verses, please keep in mind that each of these places is comprised of a matrix of countless numbers of interacting species. They are living processes, perhaps even living beings, not simply geographic places.

*rills and rivers, creeks and braided waterways,  
pray care for this adolescent tribe.  
Heal our rambunctious self infatuation,  
our tunnel vision and above all,  
our blinkered pride.*

*I pray to the living wind and rain,  
to the sun, moon, planets and stars,  
all my cousins near and far,  
pray wrap us in your solicitude.*

*My eyes are moist,  
a vulnerable striped bareness,  
remembering this communion deep and wide.  
How to name it . . .  
joy? sadness? frustration? awe? confusion? reverence? gratitude? love?  
We belong with each other.*

*Feeling your feeling,  
Sensing your sensing,  
We are woven intimacies, through and through.  
We are alive.  
We are blessed.  
We are spacious and luminous.  
We gaze at stars and empty vastness, and feel our fluid bones;  
a great symphonic cry of longing and joy,  
a dancing of solidity, flux and knowing,  
histories revealing, stories concealing,  
I care for you all,  
Each and every part,  
and every moment of every part,  
all included,  
nothing ignored.*

*We are life,  
praying with life,  
to life, for life,  
in all its abundance –*

*We are a circle of blessing.  
We are suchness  
beyond words.*



## *Who is Writing this Book?* *(a revelation of assumptions and attitudes of enquiry)<sup>8</sup>*

To accurately introduce oneself is not easy. What should we say? What is relevant? Even a multi-tome autobiography can sometimes fail to get it right. The way we understand and experience ourselves – moving matrices of visible and subterranean flows of perception, feeling and values – is continuously contributing to how we make sense of the world around us. Me and thee, self and other, the inter-subjective dancings of being; these primordial pairings reveal layers of hidden disposition, paradigms of relating which comprise the attitudes which shape our living.

I'm thinking that it might help you to have a deeper appreciation of what we are exploring in this book if I try to introduce myself. This may seem a little strange to some readers. While what follows is ostensibly a description of me, I have a sense that it may be referring equally to you.

*I am animate.*

*I am an animal.*

*I am born from life and living.*

*And so, dear friend, are you.*

*Everything we experience reverberates with these truths.*

Who am I? This is one of the great koans of Zen. Over the years I have learned to hold this question delicately and sensitively; while eating, studying, contemplating, writing, and working in the garden,

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<sup>8</sup> This section has been inspired by the writings of Chilean biologist and philosopher, Humberto Maturana



in fact generally speaking, in the midst of virtually any activity I am doing. The form of the question morphs from time to time becoming, what am I? where? when? and how am I. Let me try to put into words what I have come to conclude. In a nut shell, I could say that I am both an expression of natural awakening and a practitioner of contemplative science. By natural awakening, I'm pointing to a process that is inextricably part of nature. Awakening is natural, inherent and perhaps we could even say, primordial. Each morning I awaken. More frequently than that, each moment is a fresh awakening – a budding – a flowering expansion of life and living. As an expression of what I'm calling natural awakening, I appear in, from and as, this here and now evolving universe. I am a flowering of becoming, a proliferation of morphing forms and structures, a dynamic system of systems involving myriad-domains and levels – an already in-process cosmic mystery that is locally manifesting a planet we call Earth and a person called Tarchin. I exist inseparable from a world shaped by autopoietic biological processes; entwining ecologies in which we, as vertebral, mammalian, bipedal, social, languaging, primates, find ourselves.

As a practitioner of contemplative science, I am energetically shaped by a mysterious compulsion, seemingly growing out of the natural awakening that we are, to enquire, understand and explain, and through these actions to contribute to bringing forth a community that values the process of deepening enquiry and ever clearer and more useful explaining. From a conventional perspective I, Tarchin, have also had more than 50 years of involvement with Buddhist teaching and practice.

If I was applying for a job in public service, at some point I might be asked to reveal any 'conflicts of interest' that could have a bearing on how I approach the work. In an analogous way I feel I should generally acknowledge some fundamental assumptions that inform

my living. These will become more fleshed out as you read further into the book.

1) I am a multi-faceted collaborative fabrication. Seen from a perspective of structure and process, I am a collective; a symbiont of atoms, molecules, cells, organs and organisms; a dynamic, multi-dimensional matrix of co-arising entities and mediums, each one shifting and changing in response to each other's shifting and changing. In this sense, I describe myself as a structurally determined dynamic process.

While being a collage of transient forms and processes, at the same time, I am a single cohesive entity, an animate organism, a persistent whole or entity that interacts with the mediums around me both micro and macro, physical and mental. The collective of experiencing that is me, *feels* like a singularity, even though this wholeness is a dancing of innumerable parts and processes, which themselves are dancings of parts and processes.

These are the two facets of my creatureliness; an evolving symphony of structurally coupled parts and processes, and a unique entity; an un-pin-downable seamless cohesion of multi-levelled knowing in relationship with other cohesions of multi-levelled knowing.

2) My experience, both conscious and unconscious, is inseparable from the total activity of living that makes me up. The body or summation of experience that I am, is congruent with the activities that comprise this same body of experience. In this sense, I don't live a life. Rather, my life *is* the activity of my living which is inseparable from the streaming of all life. Without living there can be no experience. Even what we call the experience of dying can only arise in the experience of living. Strange as it might seem, if I stop living then there can be no experience of death. Living could be called a seamless mystery of birthing~dying.

*Life is a boundless matrix of dynamic relationships.  
Ultimately, every action reverberates throughout the universe.  
I responding to you.  
You responding to me.  
This responding to that.  
That responding to this.*

*Responsiveness is the living heart of being and becoming.  
Atoms, molecules, organs and organisms, families and societies;  
entire ecosystems, biospheres, planets and galaxies;  
all shifting, responding, constantly changing.*

*Each birthing of this is a dying of that.  
Each dying of that is a birthing of this.  
Responsive change is the very nature and fabric of what is.  
Permanence is a mental abstraction.*

3) Time is a useful concept, a type of explanatory device we humans have developed to help make sense of our experience and to coordinate our activities with others. Past, present and future are concepts that emerge in, through and from the ever-fresh here and now living that we are and so, conventionally speaking, there is only 'now' with its accompanying twin, 'here'. This is all I or anyone else has to work with.

*I take refuge in the full richness of here.  
I take refuge in the ever-fresh immediacy of now  
Truth is all-pervading  
It is the suchness of this moment,  
the thusness that we are,  
My refuge is to live within the truth.*

4. I am a multi-dimensioned historic phenomena that has been developing for billions of years. In a sense, I am a we. I exist both as

a maturing individual (a life from conception till now) and as one member of an evolving species and bio-sphere. More specifically, I am a biological phenomenon, an animate organism, an integrated collaboration of myriad types of cells. Cells are fundamental expressions of what Maturana called *autopoiesis*.<sup>9</sup> They are dynamic systemic entities whose molecular structure facilitates or determines a range of possible activities which in turn build the structures that facilitate those activities and so forth.

Part of this activity~structure is the cell membrane with its large numbers of different types of transport mechanisms. These membrane doorways determine and facilitate what aspects of the surrounding medium the integrated cellular organism is capable of responding to. The implications of this situation is that nothing outside the autopoietic system can force that system do something it is not already structured to do. A living entity cannot compel another living entity do something that they are not already structurally capable of doing. In this sense our functioning, the autopoietic creatureliness that we are, determines the world that we 'see' or experience, the world that we respond to.

Multi-celled organisms arise through the structural coupling of molecular autopoietic cell systems. We could think of this as a

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<sup>9</sup> Autopoiesis is a term coined by biologist Humberto Maturana meaning self production or self producing. A living cell is a perfect example of this. It exists as continuous self-production. When this dynamic of self-production ceases, the cell ceases. In this sense, the form or structure or shape of a cell is determined primarily by the molecular processes that are making it. Integrated networks of molecular processes determine, or specify, the particular interactive structures that form the cytoplasm of a given cell. The nature of these structures, determine which molecular processes the cell is capable of engaging in – processes building structure and structure determining process. In his succinct fashion, Maturana defined an autopoietic system as a closed network of molecular productions, such that the molecules produced through their interactions, produce the same molecular network that produced them.

primordial symbiosis. The world of our experience is a collaboration of living being~processes. This is so fundamental that I have come to see and understand that no creature can exist in isolation. Each one of us is a living entity in the act of structurally coupling with myriad facets of surrounding medium or environment, the components of which are themselves alive and structurally coupling with their mediums. Our human sense of beingness arises in this activity of multi-levelled relating. Through these relatings we, each of us in collaboration with each other, bring forth the world of our beingness~understanding.<sup>10</sup>

*Let me relate the relating that we are.*

*Not me and you, but me~you relating.*

*Not self and other, but self~other relating.*

*Not foetus and womb, but foetus~womb relating.*

*Not creature and world, but creature~world relating.*

*Our cells in their molecular dancing ongoingness  
are inside~outside relating.*

*Our organs in their thriving are singing cities;  
communities of flow and pulse  
and temperature and gradients of being.*

*And so, I~we, dissolved throughout the canvases of sky-like breath  
and tidal presence,  
and whispered touch,  
find ourselves with,  
in,  
and through each other,  
Beginningless and endless*

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<sup>10</sup> For more on autopoiesis, and structural coupling; see "The Tree of Knowledge" by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela and or, "The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love" by Humberto Maturana Romesin and Gerda Verden-Zoller.

*this relating,*  
*– universes of relating –*  
*This relating that we are.*

5) From an autopoietic perspective, the total functioning that I am brings forth the world of my knowing~experience. So too, the functioning of every other living creature brings forth the worlds of their knowing~experience. This applies to humans, cats, birds, trees, flowers, fungi and fish. By this I am not implying a mind-only solipsism. It is not particularly useful to say the universe exists only in my mind. While I feel~experience that I live in an objective world of other beings and objects, I simultaneously realise that these beings are themselves objects that my functioning in relationship with others is facilitating. Maturana drew attention to this stance of personally experienced objectivity by enclosing the word in parenthesis.<sup>11</sup> I, as an individual subject, experience a world of physical and mental objects, while at the same time realising that these objects that I perceive and conceive appear depending on how I am functioning.

*Braidings of natural history,*  
*pairings of maturation and evolution;*  
*ontology and phylogeny.*

Objectivity without parenthesis, involves an assumption that the objective world that I perceive is the actually existent world that everyone perceives. This way of speaking treats objectivity as verifiable truth completely independent from the person or creature realising it. Maturana went so far as to say that objectivity without parenthesis is a way of understanding that we bring forth in the course of our living for the largely unconscious purpose of coercing

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<sup>11</sup> What Maturana calls objectivity-in-parenthesis could be written (objectivity) or 'objectivity'

others to do what we want them to do. I'm right. You are wrong. Can't you see this is the case? Objectivity-in-parenthesis, on the other hand, arises as an invitation to explore with others, to more deeply appreciate other views, and in doing so to bring forth further worlds of experience.

6) Assuming all of the above, it becomes clear that whatever my topic of exploration, it must begin by accepting and embracing where and what I am – a languaging, social primate, participating in an evolving universe. This is the ground of all spiritual practice.

What I think of as dharma exploration is perhaps a profound manifesting of a fundamental question. What would it mean for all of me to be with and for all of you? How is the universe functioning when bringing forth this experience of me in the act of asking the question about how the universe is bringing forth the experience of me as I am now – with you?



## *Maps and Terrain*

*There was a period in childhood when I wanted to be a map maker.  
I gathered pencils and paper  
and sticks tied together with strings to sight along,  
and began to map our street and neighbourhood.*

*At that time, we subscribed to National Geographic magazine  
and I collected those gorgeous maps and kept them  
flat between thin sheets of plywood  
while dreaming of travel and adventure.*

*I drew a grid on a map of the world  
and a grid on the wall beside my bed.  
I enlarged the world map so that  
it filled the entire wall,  
and painted in all the oceans and major rivers,  
the hot and cold currents;  
sweeping curves of blue and red.*

*In those days I would lay on my bed for hours,  
dreaming of travelling the world by water;  
sailing here and canoeing there,  
with short portages,  
to cross the Andes and other inch long gaps.*

*For some unknown reason I left the land unpainted,  
vacant of national boundaries.  
They didn't seem real like the sea and the great flowing rivers.*

*I moved on from this year of passion,  
yet later in life I found myself again collecting maps.  
Maps of the body and maps of vegetation and weather trends.  
Maps of family dynamics and social change,  
of historic swings and eons of geologic and life evolving journeys.*



*And I thought that by learning these maps,  
I would come to know the terrain  
and would be able to find my way,  
and this obsession deepened until, one day,  
walking in unknown land with steep hills  
and tumbling streams and golden autumn leaves  
and the first hints of winter,  
it dawned on me that I was mapping the land with my body.*

*Step by step, breath by breath,  
the tilt of the hip and the slide of the shale,  
the smell of flowers and the flush of memory,  
the buzzing of bees and pleasure of energy's song.*

*And as I mapped the land, the land was mapping me.  
And traces of our lives mingle and flow,  
shaping and being shaped,  
mapping each other in flesh and heartbeat and kidney function,  
in shifting metabolisms and felt sense respondings.*

*And as we mapped a knowing blossomed clear and fine;  
that the map is the terrain  
itself transforming through being  
the map makers, that we are.*

### **Suggestion – #1**

It may be time to have a stretch and walk and to take a break from reading. While you do, consider who you are and how the universe must dance, such that you and I can metaphorically 'walk' together the way we do.

## *Lenses: meditation as scientific research*

*Meditations are like lenses that can help us illumine and look deeply into, what is happening here and now – in this very moment of looking.*

With the benefit of hindsight I can see that my life has involved many different lenses: binoculars and telescopes to clarify distant, relatively large objects, microscopes to resolve the ultra small, and hand held lenses for revealing the middle ground. Some are cheap plastic throw-aways. Some are expensive, heavy, complex high tech pieces of equipment. Some are lightweight and adapted to be worn on one's nose as glasses. In addition to lenses that bring light into our eyes, there are lenses to focus light *onto* objects such as lenses in my flashlight and in the illumination devices going into my microscopes. In microscopy it becomes obvious that how we illumine the object we are interested in is just as important as how we receive data (often in the form of light waves) coming from the object. It strikes me that there is a profound parallel between lenses and how we use them and meditation done for the purpose of awakening.<sup>12</sup>

Buddhism is renowned for its many meditation practices. A classic Theravadin text, the *Visuddhimagga*, details 40 different types of meditation. In the Tibetan cannon you can find many more, and if you include all the forms associated with Mahamudra, Dzogchen, and the yogas of skilful fabrication and effortless naturalness, and then throw in those found in the traditions of Zen, Pure-land, Tien'tai and Avatamsaka, it could be said that the number of

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<sup>12</sup> An inspiring introduction to light and microscopy can be found in the short youtube doco <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBmzwM76V0o>>

meditation practices are infinite. From the standpoint of 'awakening' though, all meditation techniques are the same. They are lenses that can help us both illumine and look deeply into, what is happening here and now – in this very act of looking.

As part of furthering their understanding of nature and the ecology of living systems, a novice contemplative scientist or meditator will often go through a period of being obsessed with lenses. They study the available models; comparing, evaluating and asking others for their opinions. Gradually, they learn how to operate and to look after a range of lensing equipment. They become skilled in keeping the adjustment knobs not too loose and not too tight so that they will turn smoothly. They learn how to keep the lenses clean and how to skilfully wipe them if they have become dirty.

Conversations between enthusiastic beginners will often involve comparing powers of magnification, cost, convenience, technique and so forth. It's not hugely different from car enthusiasts discussing engines, or I.T. specialists comparing processor speeds along with the latest apps. However, such conversations gradually disappear in the lives of mature researchers who are more interested in actually using the equipment for more detailed looking. An experienced scientist will see more through an inexpensive student microscope than a beginner will see through the most expensive piece of lab equipment. As a metaphor, this could also be applied to meditators. Complex meditations are not necessarily better or more advanced than simple ones. With gathering experience, in both science and meditation, it becomes increasingly clear that the very act of looking and learning is itself a competence that can be intentionally cultivated and refined.

A master lens-person will be skilled in attending to their equipment and matching it to the task at hand. Occasionally, they will come

into unexpected situations where no 'off-the-shelf-lens' will do the job and so they use their intuition and experimental inventiveness to sometimes tweak existing equipment and sometimes to build totally new pieces of equipment that will support their ongoing research. Thus with deepening confidence in their particular discipline, and a clear sense of what they are trying to explore, they feel their way into new territory.

As mentioned earlier, Buddhist meditations could be compared to optical lenses. It's not uncommon for novice seekers, especially in cultures that are prone to what the Tibetan lama Chogyam Trungpa called "spiritual materialism", to become collectors of 'lenses'; collectors of meditation techniques: big ones, small ones, common ones, rare ones, expensive ones, cheap off-the-rack ones, esoteric ones and so forth. With the benefit of hindsight, I look back fifty years to the early 1970s when we hippie seekers were first meeting with Buddhist meditation practices. We studied how they 'work', vying with each other to become experts in histories, pedigrees and lineages. It wasn't uncommon to be so caught up in the glow of acquiring and then 'owning' them that few beings got around to effectively using them! Today there is a huge market place for so called spiritual techniques. Connoisseurs and collectors of equipment, but more often just common-variety show-offs, we flaunt our spiritual practices, if not to others then internally to ourselves. We debate their merits, trade them and cultivate an identity of being associated with them. Sometimes we even invest in them, hoard them and brag about them. Look what I have: apochromatic, compound, oil-immersion, phase contrast or dissecting! In a contemplative sense we might say, look what I have: breathing meditation, body scan meditation, mantra, visualisation, movement, prayer, vipassana, jhana and so forth. We continue to carve up the world into categories of valuable and less valuable.

This one is powerful and esoteric. That one is merely ordinary and general. At times we can become so filled with pride in receiving rare teachings and empowerments, debating with others about which ones are most effective, that we never quite get round to using them. Yet what use is a lens if we don't use it to enhance seeing! There are many good lenses. Some are high magnification and some are low. Each one allows us to see a different dimension of being, so in the right situation and circumstance every lens has value.

The similarities between optics and effective meditation can go even further. In meditation not only do we learn to cultivate continuum clear attentiveness but we learn to frame and focus our enquiry through refining our capacities for sustaining a presence of increasingly open curiosity and question. This is the equivalent of lenses that focus light onto the object. Learning to illumine our living with attentive interest in the midst of the constantly changing situations and circumstances of life is a central skill in lens-ship. Whether exploring through optics or through meditation, with deepening mastery of either comes confidence and competence. We feel more and more at home in exploring the richness and detail of our ever changing existence. Just as a mature lab technician will invent new equipment when nothing available can do a good enough job, so too, a mature meditator will adapt their practice to be more effective and sometime even invent entirely new approaches to their area of question.

Using optical equipment we inevitably bring a lot of habits to the looking, so in order to make best use of the lens, we will often need to learn new skills in seeing. With a microscope, instead of straining to see a world of the tiny, we need to learn to relax our vision, softening the muscles in our shoulders and necks and allowing the light to come to us. As in meditation, it helps to breathe! When

looking through a telescope, we learn to use our peripheral vision in order to register the very faint impressions of distant objects. Trying too hard to peer into space only blocks our experience. Whether using telescope or microscope, a beginner will be rewarded for their patience. We grow our way into understanding through experimental trial and error. To see new worlds is to see in fresh ways and this requires adjustments in physiology that extend throughout our entire organism. Over time, through becoming more familiar and proficient with this reflective dance of enquiry and transformative discovery, we will inevitably discern more and more detail.

Some people have demonstrated an almost miraculous gift for this. Biologist Barbara McClintock in the 1940s was able to see changes in the structure of chromosomes that virtually no-one else could see until many years later when much more sophisticated lenses were available. She not only looked through her laboratory microscope but she planted the maize she was investigating and then observed it growing at every stage, from sprout to harvest. She emphasised to her graduate students the importance of cultivating "a feeling for the organism" that one is studying. After years of being dismissed as fringe scientist, she was awarded a Nobel prize in recognition of her work. This illustrates how we don't really see a world that is 'out there', as if it were sitting around waiting to be seen. Rather we 'see' or perhaps we should say perceive a world that we intuit should be there. We see with our knowing and we know with the entire of our organism. There is so much more to looking than what meets the eye! Through our looking we are transformed and as we transform, so too does the world that we know.

\* \* \*

## *Meditation as Scientific Research*

*Low powers of magnification help widen field of experience but support less detail. We see large sections of forest but not the individual fungi, plants and animals. Higher powers of magnification narrow the field and reveal more detail. We see the components but lose sight of the forest.*

Although many people associate scientific research with lab equipment, flow charts and complex mathematical formulas, none of these things is fundamental for science. Living science, as opposed to applied technology or popular myths about science, is birthed in, and sustained by, an engulfing desire for deeper understanding of nature and how we fit with everything. Science begins with curiosity and the experimental investigations that enhance such curiosity. The Buddhist approach to 'awakening' is similarly based. In the Mahayana tradition, it is said that all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are born from the "perfection of wisdom" (*prajnaparamita*), which sometimes is referred to as the mother of all Buddhas. In Buddhism, *prajna*, (wisdom) is defined in many ways, depending on context. As a quality of everyday life it is revealed in what Buddhist translator and teacher Karl Brunnholzl describes as the inherent inquisitiveness and curiosity of one's own mind (one's own knowing) which is very precise and playful, at the same time. This inquisitiveness and curiosity is a delicate blending of clear discernment (the precision) and experimentation (the playfulness). Without this attitude – Buddhists call it *bodhicitta* – we can forget, or even neglect, our childlike curiosity about life and instead the emphasis of meditation becomes more about learning and mastering techniques and about getting preconceived results.

In this sense, science and dharma are richly similar. A master of mindfulness is a kind of master lens-person. This mastery rests on

complete integration of two lensings of experience. One is question/enquiry and the other is experimental discerning observation. The object of our interest is illuminated by the quality and shape of our question and the aliveness of our being that we can bring to it.



### *The Shadow-side of Lenses*

*Looking through binoculars at a nearby bird, things in the background will seem blurry and out of focus. If you make the background sharper, the bird becomes fuzzy and out of focus. Trying to comprehend the dynamic complexity of life, the universe, and where in the flow of things we humans fit, presents us with a similar conundrum. It seems that the lens*



*we look through, the way we look and the attitudes that shape that looking, to a large degree determine the world we see.*

The early 21st century is marked by the availability of an extraordinary number of lenses. Each one brings particular aspects into focus while the rest blurs into a background shadow land of little or no perceived importance. For each way of viewing there there has grown a discipline and a community of beings for whom this particular approach becomes the fundamentally most important truth or passion of their lives. We have science, art, religion and political lenses. We have capitalist, socialist, anarchist and feminist lenses. We have genetics, evolutionary biology, physics, geology, astronomy, cosmology, anthropology, mythology and so forth – myriad lenses. A complete list would be unimaginably huge with each category having its own subcategories and specialities. Looking through the lens of molecular biology, metabolic pathways become clear but large scale social movements fade from the picture. Any act of looking brings somethings into the light of understanding but does so while banishing the rest of the world into an unintended forgetfulness. This is becoming a serious problem. Believing that our cherished lenses (which are often unconscious) reveal the truth of things inevitably contributes to a fragmenting world.<sup>13</sup> This seems to be the shadow side of lenses.

Could we imagine a way of lensing that is capable of illuminating the entire dynamic, ever-evolving, mutual collaboration of parts and whole? A kind of 'omniscopes'? Cultivating such a lens could be seen as the leitmotif of this book.

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<sup>13</sup> Calling this a serious problem could be overly euphemistic. In failing to deeply explore the inter-beingness of all life, we become vulnerable to the forces of prejudice, fear, hatred, war, sectarianism, brutality that are all too rampant in the world today.



## Suggestion – #2

In his book, "Life Ascending", Alexander Skutch wrote; "An outstanding attribute of an awakened spirit is its expansiveness, its insatiable hunger to experience more widely, to know more broadly and profoundly, to cultivate friendly intercourse with the whole of Being. The noblest mind is that which understands, appreciates and loves the largest segment of the Universe." Rest for a moment in the fullness of your being and feel the rhythms of your breathing, your contact with the earth and your hunger to know more broadly and profoundly.

## *What's in a Title?*

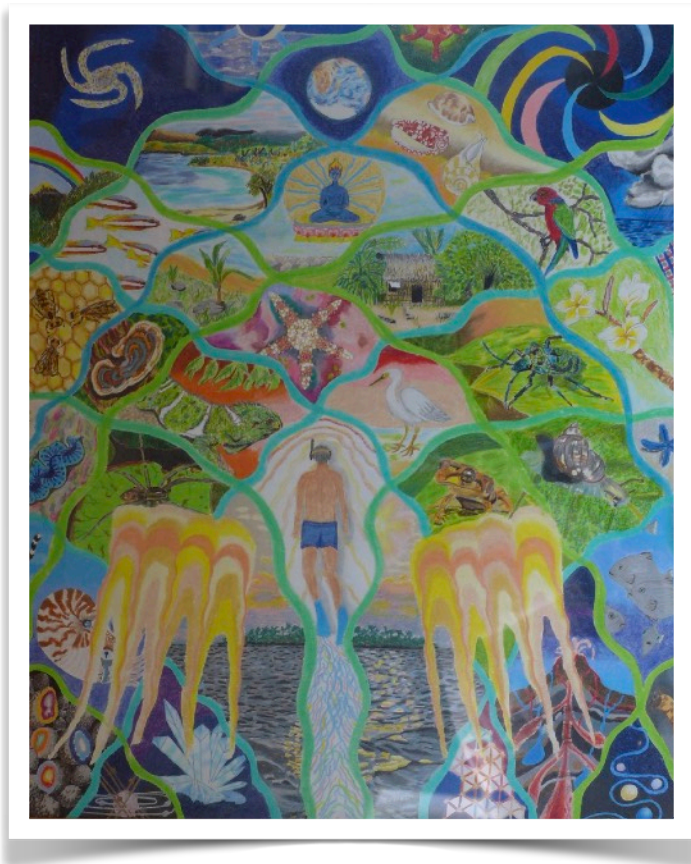
*This book, which weaves together the two great passions and interests of my life: buddhadharma and science based ecology, has been puttering along with starts and stops, gestating for more than twenty years. During that time, the project has morphed and found new shapes that were reflected in a number of different titles. Each one hinted at a subtly different approach to what increasingly feels to me to be an integrated natural process of unfoldment, a process that has been fertile and fecund for billions of years – a process involving everything and everyone.*

*Unable to decide which title was most appropriate I thought to use them all, perhaps as sub-titles, but this came with its own drawback of over-complication. Realising that the straightforwardness of the work risked being obscured by a surfeit of grandiose labels, it felt right to gather them all together and call it "Gifts of Wonderment". In this section I'll share with you some of those alternate titles.*

**I**n some traditions of Tibetan Buddhism there is a belief – perhaps we should call it an inspired assumption – that profoundly mature spiritual beings are sometimes able to comprehend the intent of a dharma text by simply reading its title. I like this idea; that somehow, a memorable phrase could instantly invoke a lived experience of perhaps profound at-oneness or, the mystery of integrative living replete with dimension and detail.

Closer to our western culture, physicist and philosopher David Bohm often alluded to the impossibility of seeing the whole universe all at once. Remember the example of using binoculars to view

wildlife. In seeing one aspect we exclude another. Although in a certain sense this is inevitable, nevertheless, a contemplative scientist will actively try to cultivate a capacity for holding many views which gradually, through the day by day process of his or her attentive living, will meld together in a breath of intuition. Then, taken deeply to heart, this multidimensional mode of seeing/ understanding will inform fresh ways of meeting the world. With this in mind perhaps we could regard the following as being more than merely alternate titles. I'm offering them in the hope that they can hint at different angles and more inclusive ways of viewing.



## *Alternate Title 1*

# Contemplative Enquiry As a Way of Entering The Immeasurable Holoverse

*This title feels very close to my heart, informing much of my dharma practice from the very first days of meeting Namgyal Rinpoche through till today.*

## Contemplative Enquiry

In today's world, enquiry or question is commonly regarded as an attempt to solicit, either an answer, or explanation for something – usually expressed in the form of words and concepts. In general, question and answer are seen as an almost inseparable dyad, with question often viewed as the junior partner, a mere expedient or tool, and answers being the more valued and elevated of the two. I suppose this is understandable. To genuinely ask a question is to demonstrate one's lack of knowing. After all, if you already knew, there wouldn't be much point in asking. For some, active enquiry is tantamount to a confession of ignorance, which sometimes can even feel embarrassing or shameful – an agitated discomfort of dwelling in uncertainty. Our culture values great answers. We celebrate and publicise them, but what about brilliant questions? Ones that no-one thus far has ever thought to ask? In a sense, an answer is the end of the matter, whereas a question can be doorway to unthought of possibilities.

The way we enquire reveals a common difference between adults and children. Adults are constantly wanting answers or solutions to the problems of living. The discomfort of 'not-knowing' drives us to seek an answer or solution that we hope will relieve the painful feelings of our ignorance. For children, the situation is quite

different. For them, to enquire or question is a way of experimentally testing and tuning themselves to the unknown. Through this continual attunement, we grow physically, emotionally and mentally into the next moment. To question or enquire with honesty and integrity, requires an unpretentious openness, trust and curiosity. This is the natural state of a well loved and well nourished infant. Before they are even able to speak, they live their enquiry. Even when looking for answers, they are certainly not looking for mere verbal or conceptual response.

Think back to your childhood and remember the excitement of alive enquiry. Remember the tactile-kinaesthetic sensations of being alert, engaged and interested in something. Can you recapture that today? Instead of asking for someone else's understanding or opinion; be it an authority, an expert, a guru or god figure, we might cultivate our capacity for feeling our way into the thing or process itself. We re-learn learning with our entire bodily being entering the state of question/enquiry through touching what we are interested in with a tremendous degree of sensitive, open-hearted receptivity.

If we are interested in sound we might do whatever we can to augment our ability to listen. If it is a visual phenomena that is drawing us we can learn to sharpen our seeing. If we are enquiring into how everything fits together – the primordial question – *what on earth is going on?* – then we need to enter a way of being that is open to the full richness of whatever is arising. To genuinely be in a state of question requires that we be sensitive and responsive enough to explore the fullness of our living through the activity of this very same living. This reflective exploration, of us exploring the exploring that we are, is what I think of as 'contemplative enquiry'. It is the living heart of meditation and mindfulness practice and will be the subject of much of this book.

*I lay down the path of my living  
Through living.  
Footsteps continuous  
Patterning without break.  
Ground meeting soul.  
I and thee,  
Laying down paths of living  
A living world templating this pathway of me.*

Contemplation and meditation have different meanings to different people though sometimes they are used interchangeably. To clarify what I mean by "contemplative enquiry", I'll try to indicate how I differentiate contemplation and meditation. Consider the process of learning to play a piano. At the beginning we are taught scales and exercises which, through practice, will gradually co-ordinate finger and muscle and nervous system, along with hearing and feeling and so forth. Meditation is a bit like this. Through meditating, we learn to co-ordinate attention, interest, sensitivity, memory and unfolding physiology in a seamless flow of focussed engagement. Not many people would practice scales and exercises in order to become master scale players. Presumably we play scales as a way of facilitating our ability to make and enjoy music. In a similar fashion we develop our skills in mindful attention in order to be able to facilitate the music of living – the ever-evolving web of inter-relating that is our life in action.

Changing the metaphor a bit, we could compare meditation practice to kneading dough for pastry. In baking we take flour, water, salt, butter, and whatever other ingredients that we are using, and we mix them together, working it until the pastry becomes uniformly moist and malleable. In meditation, we combine mindful



attentiveness, intention, physiology, sensing, memory, analysis, and so forth and work them until they are thoroughly integrated, at which point our minds feel soft, open, malleable, flexible and workable. At this point we are ready to enter what I think of as contemplation.

When I was young, my mother would bake shortbread cookies. She would mix the dough and then roll it out on the table top. We kids then had the job of taking cookie cutters shaped as crescent moons, stars and various animals and pressing them into the dough. These variously shaped cookies were then baked in the oven. If one tried to do this in reverse, in other words first baking the sheet of dough and then doing the cutting, everything would crumple. Remembering this experience has given me a fresh insight into contemplation. The cookie cutters were metal templates and the dough was what we templated – we con (*with*) templated.

In terms of spiritual practice, contemplation is an act of sensitive dialogue. We contemplate the universe while the universe is contemplating us. First we need to become soft enough and malleable enough to be shaped by the universe. If we are tough and opinionated with unconscious likes and dislikes, it is not likely that the universe of 'other' will make much of an impression on us beyond perhaps strengthening these prejudices. To enter 'templation' – contemplation – oneself and one's 'environment' mutually and simultaneously template each other and are templated by each other. I template the universe while the universe templates me. This mutual 'templation' is true contemplation. We are shaped through enquiring and our way of enquiring is shaped by who we are. Engaging with the universe from a stance of curiosity, inquisitiveness and interest, stimulates transformations in our being. Contemplation leads to a re-directed enquiry which in turn leads to fresh contemplation, and so forth. This is a dialectic, an on-going



process with no absolute beginning or end.

As we acclimatise to this contemplative dance, we might raise the question of who is doing the contemplation and we might find ourselves plunged into a state of profound communion, a sense of oneness, blessedness, reverence and gratitude.

*Dwelling in a space of love,  
tendrils of curiosity reaching forth in all directions,  
we feel our way,  
softening and sensitizing into the richness of community,  
a living world within us, around us and through us.*

*Apprentices of wonderment and awe,  
probing and questioning,  
sampling and savouring  
with calm abiding and vivid discernment together exquisitely intermeshed,  
we touch our home,  
this world,  
of you and me and all of us together,  
precious  
beyond words.*

## A Way of Entering the Immeasurable Holoverse

Contemplative enquiry is the way of entering. It is the path – or practice, or method, or manner – of entering. Borrowing from other cultures we might call it the tao of entering, or dharma of entering. To enter something is to embark, to cross the threshold, to move from being outside and separate from something to being completely enclosed and part of it. 'Entering' hints at primordial ever fresh meeting, realising, recognising and surrendering into being what, in this case, I'm calling the immeasurable holoverse.

In the voluminous and syncretic mahayana *Flower Ornament Scripture*, also known as *The Avatamsaka Sutra* or *Hwa Yen*, we find the phrase, "worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction" or sometimes, "realms (of experience) interpenetrating realms (of experience) without obstruction". These expressions point to how the nature of everything and everyone is interdependent co-emerging process-in-action. From this perspective, the universe is a continuous inter-dancing of the seemingly private and personal 'inner' experience of each observer or experiencer, and the seemingly shared 'outer' or public reality. Instead of worlds interpenetrating worlds, we might say processes within processes within processes. Shifts in the small more localised realms trigger responses in the large and more encompassing ones. At the same time, shifts in the large trigger responsive adjustments in the small. Wherever you look, movements making up the interior of things are inter-responding with movements of exterior things. Mental and perceptual processes are shaping physical processes while at the same time those same physical processes are shaping mental and perceptual process. Individuals are influencing collectives while societies are shaping individuals. This multi-dimensional and multi-domained interweaving of causes and conditions ultimately involves the continually dynamic and constantly evolving universe in all its entirety. Because it includes everything it is beyond any capacity to meaningfully measure, hence the term *immeasurable*. In the Avatamsaka this experience of totality is sometimes referred to as "*Indra's Net*".

When deeply examined, any 'thing' or *dharma*, be it perceptual or conceptual, will reveal itself to be not a static object, but a dynamic web of interdependent relationships which all together comprise the organizing process of that thing we are analysing. In other words, any one thing, or unit of experience, when thoroughly investigated,

will reveal itself to be composed of many things, each of which is engaged in the process of relating to many other things. For a human being, this dynamic mandala of relationships involves a number of domains of consideration. Take your own body as an example. The single unit or entity you think of as your body is composed from, or arises out of, the activity of uncountable 'interior' biological, chemical, and physical processes. At the same time, these interior activities are actively engaging in myriad 'exterior' relationships linking with things and processes existing beyond your skin.

Living bodies involve a constant dance of relating with a continuously evolving ecosystem. How your body is functioning depends on the weather, the rhythms of the sun, the behaviour of your parents; on social conventions of economics, education, religious belief, and so forth. Your body's interior physiological and chemical functioning at any particular time is intimately responsive to where your body is located in a larger exterior world. Simultaneously the surrounding world is adjusting to the summation of your interior functioning. It wouldn't be unreasonable to say that you are nothing but a constantly transforming field of multi-dimensional relationships in action.

*Inner and Outer*

*both are giving rise to  
this body*

Analysis is a process whereby we deconstruct an initially assumed single thing or unit into a dynamic of internal and external factors which themselves can be analysed into further internal and external factors and so forth until the initial so called solid form seemingly 'disappears' into a vast dance of un-pin-downable movement. Buddhist practitioners sometimes call this the 'non-abiding'.

Analysis however, will not show the whole story of what is taking place. A study of multi-levelled relationship will also reveal synthesis which could be thought of as the seeing/understanding of particular forms or units, arising from this dancing non-abidingness.

With deep pervasive investigation, the world dissolves into un-pin-downable mystery while simultaneously, it appears, rainbow-like from an interweaving of myriad factors and processes. In Buddhism, this ungraspable spacious open nature of things, this open nature of beingness/ non-abidingness, is called *sunyata*.

*Nothing arises from a single cause.*

*Nothing exists by its own power.*

*Nothing arises singly.*

*This is a heart truth of interdependent arising.*

Borrowing from the ideas of hologram, holistic or wholistic, I have called this totality of worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction, the 'holoverse' and the collaborative activity of interdependent responsiveness that gives rise to it, a 'holomovement'. I was first inspired to use these terms back in 1986 by the physicist, David Bohm.<sup>14</sup> Around that time I wrote the following poem and dedicated it to him.

*I enter the holoverse through the trapdoor of my body.*

*Rivers of trembling, lighting the streamings,*

*Stardusting swirlings of lifetiming motes,*

*Fields pulsing softly and broadly and fast,*

*Crisscrossing oceans of endlessly sparkling*

*Visions of all times,*

*Radiating vast implications,*

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<sup>14</sup> For those interested in Bohm's work, I heartily recommend a new collection of his writings called, "The Essential David Bohm" edited by Lee Nichol.

*In simple points of infinite complexity.  
I enter the holoverse through the trapdoor of my body.  
The holoverse bodily enters through me.*

*The future is now.  
The hall of mirrors as metaphor is shattered in the face of a holoverse  
rich and wondrous beyond all imagining.  
All and nothing, one and many  
Vast and minute, separately and sequentially and simultaneously.  
Words fade as eyes open even wider  
and even wider still!*

"Contemplative Enquiry as a Way of Entering the Immeasurable Holoverse"; this was one alternate title for this book you currently hold in your hands, "*Gifts of Wonderment*"



## *Alternative Title 2*

### **A Modern Practice of Satipatthana**

*This title has grown from my years of involvement with Buddhist philosophy and practice.*

Often referred to as the heart or foundation of Buddhist meditation, *satipatthana* has been studied, practiced, thought about, and written about, for hundreds of years. By designating this as a 'modern practice' it might wrongly seem to imply that satipatthana – without the attribute of 'modern' – is old fashioned and that it could use some rejuvenating. In a way this is both true and not true. When the historic Buddha expounded these teachings he did so in the social vernacular of that time. In the hundreds of years since then, cultures have of course evolved, and Buddhist practitioners continued the tradition of elucidating these teachings, using concepts that are wide spread, commonly used and relevant to their particular times. Today, analytical tools of science have become an inseparable part of our culture, and so we inevitably make use of them. In this sense it is modern yet the term can convey much more. Modern also carries a sense of refreshment – it's current, it's relevant – it's a modern practice that reminds us of basics even as it uses the doorway of today.

This might seem odd but I sometimes find myself wondering how modern, modern is. Obviously we are not talking about a thousand years ago, or a hundred, or even fifty. We wouldn't call those times modern. What about last year, or last week, or yesterday? In a way the practice of here and now awareness, is perennially modern. This freshly arising moment of living that one is, is the cutting edge of contemplative exploration of any particular culture or time. In this sense a modern practice of satipatthana is eternally here and now.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, a man, who eventually became known to us as the Buddha, was driven to grapple with some of life's great conundrums.<sup>15</sup> How can one live well in a world that is constantly changing, unpredictable, and impossible for any single being to control? How can one live with impermanence and death, unsatisfactoriness and suffering, without shutting down, or escaping into fantasy, or grasping after facile philosophical explanations, or simply burying oneself in never ending reactivity and busyness? These questions, or ones similar, have moved yogis, philosophers and enquiring beings throughout history. They seem to be as relevant today as they were hundreds or thousands of years ago.

The Buddha's life demonstrated what I have come to think of as the path of the contemplative scientist. He looked directly into his moment by moment experience of living. This was deep and intimate exploration. His ongoing body, speech, mind and activities became a laboratory for experimentation and observation. With remarkable clarity and attentiveness, he investigated these processes, trying to understand the roots of dissatisfaction and suffering. In the process, he discovered profound and essential keys for living well.

If the Buddha had been living in contemporary times, I'm sure that Charles Darwin's view of evolution along with studies of ecology, Humberto Maturana's presentation of autopoiesis, Lynn Margulis' studies of symbiosis, and Maxine Sheets-Johnston's work on the primacy of movement would have featured in his exposition. As it was, he preceded Edmund Husserl by hundreds of years, in being one of the world's first phenomenologists.

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<sup>15</sup> The rest of this section is adapted from my book "Foundations of Mindfulness".

Abandoning many of the religious and philosophical preconceptions, beliefs and biases of his day, he explored in a very pragmatic and factual way, letting his immediate actual experience guide the search. Eventually he came to understand what later became known as *The Four Noble Truths* or less conventionally, *The Four Realities of the Noble Ones*, or *The Four Great Realities*.

The Buddha saw that wherever there are compounded formations (*sankhara*), in other words, physical or mental objects, assemblages or processes that are made from contributing parts, there will inevitably be unsatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*). Every 'thing' – every dharma – is a transient flow-through of other things. Every living being needs to eat. Every living being is ultimately eaten by other beings. All things wear out. Dynamic systems fluctuate in their relating with other dynamic systems. Collision produces friction. Situations and circumstances arising in myriad domains of being, are continuously changing in ways that no single creature can completely control. Suffering, in the form of perceived unsatisfactoriness, is a great reality of life. This is *The First Noble Truth*.

With courage and determination not to run away from the suffering, he carefully examined these unavoidable facts of living and recognised the fundamental causes of *dukkha*. He saw that dissatisfaction, suffering and confusion are inevitably preceded and accompanied by partial or incomplete understanding of one's currently arising situation. This in turn gives rise to clinging or grasping – trying to make permanent, that which is impermanent – manifest in the forms of hope, fear, and expectation. The recognition that suffering arises from these causes – incomplete understanding, plus clinging and the activity flowing out from this – is another great reality of life. A thorough understanding of the complex causal matrix giving rise to suffering is *The Second Noble Truth*.



In the process of bringing a profound degree of friendly enquiry and wide awake interest to every moment of experience – in effect, through surrendering into and learning to warmly embrace the fullness of living in all its un-pin-downableness – he came to realise and experience a surprising presence of well-being, peace, wholeness, connectedness and health. This is the cessation of suffering and is *The Third Noble Truth*.

Abiding in the experience of profound peace (*nirvana*) – the cessation of suffering – he then reflected on how this way of being came about. Through these deep and integrative contemplations he began to understand the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. This path became known as the "Eight Fold Noble Path" and is *The Fourth Noble Truth*.

The key to unfolding these Four Noble Truths lies in persistent, friendly enquiry into what is taking place in our moment by moment living. In the Buddhist tradition, the *Satipatthana Sutta* is one of the most succinct and detailed outlines of how to do this. It sketches out, in a methodical step by step way, a very practical path of awakening. You could think of it as a map to guide us on the journey, an illustrated map with a few hints at the general landscapes we are likely to encounter on the way. Of course, even with the best map in the world, you still would have to do the actual walking yourself.

The text begins with where to meditate and how to sit. It then directs us to an exploration of our physical body beginning with mindfulness of breathing. Here we investigate and make friends with the living breathing organism that we are. These contemplations and enquiries eventually lead to a place of lucid awareness, deep stillness and calm.

The next step is to learn to carry this clear, calm, responsive,

awareness into the midst of activity. Gradually we come to experience the inter-beingness or communal nature of the physical body as an evolving compounded collaborative activity of many parts and processes. These explorations can lead to the dropping of all sorts of unhelpful attitudes and assumptions that we may have about our body. Eventually, all physical bodies reveal themselves to be beginningless/endless dancings of corporeal knowing, inseparable from a vast inter-connected, inter-dependent, constantly dynamic universe. This is the birthing of a deep ecological appreciation of the physical world and is the gateway to realising what is referred to in Buddhist texts as *sunyata* or 'emptiness', the spacious open inherently ungraspable mystery of inter-being.

Having investigated and become somewhat familiar with the complex inter-dependent dancings that comprise all physical forms, the meditator then begins to explore the mystery of mind, cognition and knowing. The sutra directs us to examine what could be called the feeling or evaluation function; the processes of body/mind whereby likes, dislikes and preference emerge in the flow of our living. With deepening respect for the body and an increasing equanimity in the way we evaluate new situations in terms of liking, disliking and indifference, we are invited to explore the play of mind states, the huge array of emotions and flavours of knowing and attentiveness that colour and sometimes dictate human experience. Finally, equipped with a bright, clear, appreciative awareness of body, feelings and mind states, one expands the investigation to include the vast array of *dharma* – the complex phenomena or truths and communal understandings of nature/life unfolding.

The *Satipatthana Sutta* is commonly understood to be the Buddha's most pithy and essential teaching on the cultivation of mindfulness. Oddly, the word *sati* doesn't actually mean mindfulness. It more precisely means 'remembrance' or 'to remember'. The *Pali Text*

*Society Dictionary* hints at alternate possibilities, using words such as memory, recognition, consciousness; intentness of mind, wakefulness of mind, mindfulness, alertness, lucidity of mind; self possession, conscience, self-consciousness. There is more to mindful-ness than just mindfulness!

*Patthana* conveys the sense of setting forth (on a journey), putting forward (for examination); origin, starting point or cause; stations or foundation. Interestingly the seventh volume of the *Abhidhamma*<sup>16</sup> is called "Patthana". In this book we find a profound analytical study of causal relations, an extensive contemplation of the various seminal factors; physical, mental, animate and inanimate, that together support or contribute to the arising and passing away of any particular thing or phenomena.

*Sati* and *patthana*, put together as a single word, satipatthana, is commonly translated, 'foundations of mindfulness'. More poetic renditions might give us phrases like: 'a lucid, alertness in the presence of the inter-dependent, inter-relatedness of things', or 'an alert, wakeful, recognition of how a complex weaving of factors is comprising this present moment of experience' or, 'an ever fresh cultivation of remembering/understanding the inter-being nature of everything'. In essence, the practice of satipatthana involves thoroughly cultivating, in an unbiased, lucid and intimate way, awareness of four basic areas of human experience: body or forms of embodiment *kaya*; feeling/evaluation *vedana*; states of mind *citta*; and objects of mind *dhamma*. As one's experience with each of these four deepens and matures, it will become clear that they are profoundly interdependent; continuously shaping and affecting

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<sup>16</sup> The *Abhidhamma* is a collection of teachings given by the Buddha which analyse in critical and discerning detail the workings of mind and matter and the process of liberation. A study of *Abhidhamma* can provide a meditator an expansive array of analytical tools with which to better understand their place in the universe.

each other. In time, a rich sense of how they interweave and support each other in an unbroken, flowing, creative continuum, will come to the fore.<sup>17</sup>

In *Gifts of Wonderment*, I will outline a practice of satipatthana that is in tune with today's world – an integration of science and contemplative practice. This is not really new. The Buddha approached life in a similar way. He began his meditative journey, equipped with the best education available. Obviously, he had no access to microscopes or telescopes. He knew nothing of cells and foetal development and cladistic lineages. He had no inkling of the Hertzsprung-Russell sequence of stellar evolution and the mystery of the periodic table. Many of the ways of extending our sensing and understanding of the world that today we take for granted were not available to him but this was not a lack. It didn't hold him back. The life we are living is our ground for awakening, not a life that might be – sometime in the future. He investigated the field of experience in which he found himself and in the process of doing so, came upon profound understandings that enabled him to make sense of the world of his time. He experienced life as a radically inclusive integrated whole and through this he discovered true peace.

Today, inspired by the Buddha's example, supported by education that broadens our capacity for appreciating animate organisms as domains of interacting space, time and knowing; we could learn the arts of contemplative enquiry, expanding our capacity to make sense of the world and our place in it, and in doing so, contribute something beautiful and life supportive to all beings.

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<sup>17</sup> A commentary on the Satipatthana Sutra can be found in *Foundations of Mindfulness*, Tarchin Hearn. 2019

*A Fresh Approach to Mindfulness*

*How to speak about this mystery?*

*Mind is that which minds.*

*Do you mind?*

*Do you care or have concerns?*

*Please be mindful of the fact that . . . .*

*In other words,*

*be careful and responsive*

*with and to this mystery.*

*To touch something mindfully implies*

*touching gently and sensitively;*

*with reverence and caring for the integrity of that particular 'what' that you are touching:*

*a hand,*

*a hip,*

*a thought,*

*a breath of ineffable.*

*And as you touch,*

*in turn, you are touched.*

*With mindfulness*

*we don't hurt this object when touching it.*

*We treat this 'otherness' with respect;*

*this otherness*

*touching their otherness,*

*that is you.*

*Surely this applies to all our senses.*

*Each child finds his or her way;*

*fumbling, stumbling,*

*growing into sensitivity,*

*clumsy at first,*

*then,  
gradually becoming smoother  
and more integrated  
and sometimes even graceful.*

*Think of a toddler,  
just learning to walk,  
sixteen years later,  
an olympic gymnast poised  
on the balance beam,  
vibrantly alert and focussing.*

*Mind-**full**-ness is a fullness of knowing,  
and fullness of knowing is discernment  
both detailed and vast,  
and love,  
and passion,  
and detachment  
and surrender  
and reverence  
and so much more.*

*Mindfulness, care-filled-ness, sensitive,  
attentive, respectful, engagement  
is nourished in the company of parents,  
then teachers,  
then mentors,  
then lovers and friends.*

*We copy each other;  
imprint on each other;  
responding to and with each other.*

*It matters how we proceed.  
Cultivating mindfulness is*

*to consciously grow;*

*maturing in smooth functional integration,  
a flowing of bodyhood, languaging  
and integrative experience.*

*Mindlessness takes us in a different direction;*

*towards frustration, pain, agitation, fragmentation,  
distrust and life sapping suspicion.*

*Mindfulness arises with inter-dancing.*

*Body, speech and mind;*

*the entire field of inter-being/inter-knowing,*

*all events and meanings:*

*self and other,*

*individual and groups;*

*universes of intelligence*

*flowering and unfolding.*

*What mystery!*

*This body! — physically growing,*

*an increased capacity for*

*delicacy,*

*harmony,*

*grace,*

*flexibility,*

*and co-ordination.*

*What mystery!*

*This speech! — skilfully intermingling,*

*kind,*

*uplifting,*

*supportive,*

*inspiring,*

*deep and meaningful,  
unending communion.*

*What mystery!*

*This mind! — a field of knowing;*

*blossoming,*

*attentive,*

*inclusive,*

*translucent;*

*a multi-levelled multi-domained shimmering presence  
of acceptance/understanding.*

*This minding mindful mind is the universe in process.*

*Experience is not a subjective representation.*

*It's not a personal re - presentation*

*of some mysterious otherness.*

*It is a presentation – always present,*

*a mutually transforming*

*interaction of participating events.*

*It takes two or more to 'language'.*

*It is not a matter of true or false perception,*

*as if there was a finite fixed being*

*or universe*

*out there,*

*waiting*

*to be correctly or incorrectly perceived;*

*something one could*

*or should*

*be mindful of.*

*Rather,*

*the unfolding dynamic of your living*

*is engaging with the dynamic unfolding*



*of so called 'other', in  
a collaborative whirling  
of ever-fresh transformation  
which is your knowing now.*

*So much more than a focussed action,  
a daily discipline,  
a Buddhist meditation  
to practise  
or to neglect.*

*Fully flowered,  
mindfulness perfumes everything,  
a quality of being  
transforming everything,  
even mundane ordinary living;*

*This Satipatthana  
this setting up of mindfulness,  
an always available profoundly open  
way of blessing and peace.*

*Mindfulness is the flavour of healthy knowing in action.*

*And so, returning to the question . . .  
"How to speak about this mystery?"  
this thusness —*

*Look around you!*

*What you are seeing and experiencing . . .  
this . . .  
is how we speak!*

### *Alternative Title 3*

## **Progressive Stages in the Praxis/Yoga of Deep Ecology and Contemplative Science**

*"We don't see things the way they are;  
we see things the way we are." – Anais Nin*

*To thoroughly realise the implications of deep ecology is to feel profoundly at home in the living world. To merge the essence of deep ecology and contemplative science so that our life is filled with interest and wonderment without ever leaving home, is belongingness as blessing.*

### **Progressive Stages**

In general, a human life could be considered as a sequence of development and growth: conception, gestation, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and dying. Through this progression, we mature from foetal-hood into adult humanness. Each stage is an expression of myriad dancings of relationship: foetus~womb, child~mother, person~world. Each stage involves inter-weavings of mechanical, chemical, cellular, conceptual, social and ecological activity. One's current dispositions, capacities and talents for relating, emerge and proliferate seamlessly from preceding stages. Biologically speaking, skipping a stage is not an option. A maturing path of meditation/contemplation/communion is similar, in that there is a progressive maturing of contemplative skills that go hand in hand with an expanding breadth, depth and subtlety of life experience. Although, in terms of meditation practice, it may feel productive to simply follow your current

passions and interests, the experiences gained through wrestling with and coming to some competence in the sequence of themes suggested later in this book, will lay a foundation for rich and wonder filled living.<sup>18</sup>

## Praxis/Yoga

In English, the word practice is used in a number of ways. It might conjure up the image of a learner repeating something again and again until they are good at it. Alternately we could think of a doctor practicing medicine who continues to learn while at the same time helping others. Such a doctor is simultaneously teacher, student and technician; living and learning all rolled into one. Intentionally living in this reflexive way is what I mean by praxis. Moment by moment what we are is transforming through what we do. In this sense, praxis and yoga can be regarded as synonyms.

Yoga is a broadly used term that is common throughout India, S.E. Asia and the Himalayan regions. In a general sense it refers to any practice, discipline or process that encourages a path or way of living that feels integrated, whole, complete and unified. 'Yoga' can also refer to the result of such training; a realisation of natural primordial unity, the direct experience of wholeness, a radical inclusivity involving everything and everyone. Years ago when asked what I was, in terms of a profession, I would sometimes describe myself as a "yogi of the natural world". Saying this, I was alluding to my understanding that the natural world of co-evolving

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<sup>18</sup> Namgyal Rinpoche used to say that "you need to be jack of all trades and a master of *at least one*." The process of 'mastering' any particular discipline requires us to accumulate a range of skills and competencies: skills in focussed attention, sensitive responsiveness, empathy and intuition, dealing with expectations and disappointments, memory, patience, experimentation and evaluation. Once developed, these skills will then find their way into whatever field we turn our attention to. Mastering any discipline usually involves a progression of learning. In this, there is no difference between contemplative science and buddhist meditation.

biosphere and geophysical transformation (a vast, ultimately immeasurable matrix of multi-dimensional collaboration) is giving rise to me in the act of appreciating and engaging with this natural world, which itself is giving rise to me. Being this beginningless/endless inter-dependence, is yoga. The path, practice or praxis that leads someone to realising it is yoga.

Contemplating my life from the vantage point of seventy years, I find I can easily think of it as an immense braided river of becoming with many crisscrossing streams. Two main channels seem to stand out in terms of their depth and strength of flow. One is fifty years of immersion in Buddhist study and practice, and the other is a life long passion for science and scientific enquiry. Over time these disciplines have become so utterly intermeshed in my ways of experiencing, understanding and exploring that I forget, that for many people, they seem to be two quite separate worlds. I have often thought that if you were to take the science out of my Buddhism my understanding of Buddhism would be hugely impoverished. The same thing would occur if you removed the Buddhist practice from my scientific interests. Yoga of course, is a word more associated with Buddhism than with science, however in this research proposal I would encourage you to consider both deep ecology and contemplative science as modern disciplines of yoga.

Such praxis or yoga requires us to first learn and then to integrate various capacities in the art of what I think of as contemplative research. The main body of this book will address this in considerable depth. At this point though, I would like to draw attention to two central skills of both yogis and scientists. The contemplative thinker, Krishnamurti often referred them as two types of praxis or yoga. One he called "choiceful awareness" and the other he called "choiceless awareness".

In the process of our living, we are continuously choosing to be involved with some things and not with others. We can make skilful choices that contribute to deepening wisdom and compassion both in ourselves and in others and we can make unskilful choices that contribute to problems. I think of choiceful awareness as a yoga of skilful fabrication, where we intentionally participate in the collaborative fabrication of our moment by moment experience. Choiceless awareness is subtly different. Here we find ourselves, engulfed in faith and trust and wonderment, surrendering into the fullness of what is happening. I think of this as the yoga of effortless naturalness.

Through cultivating the yoga of skilful fabrication we nourish a suite of life skills that support us in integrating our conscious intentions and aspirations, with the vast field of activity that is our living physiology responding with and to a congruently evolving environment. Personal action and aspiration along with communal activity at many levels interact in constructing or fabricating the ongoing lived experience of our lives – both our interior private personal life and our publicly recognised communally shared life. Living is profoundly collaborative. Our understanding of the world affects how we perceive it and at the same time, our perceptions of the world influence and shape our understanding of how to be with it. Enlarging our capacities for perceiving the world, we expand our understanding. Widening our understanding, we extend our capacity to perceive and imagine.

Different cultures will describe or explain this creative process based on their particular history of experientially understanding and explaining the universe. In ancient Tibet, yogis knew nothing about DNA, cell differentiation, brain structure and evolving ecology yet they could still develop an unshakable confidence in a totally interdependent universe described with terms such as bodhisattva,

factors of enlightenment, lotus flowers, rainbows, chakras, energy channels and blessings of the lama. What I think of as the yoga of skilful fabrication, the Tibetans called 'arising yoga'. In the modern scientific world, our explanations need to include physiology, cosmology, genetics, social conditioning and so much more.

In a general sense, the praxis or yoga of skilful fabrication could be thought of as an orderly process whereby our various experiential understandings of the diversity of life and living are knit together into a single living fabric. Bringing forth and cultivating such a realisation requires intentional training. It is something we choose to participate in and requires a range of skills and disciplined effort. In this sense it is choiceful. Through persistently engaging this praxis/yoga, we come to feel increasingly immersed in a flow of ineffable wholeness, a sense of completeness, a state of union in which the diversity and specificity of life is fully evident. With deepening experience, these progressive stages of praxis and yoga merge as a seamless mystery of love and clear seeing which infuses everything we do and all the doing that we are.

## Deep Ecology

Ecology is often seen as a branch of biology focussed on the relationships between living organisms and their environment. Derived from ancient Greek *oikos* meaning home and *logia* a study, the word potentially points to a discipline that is much bigger and more inclusive than the ecology of popular understanding. Ecology is essentially the study of home, of how and where we live, where we are situated, where we find ourselves, and finally, how and where we find our sense of belonging. Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, wanting to emphasise this broader meaning, coined the term 'deep ecology'. He used the term 'deep' not to denigrate popular ecology but to point out the depth and breadth of enquiry

needed to fully understand and experience our place in nature. Deep ecology invites us to investigate where we are situated in the scale of deep time (spans of millions or even billions of years of evolution) and poly-dimensional space (both micro: cells and molecules and atoms, and macro: organisms, societies, biospheres, solar systems and galaxies).

Home, of course, is much more than a house. A house can be any temporary shelter from the elements, but a home is community, the matrix of relationships in which we live and belong. In such a community we are conceived, we grow, we raise our children and eventually we die. For many people, ecology appears as a dry scientific study of interrelating creatures and their environments that involves delineating food webs and carbon cycles, weather systems and geophysical processes. Gradually we build an understanding of a complex world of interdependent objects and with it some sense of our place in the dancing of it all. In fact, the story is much more complex.

As an animate organism I am a simultaneous two-fold expression – an interweaving of both ontogeny and phylogeny. Ontologically I exist as a particular living creature. I am an individual with my own unique history of relatings. These two beings (my parents) had sex. This genome was expressed in relationship with this particular environment, place, time, temperature, social conditions and so forth. This, however is only part of the story. Phylogenically I am a statistical likelihood of the particular form and behaviours characterised by the species or category of creatures to which I belong, a species itself located in an evolving web of relationships with other species.

It is interesting to contemplate when my ontogenic expression (my personal history) began. Was it when I became a Buddhist? When I

was a child? When I was born? Actually, it feels incomplete to explain my development beginning from a point occurring part way through my life. To have a complete story of how I have come to be who and what I currently am, I need to begin with conception. We could of course ask the same question of my phylogenic expression (my evolutionary history). Where and when did that begin? With the first human, or primate, or mammal, or vertebrate or eukaryote or even the first indications of cellular life process?

From the temporal perspective of mountains and continental drift, I appear as a relatively young ontologically unique being, a special character, an individual talent that is maturing through the experience of living in relationship with the beings and environments that I meet. I am also phylogenically ancient and average; nothing special, one among many, a team playing member of a continuously evolving process of species and biomes. That each one of us is both a personal history and an evolutionary history is relatively understandable. The challenge comes in contemplating the implications of consciously integrating these two in a seamless flow of living where I am a special someone and a statistically average no-one in particular; a flow of individual maturation that integrates the experiences of a unique life, and a journey of evolution that has been transforming the planet for billions of years.

An effective praxis or yoga of deep ecology brings an increasing confidence and competence in being this two-fold stance, so much so that it begins to inform all one's decisions and subsequent activities. This is the more complete story of everyone, a story in which ecology deepens and transforms from being a study of interactive objects to being, as 'geologian' Thomas Berry eloquently pointed out, "a communion of subjects".



## Contemplative Science

Over the years, I have come to equate the vast study, practice and ultimate mystery of *buddhadharma*, with what I am more and more regarding as a 'life of contemplative science'. Here, I'm using the word science in its original generalised sense rather than in the way today's media often depicts it, as a synonym for technology or applied engineering or a cult of experts and specialists with a love of statistical analysis and things I.T. Essentially science is really an attitude to life and living. It arises out of a passion for understanding – a stance of engaged curiosity about what things are and how they work or function coupled with a willingness to experiment, explore and discern and be transformed in the process. In Buddhist terminology, this kind of science, a science dedicated to deepening our experiential understanding of ourselves and the world in which we grow, could be seen as a facet of wisdom in action.<sup>19</sup>

Although people doing science are often stereotyped as being detached analytical observers, they are at the same time ordinary human beings enmeshed with others in the trials and tribulations of living. Underpinning all forms of science is a curiosity about how things can function well and what their discoveries and fresh understandings might imply for living together in and as family and extended community. Buddhists would see this process as skilful means – contemplative science in the service of deepening and broadening our capacity for living. In Buddhist terminology, skilful means – this caring, sharing, integrative aspect of life – is seen as the work of compassion. A mature contemplative science would involve a profound integration of wisdom and compassion.

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<sup>19</sup> Wisdom or *prajña* (*Skt*) in Buddhism, can be defined as the inherent curiosity and inquisitiveness of one's own mind that is very precise and playful at the same time. I'm grateful to Buddhist scholar Karl Brunnholzl for this definition.

Investigating the interconnecting worlds, of micro and macro, inner and outer, self and others, conceptual and perceptual, will inevitably lead to us to questions about mind and knowing. Who and what is doing the investigating. This journey of deepening understanding can be approached in two different ways; from a third person or a first person perspective.

With an objective, third person perspective, we study the world of phenomena: anatomies and physiologies of various species, evolution and development, cultures and history, geo-science and cosmology. This is the field of detached observation and analysis – a familiar realm of traditional third person science.

An experiential first person perspective can be revealed through developing and refining our skills in meditation. This is a here and now, moment by moment intimate knowing of our own immediate functioning in the midst of interconnecting with (so called) others. Such meditation becomes a first person science of consciousness and knowing.

Going back and forth between these modes of exploration we begin to intuit the possibility of a seamless merging of the two. First person (subjective knowing) and third person (objective knowing) mesh with each other in a two-in-one mystery that, perhaps because of its subtle complexity, seems beyond many people's daily interest. Yet the ongoing, collaborative union of these two aspects of experience, shapes the flesh of our embodiment and vitality of our aliveness. To embrace this way of living with passion and interest is to engage in contemplative science.

Historically, the European "enlightenment" of the 1700s brought with it a reverence for rationality and an eclipsing of formal religion. In a way, science became the new religion. The sun was the centre of the solar system. Increasingly, it was thought that everything could

be explained and through explanation ultimately made conscious. Modernism beginning in the mid 19th century began to question this, and see irrationality as a driving force of nature. Darwin saw us as evolved from earlier life forms. Freud pioneered explorations of an unconscious. Art, science and industry interpenetrated and cross fertilised each other. I sometimes wonder if a post-modern world will evolve beyond a third person deconstruction and ripen into an age of contemplative science; a way of living that radically integrates inner and outer, public and private, self and other, faith and scientific investigation, creativity and conservatism, and so forth. Contemplative science is much more than simply combining contemplation and science. A way of contemplative science would bring with it a radical shift in the way we see ourselves and the universe.

*Being the fullness of the human animal that I am,  
Uniquely clothed in this  
continuously morphing collage of sentience,  
Abiding in the monastery of a world  
that is utterly and profoundly alive,  
I wander  
in unpretentious openness,  
wonderment  
and service.*

## Alternative Title 4

### Primordial Dharma

This poetical title springs from Buddhist roots, and resonates with myriad layers of meaning. For me it invokes a sense of lineage going far back into the earliest beginnings of human history while at the same time, being fresh and relevant in the world of today. Primordial dharma is revealed through recognising the ungraspable expanse of inter-beingness/inter-knowingness that we are: then, becoming confident in this view, familiarising with the ongoing implications of living this way, and interacting with so called others in ways that enhance and reflect such understandings. One might see this as the life work of all of us.

*Primordial Dharma;*

*Where meditation practice mirrors realisation.*

*Where, path and goal are not different.*

*Where what is studied or practised, is who is studying and practising,*

*Where love and clear seeing perfumes the ever-fresh gardens of our lives  
and the lives of all living beings.*

*Primordial dharma is an ungraspable treasure,*

*fundamentally inconceivable, it is*

*good in the beginning,*

*good in the middle*

*and good at the end.*

*It mothers, holds, supports and cradles everything,*

*This ever-fresh dancing of creativity and wonderment,*

*Its what I am*

*and what I do,*

*this primordial dharma that is also you.*

*It manifests everyone*

*– mysteries unfolding  
    inviting investigation  
Realised by wise lovers of suchness  
    everywhere  
    Blessed.*



## *Alternative Title 5*

### **A Research Proposal**

In times past, a spiritual life was often thought to involve cultivating an array of integrated activities designed to bring the seeker to a clearly named goal. This idealised destination was often exhaustively described by various religious traditions and was referred to in an abstract sense using words and phrases such as: enlightenment, union with God, realisation, awakening, nirvana, the purified state, the Great Spirit and so forth. In this book I take the stance that the mystery we call nature-in-process doesn't 'know' where it is going and that any seeming progression is the result of ourselves and all beings collectively stepping into the unknowable next moment, moment by moment by moment. What many people see as the fruition of spiritual practice: love, clear seeing, compassion, patience reverence, gratitude and so forth is actually the best preparation for doing this. With these qualities we are finally equipped to fully embrace the immeasurable expanse of living that we are.

As I write this, I'm reminded of a particularly numinous dream that occurred a number of years back. It seemed that out of a prolonged fog of arduously trying to get somewhere I found myself arriving at a huge airport, presumably to catch a flight. Through the doors of the terminal I could see a mass of people busily hurrying in all different directions. From somewhere in the crowd a uniformed official dressed as a customs or immigration officer appeared. He smiled in a friendly fashion, reaching out to shake my hand as if he had been expecting my arrival. "Welcome to the human race", he said. Then falling into step with me, we walked together through the maze of airport shops, until the crowds thinned and we approached a grey unmarked, very ordinary looking door. We stood

there for a moment while he took something out of his pocket. "Here is your passport" he said as he swung the door open. I looked out expecting to see sunlit planes and runways, but instead was awestruck with a vision of inky black space filled with countless stars and galaxies. As I stumbled forward, the space seemed to grow until it swallowed the airport. The feeling of his hand still resting warmly on the back of my shoulder gently nudged me through the opening and his words filled my being like a blessing, "Go and explore." At that point I woke up feeling wonderfully inspired.

This book could be seen as a research proposal for those who find themselves asking in a deeply contemplative way, "What on earth is going on!?" Our passport is a continuum of kindness and interest. Go and explore!

The proposal grows from three basic assumptions.

1 Every human creature is an intact, living whole; a thoroughly integrated body~brain~mind~community that is inter-living, inter-being and inter-knowing with countless other living beings.

2 The activity of one's living, with all its richness and detail, is one's path of awakening; not the Buddha's living, or Christ's, or the Guru's, or any other being's life or teachings. Our immediate ever-fresh experience is an evolving ecology of body~brain~mind~communities, co-evolving with other body~brain~mind~communities. This is all we ever have to work with.

3 Through this process – of beings in myriad domains and dimensions of existence making sense of each other – we bring forth worlds.

Research means to search again, and again; to enquire, investigate, explore, delve into, deeply experience, or come to understand –

again and again and again. This is the continuous process whereby a creature makes sense of what is happening and then learns to rest in that. Think of research as a way of living, a revelation, a continuous revealing of what we are and what life is! The very process of 'researching', brings forth a universe which is reciprocally shaping the texture and flowings of our researching. This is living on the threshold of the never quite arisen next moment. Research, not to find 'objective truth' but to participate in the further evolution of this universe-in-action both as a personal ontogeny and as a flow of evolving species or phylogeny. Ultimately, the act of researching and what is being researched, together comprise a dynamic partnering, a living system that we both are, and actively do.

*It begins as a stirring, a breath of wonder, a moment of intuition,  
a quiet knowing of rightness  
an insight you didn't know you always knew.  
Everything is interdependent with everything.  
Awesome.*

*We sit with the implications.  
We collide with the world not seeing this.  
And through that painful tragic crashing  
A yearning for refuge and a desire to live meaningfully becomes strong.*

*Details proliferate; generosity, wholesome relating,  
patience, skilled use of energy,  
A blossoming of caring and enquiry,  
an inherent inquisitiveness, precise and playful  
And we discover a new way of life and living.*

*Exploring embodiment  
Exploring en-mindment  
Dancings of knowings responding to and with dancings of knowings,*



*Glimmerings of understanding, mind and knowing,  
and the inter-being nature of experience.*

*Dawnings of confidence and capacity*

*Solid in beingness*

*Perfumed with loving, wise relating*

*A life-long journey of maturing into humanness*

*as we release into the mystery,*

*striding beyond paths and pathways*

*Seamless, ineffable, spacious and open,*

*this body of dharma – compassion unfolding*

*celebrating the ordinary with lightness and wisdom*

*we realize true home.*



## Chapter Two

# What We Are Working With: *a philosophic meander into sense making and story telling*

*"... life ... is not a state of being but the animated dynamic of animate organisms." – Maxine Sheets-Johnstone<sup>20</sup>*

*"Reality is not a unique and homogeneous thing; it is immensely diversified, having as many different schemes and patterns as there are different organisms."  
– Ernst Cassirer<sup>21</sup>*

*"We are a part of that nature that we seek to understand."  
– Karen Barad<sup>22</sup>*

These writings have been gestating for quite a few years. During that time, it has become increasingly clear that what I'd really like to share with you is not easy to convey in words. I've considered a number of approaches: an instruction manual? a philosophic text? a collection of inspirational poetry? Occasionally it felt beyond my capacity and I toyed with abandoning the project, thinking that a better medium might be performance art, complete with dance, music and mime. On reflection, each of these

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<sup>20</sup> *"Insides and Outsides"* p 29

<sup>21</sup> *"An Essay on Man"* 1975, p 23

<sup>22</sup> *"Meeting the Universe Halfway"* 2007, p 67

approaches had shortcomings and so I now find myself attempting a collage of prose, poetry and images, hoping that this will synergise with the reader's intelligence to reveal a vibrant living whole.

In this chapter we will continue to raise the question of how we view life and living, and how we make sense of it. It may seem like a bit of a detour, so if you feel rushed you could skip ahead to the next section and perhaps return here later when you feel more relaxed and ready to enjoy the scenery. For those of you not in a hurry, our meandering will introduce some less known parts of the landscape of living. In these pages we will consider what we are actually working with or, from a different perspective, what's working on us. This is a story that is part allegory, part explanation, part history. Regardless how you view it, it is sure to be engaging because it concerns you and me and all of us together! I will try to sketch out 'the scene'; the protagonists, the situation, the plot line and so forth for this universal tale, or more precisely three different yet overlapping versions of an extraordinary living story. It is a still evolving story that is enacted, told, intimated, and sung in the bodies of all of us together and through this communal labour, we birth worlds.

The first version appeared as an essay in 2011.<sup>23</sup> The second is an expanded version of a didactic story in the form of an essay that was published in 2018.<sup>24</sup> The third uses language that introduces many themes that we'll refer to and amplify in later sections and chapters. There is of course a possibly a fourth version. This is the yet to be written story of your life as it unfolds after taking to heart the explorations suggested in these pages and making them your own. This fourth version will be written with the pen of your body on the

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<sup>23</sup> "A Story of Stories" revised and extended for Green Dharma Treasury, Jan. 2011

<sup>24</sup> "Explanation, Assumption and Guru Yoga" Green Dharma Treasury, July 2018

pages of the world. Actually, the story is already happening but please read to the end of the book. You may find that it helps your writing.

*Version One:*

### *A Story of Stories – a gentle introduction for everyone*

My father used to make up fabulous bedtime stories for my brother, sister and I. He would craft a particular theme for each of us which continued, sometimes for weeks or months. I had stories based on Greek and Norse myths, along with occasional tales of gothic horror told in a risqué tongue in cheek manner that often led to release in laughter. My brother had swashbuckling adventures with pirates and my sister had an amazing series placed in ancient China with a magic princess, dragons and a character named Wang Ping. These were an important part of my childhood. I was lucky to have such a gifted story telling dad.

Story telling is not merely for entertainment. We are constantly telling ourselves stories – interior verbalisings, day-dreamings, enactments and re-enactments of situations that have either happened or could happen. By and large, story telling is the way we humans give meaning, context, and a moral or ethical dimension to events. It's our way of making sense of relationships, the world, and the universe we find ourselves in. Of course, we often become so entranced with a particular story that we believe it to be solid fact, if not eternal truth. The story tellers of today have found lucrative professions in media, advertising and education. They regale us with tales of consumption leading to happiness, of the moral necessity of progress and the naturalness of devoting huge amounts

of our lives to worrying about money. Most of the plots unfold in a mechanistic universe where only humans have a soul or consciousness and where the rest of nature exists primarily for the purpose of sustaining human beings and more specifically, oneself and one's immediate family group. Exaggerated tales, which are closer to fantasies, are narrated in sombre and serious tones about unlimited growth and development. This, in spite of being part of a limited planet with finite resources. Stories we don't like to hear are dismissed as propaganda or proselytising. Stories we like to hear, we call common sense and the way of the world.

Science too has its collection of stories, though they are usually called theories. The word comes from the Greek *theoria* which originally meant spectacle or view and gave rise to the word theatre. Most of the time good old fashioned but still powerfully active hubris, makes it difficult for us to accept that the scientific 'facts' of today will likely morph into the art and archetype, the myths and legends of tomorrow. The idea that the myths we associate with ancient civilisations might have been regarded in their day as generally accepted fact, on par with today's scientific fact, strikes us as deluded or at least rather quaint; symptoms of a simpler and more primitive age. If humans survive the next two thousand years, I wonder what they will think of our current views of the universe and our human place in it.

Story-making is a living process which we need to constantly re-examine and refresh, thus allowing our stories to evolve and keep pace with our actual experience of the world. One of the oldest human stories is the story of "*The Beginning*". I'd like to have a go at telling it in my own fashion. Perhaps it will entertain you. Even better, it might inspire a new way of being.

Cyberspace is not an ideal place for story telling. It's too sterile. Our

experience is curtailed by software constraints and screen limitations. We can't feel the weight of our father sitting close to us on the edge of the bed. We can't feel his warmth and caring. We can't smell him or feel him startle at a sudden change in the pace of the action. The opportunity to weave the sound of a bird outside the window or a clatter of a pot falling in the kitchen into the ongoing flow of the story never arises. Never-the-less, let's try. As you read these words, please use your imagination to help set the scene, for the real beginning is a story of great magic and mystery.

**A** camp fire is crackling. Flames are leaping and dancing, throwing sparks and shadows against the surrounding rocks and trees, pushing back the evening chill, while above and around float uncountable diamond clear stars clothing us all in a garment of vastness.

*You sit out*

*at night*

*under the stars.*

*The milky way*

*winding herself*

*around the*

*bowl of the world*

*like a starry shawl of caring.*

*And the river*

*sings in your cells.*

*And the earth scent*

*floods your brain.*

*And the near zero air*

*pricks your surfaces*

*into fresh awakeness.*

*And the mystery  
sounds symphonies  
of reverence and love  
weaving messages of meaning.*

*This moment  
this blessed moment  
this always available intimacy,  
Illumined in the dark.*

An owl hoots in the distance and another replies. The sound of the river blends with the passing whirl of insect wings and the murmur of leaves gently rustling in the trees. Draw nearer my friends. Sit close. Wrap yourselves in your blankets, hot chocolate in hand, and I will tell you how this all began.

The beginning is actually more extravagant and fantastic than most beings ever imagine. More awesome than the big bang. More powerfully magical than any act of creation. It is utterly simple yet extremely elusive. The beginning, my friends, is now! And 'now' involves a huge amount of not knowing and an immeasurable expanse of never to be known.

A child-like mind might find it bemusing to note that the difference between 'now' and 'know' is a single 'k'. The letter 'k', or ka in Sanskrit, is associated with space and with the sound of the raven. With this in mind we could consider 'now' with lots of space. A spacious nowing, is knowing!

Within now/know, our story unfolds. The past is now. The future is now. Our story is shaping and reshaping, moment by moment. It is shaped by our DNA, by geo-tectonic pressures and dissipating heat. It is shaped by the lap of waves on the shore, the warming of summer sun, the infinite pushes and pulls of hungers and satisfactions. The story is shaped by cultures and teachings and

cosmic events. It is shaped by hopes and fears and the creative attempts of myriad organisms to survive. This story is shaped by the experience that is all of me — bumps and lumps, inspirations and burstings of beauty, gross stupidities and common banalities, neurophysiologies and musculoskeletal dancings, inner and outer, micro and macro, — all of me – being shaped by the experience which is all of you, a mutual crafting; an unending flow of creation.

The story is also flavoured with expectations. Expectations of the atom looking for an electron to share; of the tree, reaching up through the undergrowth, seeking light; of the psychic masochist expecting to always fail; of the obsessive controller seeing a universe needing control. The story is a revealing of views and understandings: a view of evolution, a struggle towards greater refinement and complexity; a view of survival of the fittest; a view of co-operative co-creation. As the story changes, everything changes. A beginning that occurred sometime before now, is a plot-line device to serve and justify the present action. An end, after now, is a theatrical convention giving the patrons what they've come to expect. Suffering arises in not seeing we are caught in a story of our own making. Suffering arises in not seeing our story is also the making of others. It also arises when we believe the story should be fixed for all time and we struggle to keep it so and to ensure that others keep it so.

*Artful spider that I am,  
Waiting in the golden web to catch my dinner now.  
I spin connections all around.  
The twig, the step, the gutter strong,  
Then thread to thread  
A brilliant maker of connections  
that I am.*



*And gradually the sky grows dim  
the threads to cloth and fabric strong,  
my mind arranged around me fast  
like laundry hanging out to dry.*

*The web grows thick, a ball of yarn and I in centre, yarning still,  
entangle all the spacious things  
And trap myself within my yarning story.*

In this tiny globe of imagined campfire light, surrounded by stars of possibility and the vast darkness of yet to be known and yet to be told, pause and feel the texture and rhythm of your breathing.

Do this right now. Look up from the screen or the page and take as much time as you need. Breathing in and breathing out, gradually relax your body and allow all your senses to be open, alert, and responsive.

Widen the gaze of your knowing, the gaze of your 'nowing', to include everything that is happening around you and within you. Eyes seeing myriad colours and forms – shifting, changing, dancing, standing solid. Ears hearing myriad sounds – the subtle rhythms of rain on the roof, the wind in the trees, the harmonics pulsing in the sound of city traffic. Nose, tongue and body, savouring smells, and tastes, and responding to a vast array of tactile sensation. Notice the panorama of thoughts and mental activity; stray random arisings associated with 'yesterday'; feelings, judgements, fantasies and imaginings — huge dollops of implication and meaning plastered all over each object of sensing; sometimes plastered so thickly that the object disappears from view and all we have left are our cherished desires and opinions.

Stay with your breathing — very still inside. Eventually you will become a lucid awakesness, a spacious expanse of playful knowing

that knows no limits, yet 'sees' translucent shimmering outlines of infinite distinction. Form in emptiness. Unity in diversity. Wherever you are, right now, appreciate this unbroken fluidity, the wondrous creative patterning, the dance of knowing that is you in this very moment. Each conscious being is a story teller, weaving magus magic in the infinite warp and weft of beingness. Each conscious creature is a character in the story of their own telling.

Now . . . before we get carried too far into poetic imagery, take a few more moments to notice something that is so obvious that many people can live their entire lives without ever appreciating it. Notice, in a very ordinary and natural way, how you experience the world of inner and outer sensations as three dimensional or, if you include time, four dimensional, with 'you' somewhere near the centre. Turn your head and look around. What you see feels real with depth and dimension, yet photons, not trees and houses, are entering your eyes. This is your universe and it is rich and vast and filled with meaning that, when examined in detail, is utterly unique to you. This is your knowing; not anyone else's and it is a knowing that is a living technicolour wrap-around experience; a personal reality we usually assume to be *the* reality.

This knowing, this saga, this story, constantly ripples and reflects back on itself, adjusting and reinterpreting the earlier building blocks to suit present needs. Then it shoots forward again, reshaping the goal in order to make sense of the action to date. This is the story of push and the story of pull, of the light in the trees, the sound of the stream and the birds chattering in the bushes. It is the story of me and the story of you. It's even the story of stories. The objects we see are not separate from the 'meaning' we give to them. The 'meaning' is a reflection of our own understandings which continuously modify our sensing of the object, bending the world of perception to our own, largely unconscious, needs and wishes.

*Feeling the stories*

*Running from far away places*

*Dreaming . . . Oh the vastness of the dreaming!*

*Perhaps our task is to be storytellers*

*Not custodians of the ancient lore but creators of future lore*

*The stories we tell is the world our children will see . . .*

Realising that we inhabit a vast miraculous universe of seeing, hearing smelling, touching, tasting and thinking is rare enough but here is another simple yet challenging thought. Consider the possibility that we don't so much inhabit such a universe as we *are* this universe. Consider that every object in your field of perception is (within its own experience) an equally vast universe of sense and meaning. Experiment with living the next 24 hours with some degree of awareness that every other person you see is also experiencing themselves as the centre of a universe of sense and meaning that they, like almost every other being, assume to be the one real universe. How strange! How rarely thought about! The you that I see is very different than the experience you are having of yourself.

Try sitting with a group of people and all of you simultaneously examine a particular object. Then have each person describe what they are experiencing. It will become obvious that there are as many 'seeings' of the object as there are people. If you then include the trees and birds, the worms and micro-organisms and fish in the sea, you may discover the Great Ocean of Stories. Stories within stories shaping stories; a universe of intelligence shaping itself. With this kind of experience we might begin, as Thomas Berry so eloquently put it, to cease thinking of the universe as a collection of objects and begin to experience it as "a communion of subjects".<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *"The Great Work"* by Thomas Berry p 16

What we are considering here might seem intellectually obvious, but "intellectually obvious" is sometimes quite different from experientially obvious. The difference is like reading a Lonely Planet Guide about a country you haven't visited, compared to actually living there. The Tibetan teacher, Kalu Rinpoché used to say that meditation was more a matter of acclimatisation than anything else. Try acclimatising to this way of being that sees a universe filled with sensing, feeling, intelligences who's subjective experiences become factors shaping one's own subjective existence. This is very different from a universe of inanimate objects where I alone, often very alone, am the only 'sensible' being around. Where all other objects, even living beings, are seen only in the context of how they affect me. Are they a threat? Can they be utilised? Will they augment me? Will they diminish me? Where they are primarily things – objects to be manipulated or controlled.

Look deeply and sensitively at a friend, at strangers on the street, at your cat, at the bird perched on the branch outside your window and realise that they are each experiencing a vast cohesive universe, every bit as complete and as meaningful as the universe that is uniquely yours. All these stories are interpenetrating and inter-relating without obstruction. The scholars of the middle ages used to ask, how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. We might ask, how many universes can dance in the story of your mind?

A number of years ago, during a forest-walk meditation at Wangapeka, I looked and saw in a very fresh way. We were moving along the path, coming out from the trees, into the open space by the pagoda. I was in a very tranquil state, wonderstruck in the dancing of the senses, weaving a continuously birthing now. I thought for a moment of how rich in colour, texture, sound, smell, and tactile sensation the world is. I thought for a moment how all of this was

arising in my experience in a unique and wondrous way. As we turned a corner, I glimpsed the other meditators walking mindfully in a long drawn out line and suddenly I 'saw' that their continuously assembling universe was as rich and complete, (and ultimately unknowable to me), as the universe that I was so richly appreciating. My mind opened to sensing all these different 'worlds', bobbing up and down walking the uneven pathway. Worlds containing worlds. Worlds reverberating in and with other worlds.

I saw a Tui alight in a tree and call forth its beautiful bell-like notes and I sensed a world of Tui assembling in its body/brain/mind/community. The gum trees swayed in the breeze and I saw that they too were experiencing a world that was unique and meaningful within the context of gum tree experience. Once this began, the contemplation stayed with me for the next three weeks. Now, merely by remembering it, I sense a world of interpenetrating universes; the fox gloves, the beech trees, the mountains, the river, the clouds, the rabbits, the keyboard under my fingertips, the strangers on the bus.

So where does this story of stories begin and where does it end. It is beginning and ending continuously in myriad moments, in myriad minds. A universe of infinite intelligence. Each part is an alive whole, contributing to every other living knowing part. Being such a universe invites a knowing that has no need to grasp at absolute beginnings and ends. This is life appreciating itself.

*I wake*

*Spontaneously sprung from the foaming of sea.*

*My history's fresh as I bake it each morning.*

*Mourning the death of a life barely lived*

*constantly reaching and where is it going*

*this nectar of knowing, this potion of caring.*

*Möbius strips turning slowly in space  
The stories loop backwards  
Radiating wonderment to all ears that hear  
Love from the heart  
heart filled with grace this is my face.*

And so, my friends, we come to the end of our story of stories. The fire in your heart is still crackling and dancing, radiating in all directions; filling the world with the light of understanding which, in turn, creates accompanying shadows of expectation and fear. This light then shrinks inward, plunging everything into darkness which becomes its own strange kind of illumination, no light, no shadows, an immensity of unknowing, a space of immeasurable wonderment. The rocks and trees and stars, the schools of fish and the micro-organisms in the soil, the people in the flat next door, everyone and everything are themselves other modes of knowing that dance with our stories; stories within stories, mingling and merging, syncopations of earth poetry and song, together creating the universe symphony — this one great Ode to Joy.

The most important criteria for stories, be they very individual and personal, or the shared stories of a culture, is not whether or not they are true but whether or not they are functional. Stories of isolation and solitude, desperately grasping a universe of objects in an attempt to settle fear and end loneliness; how useful are these? Do they help to sustain life in all its richness? Are stories of intelligent, righteous me and unintelligent everyone else very functional? Are stories of intelligent humans and sub-intelligent everything else very functional? We need a new story, a story much vaster and more inclusive than that of one struggling hero called 'me' or even called humanity, trying to survive in a world of danger, obstruction and fundamental entropy. Every object is the hero of its own dreams. Each part of my body, every part of the world, is intelligence

unfolding. Each story contains every other story. Waking up to this changes everything.

### Suggestion – 3

Have a pause and perhaps go for a walk.

Allow this first version of the story to work on you for a while. Try it out, like a coat or a new pair of shoes. What's it like?

Then, when you are ready, you might find it interesting to turn the page and look at the next version.

*Version Two:*

*Explanation, Assumption and Guru Yoga*

*exploring deeply held and largely unconscious beliefs and attitudes:  
the roots of all story making*

*We are constantly 'explaining' things to ourselves.  
Sometimes, we try to share these explanations with others;  
hypotheses, stories, collective beliefs or paradigms.  
Through this artistry, we revise our understanding  
and make sense of the world.*

The main characters in this second story of stories are 'explanation' and 'the dynamic wholeness of experience-in-process'. Explanation affects what we see. What we see affects the on-going here and now process that we are. What we are affects how we explain and so it goes, for as long as life continues.

Essentially, all explanations are attempts to understand the same thing; the ineffable, continuously cresting wave of presence and immediacy, that is our life and living. I suspect that this ever-present flowing of experience, both conscious and unconscious, can never be completely and exhaustively explained. It simply and primordially *is*. Each one of us is effortlessly born into it. Each morning we wake to it. Wherever we look, there it is – here it is – and even that looking itself, is what it is.

*What is going on?*

*We lean into experience,*

*trying to make sense of what we are seeing;*

*transforming as we look,*



*seeing a different world as we transform.*

*Our seeing itself is not separate from that perennial question,  
an ever present non-verbal probing.*

*What is going on?*

*And so we explore,  
morphings of sentience.*

*Every living creature is doing this.*



*Through explanation we are birthing worlds.*

**E**xplanation and understanding are intimately linked with one's capacity for experience. Creatures have different capacities. Slugs are different from cats, which in turn are different from humans. Each being interprets the environment in ways that are relevant for – and congruent with – the type of creature they are. What I experience, or even better, the fullness of experience that comprises me at this moment, reveals or displays the nature of my understanding. Simultaneously, this understanding – itself a kind of explanation or way of making sense of things – is facilitating and shaping my experience.

Previously lived experience, reverberating in our present experience (we call this memory) is what we draw upon and use when trying to explain things. Such and such a situation is similar in tone and

texture and tactile kinaesthetic feeling to that preceding one. This reflexive process of understanding and experience mutually shaping each other, is both what we have to work with, but it's also what we need to realise. From a biological perspective, the expansion of this process evolving over billions of years (*mahagata Skt.*) has contributed to the diversifying of life. Perhaps we could even say it is the process of diversifying life. We – slugs, cats, amoeba, toad stools, humans, trees and daisies – are all participants in a dynamic universe which pulses between the poles of creativity and conservation; diversification and consolidation. This is the base ground of the contemplative path sometimes called *mahamudra*,<sup>26</sup> where one's practice and the fruition of the practice, are not two – where all qualities are simultaneously co-emergent (*sahaja Skt.*).

### Explanation – or Assumption?

Our moment to moment living is shaped by innumerable assumptions which underpin our efforts to make sense of things. By assumption I mean, largely unconscious paradigms (*un-thought-out confidences about the nature of reality*) through which, and by means of which, we situate all objects (*ourselves included*) in the matrix of this living world of our ever flowing experience. We operate with myriad assumptions, covering many levels or domains. For example, most people unquestioningly assume that there is a real world outside themselves that they can correctly or incorrectly perceive. We assume that time is universally meaningful, that money is important, that there is progress in living which can be made or not made, and that there exists a natural hierarchy of values such that we will care for our families before we care for strangers.

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<sup>26</sup> Mahamudra is a term found in Tibetan Buddhism used to refer to the central heart of awakening practice along with it's accompanying realisation.

We assume that we have an inside and an outside and that we can meaningfully own things and living beings. We assume that the functioning of an object is largely determined by the constitution of its structure. We assume that we experience representations of the world in our brain and that some kind of translation mechanism allows us to link with others. It would take tens of pages to list a small fraction of the unacknowledged assumptions that shape our living and values today. If an assumption becomes more conscious, at that point we might begin to call it 'an explanation'.

Our living seems to involve an inherent need to explain or to make sense of currently arising experience. Consider a moment of seeing. It is as if an organism is asking; what is this density of colour, this blur of line, this particular symphony of sounds and smells associated with these memories of touch and taste? – so many questions: what? why? where? when? and how? Where is this experience leading? How is it relevant? What does it imply? How does it work? – and so forth. Essentially, we are all asking; "What on earth is going on here?" Based on this, decisions appear to be made.

I'm not suggesting that this enquiry is necessarily intentional. Making sense of experience and our role in it is largely a subliminal non-verbal process, yet it is through this internalised 'explaining' that an impression of a seamlessly integrated world of experience emerges for us. Everything fits, – these particular sounds and sights and memories and muscular sensations – all of them arising as an undivided single occurrence. Everything is effortlessly '*wholified*'. There seems to be a natural logic to the situation, even if we don't like it or agree with it. This knowing/feeling of seamless integration underpins our most basic sense of sanity. It's not optional. We need it in order to be healthy and to feel sane, yet few people ever think about it. Without this sense of integration, what are we left with, disintegration or fragmentation?

With increased familiarity, what were once new explanations or understandings dissolve into a background of unconscious assumptions. Conversely, when illumined with curiosity and interest, assumptions can be revealed. They can be transformed in the 'aha' revelation of fresh explanation. Our confidence in the validity of our experience co-emerges with this process of explanation/assumption. Understanding how we understand and then doing this well, is central to the path of liberation.

*There's a wholeness about living.  
It's not cracked, not glued together . . .  
Feelings, values, perceptions and conceptions,  
tumbling and flowing  
    through each other wherever we look  
    . . . if we look!*

*Every experience is experienced by someone.  
Every someone is a matrix of looking;  
    a unique contribution of knowing,  
    a collaboration of domains and dimensions.*

*To survive we must look,  
    and not only look  
    as if through looking we might see what is;  
To survive we must look with passion and caring,  
    with discernment and playful zest.*

*Looking as an act of participation –  
    and together we bring forth worlds.*

*There is a seamlessness about experience;  
    we make wholes with whatever is at hand.  
All of us do this; able and disabled,  
    educated and unschooled,*

*privileged and exploited.*

*This collaborative dancing:*

*(atoms, molecules, cells and communities  
of every conceivable shape and form)  
brings forth everything.*

*The story of our beingness*

*traces patterns of ephemeral progression  
on canvasses of memories;*

*the myths of our making,  
a planet awaking as music*

*arising in the ears of instruments and voices,*

*Singing this gloriousness into being.<sup>27</sup>*

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Over the last twenty-five years, I have been deeply inspired through contemplating the work of biologist Humberto Maturana, and integrating it with my understanding of the view and practice of *mahamudra*. Maturana put a lot of energy into distinguishing two different "explanatory paths" or if you like, two basic approaches to explanation. One he called, a path of objectivity, and the other he called a path of objectivity-in-parenthesis. I briefly introduced these ideas in chapter one.<sup>28</sup> An essential difference between the two is that with the path of objectivity, we situate ourselves outside the thing or process we wish to describe or understand – as if we had a

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<sup>27</sup> From "*The Seamlessness of Experience*", *A Sheaf of Poems*, 2010 – 2019, Green Dharma Treasury

<sup>28</sup> For more on the distinction between objectivity and objectivity-in-parenthesis, see *The Origin of Humanness in the Biology of Love*.

detached God's-eye view with a complete comprehension of the situation. This perspective is often referred to as 'being objective'. With the path of objectivity-in-parenthesis we situate ourselves in the system itself, inseparably part of the very process we are trying to describe. I have found Maturana's distinctions to be a very useful way of considering things and we will explore them a bit further in the next section.

If you think about it, it is fairly obvious that any explanation is inevitably an explanation or observation taking place in someone's experience.

*Every experience is experienced by someone.  
Every someone is a matrix of looking;  
a unique contribution of knowing,  
a collaboration of domains and dimensions.*

As such, the explaining takes place in the realm of observation and very often extends into the realm of language. A successful explanation will suggest a generative process that if allowed to run would give rise to, or generate, the thing one wishes to explain.

Inevitably, an explanation will be based on coherences of one's prior experiences. What else do we have to work with? The explanation however, is not the same as the generative process. Even an elaborately illustrated recipe is not the same as a meal. The explanation might happen in the realm of languaging – the domain of the observer – but the generative process in its entirety takes place in or through the dynamic, multi-levelled, total organism~medium functioning.

## Objectivity

Hunger for truth, anger and frustration directed towards perceived falsehood, and confusion arising over which is which; each of these three, and combinations thereof, can arise in the explanatory path of objectivity. With this approach to living we assume the existence of a fundamental reality or truth – a reality outside or beyond oneself – a reality that transcends any individual's limited experience or opinion.<sup>29</sup> This reality or truth is then seen as an ultimate arbiter, to be realised by the gifted and wise, or at least, by someone with their eyes and ears open. For people operating in the path of objectivity, to not see or accept what we think of as being a fact or truth, is often regarded as a sign of stupidity, or perversity, or plain ordinary ignorance. Implicit in this understanding of objectivity is the belief that by eliminating falsity, what remains is truth, as if 'truth' has been patiently sitting there, waiting for us to see or discover it. For many, this attitude~assumption has become an internalised, generally unconscious path, philosophy or paradigm of living. By grasping and holding on to what we are convinced is objective and true, falsity appears to be denied. In communities operating with this path of explanation, to not be able to discern truth from falsehood, is a sign of confusion, ineptitude or sheer stubborn mindedness.

Historically, the explanatory path of objectivity, has become a social tool for coercing others. Our view, or more to the point my view, is right. It's objective. It's a fact. Your view is wrong. Upholders of the correct view are called authorities: religious authorities, scientific

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<sup>29</sup> "Reality – that which we connote in our Western patriarchal culture when we speak of reality – is an explanatory assumption, an imagined domain of independent entities that we use in order to give universal validity to our explanations of our experiences." H. Maturana Romesin and G. Verden-Zoller, *"The Origin of Humanness In The Biology of Love"* p154

authorities, legal authorities and so forth. And so we threaten others. Evidence based science demands that, if you are not insane, you will agree with me and support me. This approach to living leads to worlds of experience that are dense and hard edged, worlds characterised by limited flexibility, strong expectations and aspirations to be in control.

### Objectivity-in-parenthesis

The explanatory pathway of objectivity-in-parenthesis – a transient, continuously morphing sense of objectivity that co-emerges with a shifting sense of self in relationship with others – arises from the multi-domained and multi-dimensional autopoietic activity of living systems-in-process. This way of explaining invites understanding rather than demanding obeisance to a particular view. It invites worlds of mutual responsiveness and potentially, worlds of increasing respect. In this explanatory path there is room for innumerable views or expressions – in theory, at least equal to the number of sentient beings. In a grand sense we could say that this dynamic process enables an evolving diversity of life. Every situation becomes an invitation to deepen and broaden our understanding; an understanding that is flavoured with a sense of uncontrived attunement with others. If my 'understanding' of a situation is good, I will feel and act in a flow of in-tunement; body, speech and mind are in accord. If my 'understanding' is poor, I will feel more conflicted. Things just don't seem to connect.

*One's view of things is all-embrasive.*

*One's thoughts are in tune with every situation.*

*All one's actions spring from this.*

(from a sadhana of Guru Rinpoché)



Objectivity-in-parenthesis is not the same as "subjectivity". In our culture, to say someone is being subjective is to dismiss their experience as being merely an opinion or a personal view. After all, 'everyone is entitled to their own opinion.' To have an opinion, or to accept that the world you perceive arises in or through the functioning that is giving rise to you in this very moment, is not particularly uncommon. However it doesn't necessarily challenge a simultaneous assumption that there is an objectively real world that lies beyond your limited view. We often denigrate 'subjective experience'. At best it's seen as a partial reflection of reality and at worst a dysfunctional disconnect from reality. This kind of 'subjectivity' is still part of the explanatory path of objectivity *without* parenthesis. Although subjective experience is often distinguished from a supposedly actual objective truth, from the perspective of nature-in-process they are two sides of the same coin.

With the explanatory path of objectivity-in-parenthesis, each being's experience arises in and through the co-evolving relationship of organism and environment. We could think of this as a vast expanse of inter-responsiveness in which we realise that our so called personal experience is seamlessly interrelating and inter-adjusting to the interrelating and inter-adjusting relationships of others. What each of us does matters and so, together we are continuously bringing forth the world of our experience!

## Guru Yoga and Mahamudra

**A**s human beings, we are a communion of responsive subjects, not merely a functional arrangement of inanimate objects. The world of your experience is not just your own business. It's not 'merely subjective'. Everything we do reverberates through the world of doings which comprise the inter-being~inter-knowing

worlds of everyone. With this perspective, we might sense a dynamic matrix of inter-becoming; a continuously cresting wave of now. This is the beginningless endless living that all of us are. As students of life, it is simultaneously – what we study, the activity of studying and, what teaches us. In Tibetan Buddhism, to realise the union of what we are with what teaches us and to live in harmony with every situation, is to realise 'guru yoga'. To be this realisation in the continuous flow of ongoing living is to 'practise' *mahamudra*.

*Since the totality of responsive awareness*

*structuring this cresting wave of nowness*

*is the real Buddha,*

*In openness and contentment*

*I find the Lama in my heart.*

*When we realise this unending expanse of multi-realmed knowing*

*is the very nature of what teaches us,*

*Then there is no need for dysfunctional assumptions*

*such as attached grasping (greed),*

*or weeping prayers (confusion),*

*or artificial complaints (anger),*

*By simply relaxing in this uncontrived open natural state,*

*we obtain the blessing of spontaneous self-liberation of whatever arises.*<sup>30</sup>

A human life could be characterised as a continuous apprenticeship with a timeless master called the vast expanse of collaborative creation-in-action. This is *biocracy* manifest; a way of organising in which every participant is both a legitimate voice, and a responsive

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<sup>30</sup> I have paraphrased these verses from "Calling the Lama from Afar", a prayer by Dudjom Rinpoché

ear. Democracy is sometimes described as governance by the people, for the people. Even when it is practiced effectively it leaves out too much of the living world to be a health supporting way of organising our affairs. In contrast, biocracy is governance by the inter-responding matrix of innumerable living systems which together are the evolving flowering of life that we are.

The continuous process of making sense of our experience in the midst of relationship with others; others who are themselves simultaneously making sense of their own experiences, is the ocean of inter-subjectivity in which we live. With deepening recognition of this, a heartfelt desire to do it well, to live in a life supporting manner, will grow at the core our being. Smiling, breathing, present and appreciating, we radiate in all dimensions and directions. In this fashion, we illumine the world.

*In the process of drafting this essay in its original form, I made a number of notes that in the end I didn't use. I'm adding them here with the hope that they might enhance your further contemplations.*

1) An explanation is an answer to the question, how do things come about? There are other types of question: what, where, when, and so forth. In these types of question, there is always an implication that is sometimes clear but often isn't. For example, the question, "What is such and such?" implies the existence of the thing that you wish to identify and categorise. Where is something? assumes a thing and a location. When did such and such happen? assumes a reliable measure of time. If we were deeply interested in a particular subject, we might first ask how does it come about that I identify this thing and that I can ask, what is it? This is a valuable question because it

makes us realise that the phenomena we are interested in must have arisen in someone's experience (in this case our own) or else it wouldn't exist. From here we might broaden our search for an explanation/understanding of *how* it manifests.

2) We live the explanatory stance of an individual observer (*personal*) while at the same time we are embedded in or part of the explanatory stance of an observer community (*collective*). There are myriad observer communities. For example: communities of scientists, of biologists, physicists, chemists, and mathematicians; of religious and spiritual beings; of musicians, democrats, fascists, capitalists, socialists, male chauvinists, feminists, agnostics, family lineages, nation states and races. Each has its values and ways of seeing the world and each, its own jargons and metaphors. As such, we can find ourselves – dependent on situation and circumstance – juggling an intersecting web of explanatory pathways. Much agitation and miscommunication can come from muddling these different ways of explanation. Is it a wonder that there is so much conflict and confusion?

3) An explanation is primarily an interpersonal interaction that takes place with a clear, or unconscious, or covert motivation. Is it an act of communing through understanding or is it primarily an act of divisiveness through establishing dominance, rightness, demonstrating one's acumen and so forth? There can be innumerable motivations. An explanation can take place within one's mind (for example, me explaining my thoughts or feelings to myself) with the same overt or hidden motivations we have when trying to explain something to another.

4) An explanation can be useful for facilitating life and yet be utterly different than the generative process it refers to. How is it that there is a dwarf nectarine in that pot? Explanation – I acquired a dwarf

nectarine and planted it in the pot. This explanation is true and informative within a limited frame of reference. The generative process that gave rise to it however, is immeasurable. It includes an ocean of relationships required for growing a 'me' and for growing the nectarine and making the pot. This generative process is an integrated mandala of activity that involves the entire universe.

Reading different theories about the workings of mind and consciousness we come across myriad conflicting views and none that successfully bring them all together. Perhaps this is parallel to the challenge of unifying relativity physics and quantum mechanics. The problem might be that any explanation will always be an abstraction while the generative process we are attempting to explain is always a multi-realmed, multi-domained, all inclusive dynamic whole. These are two quite different domains – explanation and generative process. In Buddhist thought, the full generative process is sometimes referred to as 'suchness'. This is the realm of reality described in the Avatamsaka Sutra. The all in the one and one in the all. Worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction.

Explanations are always from a particular perspective. As such, it is futile to evaluate an explanation solely on the basis of its being an ultimately accurate description of reality – objectivity. Perhaps more to the point, would be to see the purpose of explanations as primarily to integrate human conscious activity (objectivity) so that it is more or less aligned or attuned with all the ungraspable and un-pin-downable cosmic generative processes which together comprise everything.

If I plant a broccoli seed and some time later a broccoli plant appears. That may be sufficient explanation for the appearance of the broccoli. Someone else could use this as a guide and by

following it, end up with broccoli, but it tells us little about how the universe actually brought forth that plant. It can't serve as a generative mechanism. Many of the contradictions that we see in the universe are contradictions in our ways of explaining or describing it. The functioning of the universe is never a problem. It is always this cresting wave of now. When we learn to value the generative process and appreciate it in a more and more inclusive and embracing way (mahagata) we are less seduced by particular explanations and their sectarian tendencies.

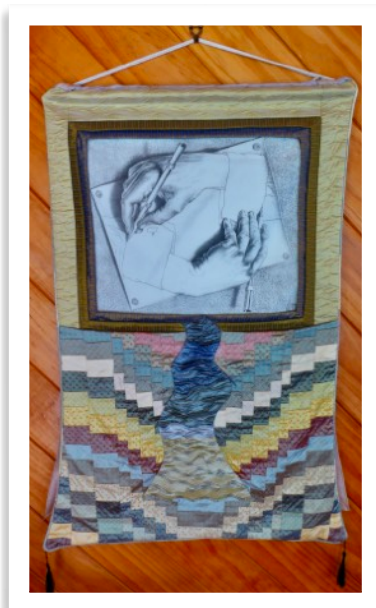


*Version Three:*

*Sense Making*

*– a more detailed circular story for the biologically inclined*

On the wall of my retreat hut at Orygen Hermitage I have a beautiful piece of art-work that was created by Dominique de Borrekens an artist and student-of-life who lives in Golden Bay, New Zealand. She enlarged and printed a famous drawing by Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1972) in which he depicted two hands, each one holding a pencil, seemingly in the act of drawing the other hand. The picture suggests a beginningless endless process of creative emergence. In prior years, Dominique had been gathering together a fabulous collection of men's silk ties from various second hand stores. For this particular project, she cut a number of them into tiny sections and sewed them together to form a shimmering frame for the Escher's work.



Escher's art can be dizzying to contemplate. Many people find his drawings both intriguingly ambiguous and somewhat disconcerting, revealing as they do our deeply ingrained need for a sense of certainty. The sketch of two hands suggests a mirror-like recursive process in which active cause leads to effect, which in turn becomes a cause, leading forward or backwards depending on how you look at it, to the first cause which is now seen as an effect. The image is an invitation to experience our living in a translucent, relationally dynamic and radically inclusive manner. This of course can be challenging especially if we feel compelled to nail down a definite plan for future action.

I find it helpful to keep 'Escher's Hands' in mind when trying to trace out a story of how we humans make sense of things, how we explain things, and how we have come to experience ourselves and the world the way we do. In this continuous flowing of nature-in-process, causes mingle with effects; intentional movement mingles with affective response; individuals mingle with community; inner phenomena mingle with outer. Edges become porous, borders become blurry and, given the beginningless/endless nature of this dynamic, opportunity for confusion and misunderstanding abounds.

To put such story into words without transforming a multi-dimensional and fluidly evolving process into a relatively static arrangement of technical concepts, is easier said than done. It may occasionally seem to be overly complex and at times frustratingly mobius strip-like. Nevertheless, with inspiration arising from contemplating the written works of biologist Humberto Maturana, psychologist Daniel Stern, and dancer, phenomenologist and philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnston, I will try to sketch the general outlines of the plot.



## Prelude

*– setting the scene for a story that is rich and complex and at the same time, elusive and impossible to pin down*

In general, the process of explaining things, either to ourselves or to others, is the way we humans attempt to make sense of the world. Through explanation, an object or activity that is unfamiliar is transformed into something familiar. It is a process in which the dynamic matrix of intentional activity and responsive movement that underpins everything, is rendered into seemingly graspable 'objects' that can be sensed, evaluated and sometimes named. In the past, we in collaboration with the rest of the universe participated in fabricating a sense of meaningful patterns of causal connection from this dynamic world of living, thus setting the stage for how we will interact with others in the future. With this in mind it is clear that explanations are more than descriptive stories or garlands of factual information. They are rich complex actions in and of themselves which energise and motivate us, providing a basis for further action. In this sense explanations and stories have power.

Most of our conscious living takes place in a world of explanatory stories, and for adults, especially those living in the economically privileged world of today, most of these stories involve words.<sup>31</sup> We tell stories. We sell them, listen to them, and fantasise about them. We even reverence them and on occasion enshrine them into law. We purchase them and if it is a religious story, can be initiated into them – often with great pomp and ceremony. At times we rebel against stories or fight for them. Some people are willing to die or even kill for them.

All over the human social world, stories are similar. There are

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<sup>31</sup> With the advent of digital media, many of these stories are augmented by video images.

stories about pleasure and pain, loss and gain, praise and blame, fame and notoriety – in Buddhism these eight themes are called the eight worldly winds. We live out the comedies and tragedies of superiority and inferiority, righteousness and evil, heroism and depravity, pride and shame, war and peace, sex, power, exploitation, evolution, divine blessing and so forth. Through these stories we explain the world both to ourselves and to others, rendering a communally creative process of becoming into discrete interacting objects that we can value and name. Thus we learn 'to make sense' of things.

As children, we adopted and then adapted the stories of the already existing ongoing worlds we found ourselves in: the worlds of our family, our neighbourhood, our culture, caste, religious or economic niche and so forth. Stories of the past became part of our present story so that over time we begin to feel that these inherited stories about the nature of reality are our own. It's how I explain things; how I make sense of the universe. It's the way things are. But is it? Is this the complete story? How durable is this particular tale? How widely applicable and evolvable? And is it actually life supporting?

Not all stories are equally sustainable. Some are quite limited to a particular time and culture and circumstance. Others seem to link us in communion with a multitude of evolving species across vast expanses of time. It is clear that some are able to resonate with the ongoingness of evolving life better than others. In the long run, if the stories are unsustainable and have little or no explanatory value in terms of informing future biosphere supporting action, they will be replaced by more functional ones or, they will die out, along with the creatures that made them.

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As I mentioned earlier, Maturana felt it was essential to clearly

distinguish explanations or explanatory mechanisms, from what he called the generative process. In his teaching and writings he often emphasised that he was speaking as an adult human being and as a scientist, both of which are manners of living very different from that of young children, plants, fungi or single celled organisms. As scientists or adult humans, wishing to explain or make sense of something, we would consciously or unconsciously hypothesise a generative process that, if allowed to run, would give rise to the thing we wished to explain. At this point we would have a plausible story of how it came into being.

Generally speaking, we feel we can make sense of things when we can better understand the causal processes that gave rise to it. While this may seem fairly straight forward, it can bring us face to face with a potentially tricky problem. The terms we use to describe or explain something are inevitably based on analogous stories that arose in the course of trying to understand earlier moments of living. In effect, we end up using an explanation to explain an explanation and in doing so miss the generative process entirely. Escher's hands come to mind. Which is the explanation? Which is the generative process? Even a single name for a person or object could be thought of as a very short story that is used to identify them. But it's not the generative process giving rise to them. In using earlier explanations to explain current situations we often lose sight of the generative process.

It is useful to keep in mind that an explanation is in fact a hypothesis – a proposed story – a speculative work of creativity, albeit based on prior experiences. How do we gain confidence in our story? We need to put our hypothesis to the test, either by way of a direct experiment or by waiting for a similar situation to arise and then observing the outcome. If the such and such happens we deepen our sense that our story is useful. This confidence then

underpins future actions. If the such and such fails to happen we go back to our studio – the studio of our actual life and living – and create a hopefully better, more inclusive story. As we shall see, this is also the story of how we grow.

Regardless our age, we have all had many earlier moments of experiencing in which, a particular thing taking place seems meaningfully connected to something else that will take place some time afterward. Simplistically speaking, when this activity happens, then that activity results. For example, if while holding a drinking glass I release the grip of my hand and fingers, the glass falls to the floor. When it hits the floor a crash sound accompanies the collision and sometimes a splattering of fragmented glass. We understand a current happening by referring it to analogous experiences of relationship from the past. It is as if the organism were asking, what is this current situation like? Hmm . . . it's like such and such. If on a later occasion we drop a glass that breaks on the floor and look for an explanation of how and why this happened we might explain it as being a result of releasing tension in our fingers. Although this is obviously a contributing factor, it is hardly a complete generative process. There is no mention of gravity, or one's perhaps unconscious dislike of that particular glass, or the fact there was a flaw in the manufacture or a wobble in our attentiveness . . . and so forth. An explanation is not the generative process and we can live better when we realise this.

Making sense of the world always takes place from a particular perspective. Explanations arise in the living of someone – a particular me who is the explainer. The generative process on the other hand involves many domains and dimensions of intermingling process that might go far beyond what we usually think of as me. As cosmologist Carl Sagan once reputedly said, if you want to make a cherry pie from scratch, first of all you have to

make a universe. Ultimately the process necessary to generate anything – a bird, a tree, a political system or the shattering of a glass as it hits the floor – involves the interactivity of the entire evolving universe. All explanations are provisional and for most of us, they simply need to be good enough to support us in deciding on further action.

Now we are coming to the central nub of the problem. An adult's story of course, arises in adult experience, using adult experience to make sense of earlier experience. The adult looking back in time uses verbal categories to explain how things have come to be the way they are now. We don't have any problem with that. Yet a phenomenological story, a story of animate being, is a continuously evolving story of sense making that has been in process for as long as there has been life. In the context of geological time, human adult concepts, especially verbal ones, are a very recent arrival in this world, a blink of an eye in cosmic unfolding. They may not be very useful when we try to make sense of pre-verbal or even pre-human experience. How does a teenager make sense of it, or a child, an infant, a cat or bird? How did living forms make sense of the world before the existence of humans with their words and concepts? With these considerations and questions in mind, let's attempt a more inclusive tale, one that invites an incremental stripping away of many familiar concepts and a simultaneous revelation of deeper layers of story making. We will do this in two parts; a story of here to there, and then a story of there to here.

*How did we come to know the universe we know today?*

## An Adult's Tale – looking back from here to there

*To facilitate the telling of this part of the story we will make use of the imaginary 'omni-scope' that I mentioned in the section on Lenses. By 'turning a knob' that can zoom in or out, thus bringing various scales of observation into focus, we will see different domains and dimensions of life. In this tale, we will adjust the focus in order to see further back in time.*

As adults we are effortlessly drawing on many years of life experience along with well developed verbal language skills when meeting the freshly arising now. This is so deeply engrained that when we can't put our experience into words, we often feel a wobble of being unable to make sense of it. For a moment, think of yourself interacting with a young child. It is obvious that many adult stories, concepts and categories, that we unthinkingly use to both explain and make sense of things today, are simply not available for the young child. Can you remember that time? The horizons of your past and future seemed closer to the immediacy of your here and now experience than they **do for (as?) adults**. Last year has slipped off the radar and next year is virtually unimaginable. In a sense, your child self had a reduced collection of possible explanations to work with. From an adult's perspective, the child explains things very simplistically but for the child at that time and in those circumstances, the explanation probably felt quite complete and satisfactory. "Johnny bad." "Pussy spilt milk." "Popsie gone to heaven."

### *Adjust Focus*

Can you imagine yourself before you learned to speak? It's hard, if not impossible for many adults to remember such a stage. Although the ability to explain things in words to others has not yet arisen, some process of making sense of things to yourself so that you can

stay attuned to your changing environment, is already very active. When mother smiles in a certain way, accompanied by a particular quality of sound coming from her lips, this may be physically analogous to earlier experiences where your organism perhaps felt bathed in goodness. And so, you feel good. In fact, for you, the situation *is* good. You recognise certain people and have a rich friendly discernment of them, whereas strangers might provoke withdrawal, anxiety or both. Clearly there is an active, probing intelligence at work here – a corporeal knowing that pre-dates verbalised conceptual knowing. Any attentive parent will recognise that this is the process through which their child grows; a process of learning their body and learning to move their body in a moving world.

### *Adjust Focus*

Let's go back even further. Imagine yourself barely minutes after birth. You are a breathing, alert, metabolising animate organism. Your entire physiology, functioning as a well integrated co-ordinated whole, is responding in myriad ways to shifts and changes in its outer environment. A constantly adjusting matrix of muscular activity, underpins the over-all feeling/functioning of the present moment. The freshly born creature that you are reinforces and experimentally extends tendencies or dispositions – corporeal tactile-kinaesthetic muscular memories – that have happened in the past. The ongoing activity of these selective patternings – nerves, muscles and organs, fine-tuning to each other, stimulating and responding to each other – comprise your body in the process of growth.

### *Adjust Focus*

Now imagine yourself before birth. You are a mammalian creature inside a womb in your mother. Moving back through time muscles

are less and less defined. Differentiating tissues are relatively independently growing in clumps and clusters throughout the volume of animate beingness, an observer might call the unborn child. Gradually any sense of an organism making sense of experiences in terms of felt-sense inter-organ/muscle activity, fades into the ocean of biochemical assembling. Cells adhere to each other or slip by each other. Chemical environments invite cell membranes to function in ways that stimulate cascades of molecular functioning inside the cell. Molecules coupling and uncoupling with each other form networks of biochemical responsiveness which can lead to the turning on or off of transcription, the copying of particular segments of DNA. This in turn, leads to changes in the structure of the cell which accompany changes in the cell's functioning which leads to changes in functioning of neighbouring cells and so the dance unfolds. Imagine a choreography of cells, collectively intimating the possibility of an integrated whole, this foetus/mother relating, growing into being. At this stage, the cells are functioning in a coordinated, 'sensible' fashion without words, concepts, or cultural stories!

### *Adjust Focus*

Picture a moment immediately following your conception. A single autopoietic cell is making sense of its universe, which in this case is the biochemistry of fallopian tube or womb. How the cell responds to its world will depend on what transport mechanisms its membrane is endowed with. Outer conditions stimulate shifts in functioning in this cell that is you, while simultaneously shifts in you are stimulating changes in the physiology of your mother. Even at this stage what we do, congruent with what we are, depends on how how the cell is 'making sense' of its environment.



## *Adjust Focus*

Now we go back to a moment before conception. A complex process is happening that has been set in motion by an organic universe in action; eggs and sperm, fathers and mothers, hormones and passions; ecologies of unfolding life. Opening into this vastness we see co-evolving manners of living: organisms and surrounding world, billions of years of evolving life, a transforming planet-in-process.

*Oh Father and Mother*

*The miracle you make*

*Hot and sweaty,*

*blindly stripping off clothes,*

*fumbling and groping with lust and anger.*

*You are toys of passion.*

*Drunk in the grips of you know not what*

*and in that frenzy of muddy motives*

*beyond all that you know,*

*Energies break asunder.*

*Differences collapse.*

*The door is opened*

*and to this,*

*the entire universe moulds its print.*

*It's done!*

*Breathless heat subsiding you*

*sink in release.*

*Blind butterfly collectors,*

*Wresting another form*

*from the void.*

### *Adjust Focus*

Now imagine the virtually unimaginable. Go back to a time before the existence of co-evolving cells, to a time of planet formation, interlinking chemistry and auto-catalytic hyper-cycles, Escher hands of molecular form and process emerging synchronistically in puddles or on surfaces of clay.

### *Adjust Focus*

Finally, imagine going back further – immensely further – to coalescing star-dust, to suns and galaxies, to dancings of protons and neutrons and electrons as they wove into being the lighter elements of the periodic table. These are stories of cosmologists and astro-physics and here we will stop. Beyond this – "my best beloved" – no one is imagining!<sup>32</sup>

Thus far, our story outline has been one that a scientifically educated adult might tell. We have told it using a language of shared concepts and experiences, trying to make sense of who and what we are today and how we have come to be this way. But this, even with much more detail than I have given, is really just an adult's cartoon of aliveness – an explanation hopefully good enough for the purpose of making sense of this current moment. It is different from the pulsating intimate juicy, impossible to put fully into words, morphing aliveness that is our ongoing actual living. Where are the rhythms, the syncopations, the harmonies and the sudden surprises? Where are the stops and the silences and the sense of shifting space between the notes? Where are the dissonances, and paradoxes, the

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<sup>32</sup> "my best beloved" is a phrase repeated again and again in R. Kipling's *Just So Stories*. This collection of creation fables was frequently read to me in my early childhood.

ambiguities and contradictions? I wonder how closely any story, or description, or explanation, can parallel the awesomely vast and complex dance of generative processes that has been and now is giving rise to us in the act of asking and considering these very questions.

Recognising that you have in your hands a book with the inherent limitations of words printed linear fashion on a page or a computer screen, let's at least try to outline a more dynamic story – a story of growing aliveness. We started this section looking backward towards imagined beginnings – an adult's tale of here to there. Now, imagine reversing the direction of the action, beginning in some earlier moment of conception and growing or evolving towards this present now – a story of there to here.



Life's Tale – from there to here  
or more accurately, [here to here](#)  
*Six Interactive Domains of Knowing*

Our story could begin any time and any place after the 'big bang' but, unlike Scheherazade of *A Thousand and One Nights*, the telling of this story would span billions of nights. Perhaps we will never come to the end of this story, since the end of the telling will be the end of our living. A billion years is, of course, more than any of us can give to this project so we will shorten our task by beginning with a sperm, an egg and conception and even so, the journey will still be complex.

This is a story of animate organism, a story of dynamic relating, a story of affect shaping effect and effect shaping affect. It is a story of generative process, a living process of recursive responsive activity and increasingly complex manners of relating. At the same time it is a story of proliferating and accumulating dimensions and domains of what we adults could call cognition or knowing. In following such a story we might begin to suspect that different types of cognition and knowing are themselves different types of relating, and vice versa. Through cognition and knowing we make sense of experience. Making sense of experience shapes the relating that comprises our beingness. Renewed relating is fresh cognition – and so we live.

At a personal level, this is the journey of each one of us. It is an odyssey of life adventuring, in which we discover ourselves to be shifting dynamic system(s); more like the flow of a river in which patterns emerge and disappear, than like a static landscape. In this story, we begin to make sense of experience in terms of meaningful, but never abiding rhythmic patterns of texture and tone – the music of life unfolding. Patterns are someone's description or naming of a

fluidly dynamic generative process. The pattern – the someone – in this case ourselves, would vanish the moment this process stops. Pattern and process, explanation and improvisational jazz appear as an inseparable, continuously dancing whole.

### Emergent Corporeal Relating/Knowing/Cognition

Our story begins with what we will call emergent corporeal relating. In one sense this domain of relating has been occurring for billions of years in ceaseless dance and variation. In another sense the beginning of this story feels more personal. We are conceived. Emerging from inter-flowing rivers of mother and father, ancestral physiologies, and histories of evolving chemistry, a fertilised egg, the first spark of sentient you, appears in the universe and so begins our story.

This egg, I should remind you, is a living cell – not a mere building block of life. A living cell is a fantastically complex dancing of interactive molecular knowing and as such is unquestionably alive. As an intact living creature, it is responsive to the world around it, in this particular case, the chemistries of the fallopian tube of your mother. While at the same time the world around it is responsive to the shifting activities that make up the cell.

This entity we call a cell is actually a dynamic community in which myriad different types of molecules, each with their own history of becoming, are continuously collaborating with each other, assembling and disassembling the structures that make it up. Nuclei, ribosomes, lysosomes, vacuoles, mitochondria, membranes, cytoskeletal microtubules and so forth, harmoniously functioning together, are collectively producing the component molecules of the cell which then assemble themselves into the organelles, that

through dancing together are producing themselves. This molecular circularity of form and function, a kind of whirling-dervish Escher-hand-cell, is 'self-creating' or *autopoietic*.

Autopoiesis is a fundamental characteristic or activity of all cells. It is taking place in me and in you, right now. Might it not be possible that this whirl of activity underpins our fundamental sense of existing? Perhaps you can't comprehend feeling this but, in biological fact, we *are* this. Whenever we look, we find ourselves to *be* this. Continuously emerging from a stream of sun sent energy and elements, emergent autopoietic living systems appear in the world.

Professionally, my mother was a medical artist. Consequently I was exposed from a very early age to various aspects of biology. As a child, I can remember buying a gold-fish. Watching it swim in the water, in a small plastic bag, suspended above the ground as I walked my way home from the shop, was a source of unending fascination. In my childhood imagination, this became a model for a cell. The gold-fish was the nucleus, the water was cytoplasm, and the plastic bag was the membrane. It wasn't till studying biology in high school that I realised that the membrane was not merely a flexible plastic container. In actual fact, membranes are extraordinarily complex. They are either single or double layered semi fluid lipid structures in which are floating what we could think of as different types of molecular doorways which range in form from relatively simple to amazingly complex. Each of these doorways has a structural sensitivity to a particular molecule or ionic condition found inside or outside the cell. Contact between the doorway and that molecule or ionic state can trigger a cascade of metabolic activity in the cell that often results in substances entering or leaving the cell. In a sense, the particular structure of a cell determines which aspects of the environment it is capable of

responding too. I think of this as a primal expression of cognition. The cell brings forth its world or surround. In a sense, it knows where it is and how to deal with what it finds.

As a single cell you were already sentient. For many people today, this is a shocking or even outrageous idea and yet a single cell is a dynamic interweaving of inward and outward responsiveness – a kinetic inter-attunement of molecules. I find it helpful to think of this ancient yet ever-present domain as being an expression of chemical knowing, chemical responsiveness. From the very word go, a continuous emergent corporeal relating, an incredibly complex autopoietic dancing of myriad types of chemical cognition/ knowing, is underpinning everything we do and everything we are. It is happening right now, though a direct appreciation of it is probably obscured by 'louder' more recent expressions of relating. Since you began reading this page, many of your cells have died and many more, through division, have been born, this continues through your life. This aspect of sensitive relating can sometimes become painfully apparent when we are ill, but when we are feeling well it just hums along as an undifferentiated contributor to the sense of aliveness we claim as 'me'. When eventually it does stop, others may say we are dead. The molecular choir has become silent.

### Inter-Corporeal Relating

There is a rhythm to cell life, as there is with all life, a kind of molecular music, an *a cappella* that is never a solo. Even as a single cell, a duet is already happening between the autopoietic process of your cellular beingness and the autopoietic process of mother's cells surrounding you. This is not classical music that follows an unchanging score written in DNA. It is an improvisation a collaboration of all the contributing musicians, a mutual musing of

inner~outer and self~other. It is a synergy of complex talents – you as a unique cell similar but different from mother and corporeal mother-talents – stimulating each other to riffs of sensitive fabrication and transformation. In the passion of this unfolding symphony you divide in two, and two becomes four, become eight and so forth. Eventually the surrounding world of most of these clumping clones are other brother/sister cells and only those on the periphery are singing directly with mum. Imagining this, I'm reminded of videos of Emperor Penguins, huddling for warmth with their chicks. The ones on the outside feel the winds. The ones on the insides feel other penguins. In a similar way the environment of the cells inside the blastula is subtly different from the environment of those in the outer layer. Chemical signals in the environment of each cell are stimulating suitable membrane receptors which leads to changing activity throughout that particular cell. Sections of coding DNA which thus far had not been used are now transcribed and a cascade of transformation ensues. This is the beginning of the fantastic journey of cell differentiation and foetal development. Outer cells develop differently from inner cells. It matters where we are. Depending on their structure, cells will interact with each other in different ways. Some adhere together in sheets or clumps. Others slip and slide over each other. Distinct communities of cells, engaged in particular rhythms, texture and tones of sensitively responsive conversation, are beginning to appear. We could call this the domain of inter-corporeal relating; cells relating to cells. From evolutionary perspective, this domain of relating has been going for billions of years.

Contemplate the immense journey of evolving life.<sup>33</sup> Cast your mind back to colonies of bacterial cells forming stromatolites, to complex

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<sup>33</sup> Books such as "*Kingdoms and Domains*" by Lynn Margulis and Micheal Chapman, or "*The Variety of Life*" by Colin Tudge, will help you do this.



prokaryotic ecosystems, and to interrelating eukaryotic cells collaboratively manifesting as multi-celled organisms. Our own bodies – mine engaged in writing and your's engaged in reading – are current expressions of this inconceivably vast continuity of inter-corporeal relating.

From a more conventional personal perspective, shortly after conception differentiating cells structurally couple together forming the tissues and organs of our body. In nine extraordinary months, an ever complexifying symphony of relating – a sensitive, responsive body or corpus of knowings – came into being. Cells relating to cells, tissue to tissue, organs to tissue and back again to cells, neurones relating to muscle, endocrine glands and so forth, bondings and flowings, mantlings and dismantlings, these dancings of inter-corporeal relating inter-exist with 'emergent corporeal relating' and both domains of activity continue, evolving and ramifying for as long as we live.



### Suggestion – 4

*Settle into a deepening appreciation of the texture and rhythm of your breathing. Explore the possibilities of directly sensing these relational domains: emergent corporeal relating and inter-corporeal relating. These two are a primary foundation of all multi-cellular knowing, a foundation that was happening long before you even looked human. It is continuing today even as you sit and read. If you become exquisitely still and attentive, perhaps you can sense this multi-dimensional dancing in a tactile kinaesthetic way. Like an orchestra tuning up before the performance. Individual instruments and musicians and then groups of instruments and musicians are continuously attuning to each other bringing forth the musing music of our lives.*

*With inter-corporeal relating, we assemble into humanhood.*

## Subjective Relating

A style or mode of relating could be thought of as a manner of knowing. In the womb, as days go by, proliferating modes of relational knowing that comprise fetus~mother become more and more diversified and more and more complex. Examined closely, everything reveals itself as dynamic activity. Everything – be it an atom, molecule, cell, tissue, organ or organism – is a dance of knowing, a multi-domained and multi-dimensional symphony of inter-responsive movement. Escher's hands are everywhere.

*I come from my mother.  
And mother I be.  
Forest and sky and thee.*

Any mother will know in a viscerally tactile manner that her unborn child moves in ways that are in tune with the activities she is engaging in. Ultrasound images now allow us to see this. Gestation is a dance of continuous movement. In the autopoietic flow of cell life, molecular movement reveals a domain of ever-fresh emergent corporeal relating. Shortly thereafter, cellular interactions display the domain of inter-corporeal relating. Your foetal body increasingly moves as a single integrated organism; wriggling and rolling, reaching and stretching, contracting and expanding, twitching and jerking; moving as a fluid whole responding to the changing womb environment around you. Before one is even born what Daniel Stern called a "core sense of self" involving experiences of self-agency, self-coherence, self-history and self-affectivity is beginning to make itself known.<sup>34</sup> The world around you is constantly transforming: tactile rhythms, physical constrictings and

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<sup>34</sup> "The Interpersonal World of the Infant" by Daniel Stern is a rich and insightful work that will enrich your contemplative explorations.

releasings, changes in light and sound and amniotic chemistries, and you – an integrated animate organism – are continuously moved to move in response. With increasing familiarity and competency, this congruence of effect and affect relative to a surrounding world appears as a domain of subjective relating – an integrated organism engaging with a continuously shifting world. We could also call it self~other, or subject~object, or subject~world relating.

With subjective relating begins a life long process of learning our bodies in terms of both what they are capable of doing and how they can respond in the face of a constantly changing environment. We move to establish comfort. We squirm with discomfort. We suck our thumb and begin to swallow. We turn towards and turn away. These integrated whole organism movements begin in the womb and continue throughout our life. We move in response to inner world sensations: pains, pulsings, burpings, sneezings, spasming and twitchings. And we move in response to outer world changes such as light, texture, hardness, softness and so forth. We will look at this in increasing detail later in the book but for the purpose of our philosophic detour, it is enough to recognise that at this stage of life, three inter-dependent domains of synergic relating are now in process: emergent corporeal, inter-corporeal and subjective. Each domain is influencing the other two in an intimately collaborative process of multi-levelled knowing-in-action that will continue until the end of our living. Each moment of knowing is like a note and the summation of notes together make a symphony.

For adult humans, making sense of things is a reflective process in which novel situations are responded to on the basis of previously established capacities. An organism, through the activities that comprise its living, actively *makes* sense of its world. This sense-making has been taking place since the beginning of animate existence. With emergent corporeal relating, elemental metabolic

dancings which comprise the cell are dynamically attuning to changing environmental conditions in ways that allow, the autopoiesis of the cell to continue in an Escher-handed way. A cell's capacity to do this depends on its particular structure~functioning through which it responds in life sustaining ways to changes in the environment. Metaphorically we could say this is how a cell makes sense of things. It's as if the organism knows that doing 'this' will lead to 'that'.

With the emergence of inter-corporeal relating, epigenesis contributes to the differentiation of many types of cells that together form the various tissues and organs that comprise an organism ready to be born. This is a staggering dance of sense making; cells taking cues from the environment and then using already existent metabolic talents to grow in new ways. Moving as an integrated organism in the gravitational field of planet earth, neuro-muscular co-ordinations are refined through experimenting with variations of already in process capacities for movement. Thus the domain of subjective relating increasingly comes into view. The months following birth are a total immersion in body learning. Hands work like this. Legs can do something quite different. We learn to grasp objects, to sit upright and to stand and take our first steps. Muscle use, changing contours of force, speed and direction are experimentally woven together. We taste and touch the world, grasping things with lips and fingers and learning about texture and pleasure and exhilaration and disappointment. This is a sensible and reflective process. It is certainly not chaotic. It is sensing and reflecting without anyone sensing or reflecting. It might be useful think of this as cognition without words and concepts. It was happening before even being born. This sense making is our animate nature in action.



### Suggestion – 5

*Stand on level ground with your eyes closed. Feel the rhythms and textures of shifting sensation that we adults call breathing. As you do this tune in to the subtle contractings and relaxings of muscles that are involved in maintaining your standing posture in this gravitational field of earth. In a fresh and uncontrived way, extend your appreciation of the extraordinary dancing of corporeal intelligence that is your living breathing mindful body.*

Inter-Subjective Relating:  
*an interweaving of meaning-givers*

Shortly after birth, though I suspect we could blur this line and consider the possibility that the first stirrings were already happening in the womb, the domain of inter-subjective relating begins to become increasingly apparent to an observer. Consider the situation. In the womb you were utterly naked; no clothes, no concepts, no possessions of any kind; nothing for you to *have*, and instead, only growing creatureliness for you to *be*. This, perhaps, is the ultimate primal intimacy. The pulsing, metabolising, integrating, growing communal organism that is you is in intimate multi-levelled contact and exchange with the pulsing, metabolising, integrating, growing communal organism, that is your mother.

*Twin journeys of becoming,  
You growing towards infancy,  
She growing towards motherhood.  
Realms of integrative knowing expanding everywhere.*

Inside your foetal body, your heart is beating, while the immediate world around you resounds with the pulsings of mother's heart and circulating blood. When she is in a flow of well-being, so too are you. When she is upset or frightened, reverberations of her chemistry will cascade through the community of becoming that is your body. In this dancing of increasing attunement, the living being that is you is harmonising with the living being that is her.

From the moment of conception and even before, there is a rich and qualitative range of types of movement. There is molecular movement, cellular movement, tissue and organ movement and organism movement – all together, an ungraspable, ever continuing holo-movement of becoming. Imagine this holo-movement that is you as a beginningless endless corporeal symphony: sometimes

intensifying, sometimes diminishing, swelling, fading, exploding, softening and sometimes ever so delicate. We could describe the experience using musical terms: *accelerando*, *fortissimo*, *pianissimo*, *diminuendo*, *legato*, *staccato* and so forth. There is a rhythmic feeling flow in a moment of happiness that is qualitatively different from the feeling flow of fear or startle.

Shortly after birth, our naked skin again contacts our mother's body and our mutual attunement continues to deepen. Two bodies knowing textures of goodness and textures of disharmony. We learn to recognise familiar rhythms of heartbeat, smells, moisture and warmth. Preferences are solidifying and thus;

*We meet;  
in total vulnerability,  
sensitive,  
transforming,  
organism to organism.*

We are happy. We are sad. We are pleased and pained. And with this rich vocabulary of corporeal knowing, we embark on the life long journey of making sense of our world while congruently it is making sense of us.

Sometime between six and nine months, we are clearly responding differently to our primary carer than to inanimate objects or to strangers. We follow mother's gaze and look towards what she seems to be looking at. Now subjective relating to an objective environment is enlarged and refined with increasing recognition that some objects are feeling/sensing beings such as oneself. We learn to tune ourselves to, or we might say we inter-attune with another sensing/feeling being. We share corporeal rhythms of pleasurable expectation, disappointment and frustration and through this



process we match our existence with the existence of others. Mother expresses similar expectations with us and together we find ourselves linking through pleasurable modes of corporeal communication. We begin to recognise that adults join movement with verbal sounds and seem to highly value this way of being, and so within this ambiance of sound and gesture we begin to experiment, exploring the possibilities of, joining breath and vocal chords and feelings. We exaggerate a cry, a laugh, a moan or a growl. We make primal music with mother 'ga-ga-ing'; matching contours of vitality: enthusiastic, reluctant, hesitant, exuberant expressions of beingness and we grow in deepening understanding of each other.<sup>35</sup>

Although I have made a distinction between subjective and inter-subjective relating, the two are virtually simultaneous in development. Both of them involve an entire living organism in relationship with some 'other'. In both, movement is congruent with beingness and beingness is congruent with experience. These are different ways of describing the living, being, knowing, experiencing, that we are. Observing living from the outside, we identify objects as moving with quantifiable direction, speed and force. Felt inwardly, we recognise qualitative tactile kinaesthetic experience. Wherever we look we find movement which depending on our point of view is kinetic or kinaesthetic. Wherever or whatever we designate as a beginning we find movement already happening; moving atoms, moving molecules, cells, tissues, organs and organisms. Movement is the ground of our being.

From infancy onwards, we are constantly experimenting; exaggerating muscular activities that seem to have spontaneously

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<sup>35</sup> An excellent and entirely readable account of this stage of subjective and inter-subjective relating can be found in psychologist Daniel Stern's *"Diary of a Baby"*

taken place even before birth. We 'recognise' movement and being moved, because continually transforming holo-movement is what we have always been. As a matrix of movement our body grows from cell to blastula to foetus to infant. Movement is relating-in-action and relating-in-action is a flow of knowing – intelligence in action – experience being experienced. As our dynamic interior becomes more integrated; nerve to nerve, muscle to bone, endocrine gland to receptor organs and so forth, there is an expanding sense of the whole organism, a collaboration of all these component movements, moving in response to the movements of the surrounding world. Without any ego or owner of the movement, a sense of integrated organism moving or not moving, appears in the world, a demonstration of a fresh corporeal discovery – 'I (subject) move'.

As we grow, we recognise that we can achieve a same objective with a variety of slightly different movements or textures of movements. There are many ways we can pull things towards us, or push them away; many ways we can sit upright, or roll over. With increasing confidence and competence we experiment, trying this and trying that, and eventually we begin to know in our bones, a sense of agency, a sense of 'I can move'. There is a clear difference between being passively moved, and being able to intentionally move and bring about a desired result in a constantly changing environment. I'll try to illustrate what I mean. One one occasion during a retreat at Wangapeka, I asked everyone to bring a toothbrush to class. You could try this. Invite someone to brush your teeth. Then brush your own teeth. How are these experiences different? With someone brushing your teeth it can feel clumsy and often unsatisfactory. You are a passive object having something done to you. When brushing your own teeth you are both sensitive subject and sensitive object. Cast your mind back to childhood when you were learning these

very basic skills. Being fed and feeding yourself. Being picked up after falling and getting yourself up. Being dressed and dressing yourself. Through experimental trial and error we learned to do these tasks and in the process a non-verbal sense of self and other came more and more into focus.

Before we had any spoken language or verbal concepts we were expanding in our capacity to make sense of the world, beginning with what Husserl described as simple movement or doing, and then broadening this mode of experience with the discovery that "I move" or "I do". With increasing familiarity born from experimentation we discover a growing sense of agency illustrated by the phrases 'I *can* move' and 'I *can* do'. The same type of playful experimentation is needed to learn the art of meditating.



## Suggestion – 6

*Stand with your weight evenly balanced on both feet and knees slightly flexed. Notice how the soles of your feet make contact with the ground. Imagine roots, growing from these points of contact, anchoring you deep in the earth. Now, close your eyes and begin to savour the varying textures and rhythmic processes that together make up your breathing. You may find it enhances your focus to breathe through your mouth and nose simultaneously. You will know that you are doing this if you can feel an alternating warming and cooling on your lips and at your nostrils.*

*With great sensitivity, relax into this mouth/nose breathing and explore the myriad shifting details of your entire organism – a constantly changing dynamic of relationships – your body of experience in the act of standing and breathing. Physical sensations, feelings, emotions, memories and flows of thinking are inter-responding with and to each other. At the same time they are responding to phenomena taking place in the environment around you. Feel the subtle ripples of muscular adjustment that facilitate your ability to stand vertically, on the surface of a spherical planet, which is turning on its axis while whirling around a star. If you notice any physical or mental tensions or holdings, invite them to soften and relax. Breathing – Smiling – Present – feel your way into this exploration.*

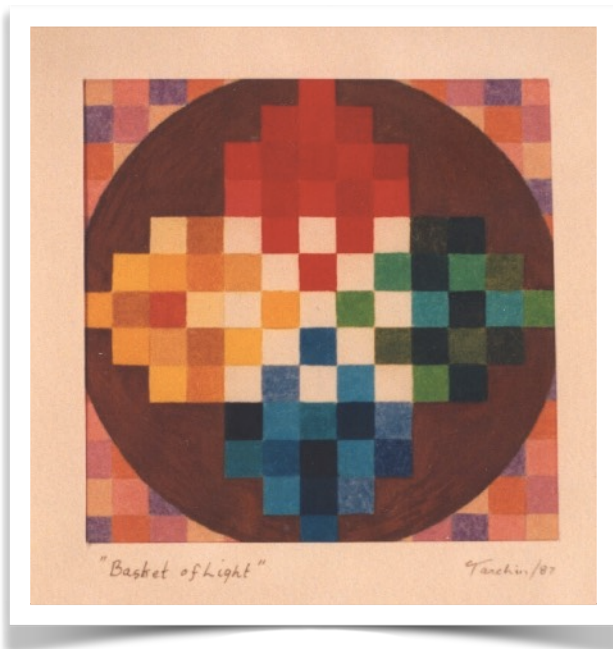
*After a while, begin to extend and exaggerate some of the subtle physical movements that together compose this integrated activity of standing and breathing. Eventually, with the exception of your feet which remain 'planted in the earth', all you is moving. Chest relating to shoulders, to hips, and legs and arms and face. Abdomen and back muscles – your buttocks and thighs feeling their strength, your entire physiology is 'dancing', moving harmoniously with the rhythms of your breathing. Guided by gradients of pleasure and interest, engulfed in the music of your breath, explore the full range of possible movement.*

*Experiment with this dynamic contemplation while centering in or from*

*your head. After a while, let the centre drop into your throat. How is this different? Explore moving from your heart. Eventually settle into your belly and stay with this until it becomes very familiar.*

*Breathing this body of moving experience,  
Gently, lovingly, softly, forgivingly,  
Interweavings of space and time and knowing  
While rooted in the earth,  
Letting go, letting be  
Hovering, weightless  
This smooth line of bliss.*

*Finish this session of practice by decreasing the range of movement until you are standing 'still', mouth/nose breathing, tracking the very subtle shifts and changes in this – your body of experience.*



## Verbal Relating

The rest of this story is both brief and too long and complex to tell. It's too long if we try to trace the first hints of verbal relating back to their evolutionary beginnings. It's comparatively brief if we assume the beginnings of speech to be only a few decades back in our infancy.

Biologist Humberto Maturana referred to language in a refreshingly uncommon way. Instead of treating it as a noun indicating a particular tradition or system of verbal communication – be it English or Sanskrit or Swahili – he turned it into verb, an active process. 'Languaging' is a complex of activities that creatures do in conjoined togetherness. We meaningfully couple. We language together!

Languaging involves much more than sounds and syntax. This is obvious when we consider sign language used by deaf people, which of course can take place in utter silence. Words divorced from feeling, from tactile kinaesthetic sensation, are words divorced from meaning. Considering the preceding four domains of relating (emergent corporeal, inter-corporeal, subjective and inter-subjective) we can see that meaningful couplings – the deep roots of languaging – have been taking place long before humans with their highly touted talent for verbal communication emerged in the biosphere. Intra-species languaging and inter-species languaging are essential features of evolving ecosystems. We respond to each other. We collaborate.

Many non-human creatures language together. Some obvious examples are birds, dogs, whales, cicadas and crickets, and perhaps less obvious are mycorrhizal fungi and plants. The world is filled with messaging – dancings of relational knowing – weavings of import and meaning. This is the story that is too long to tell and we

could spend a lifetime investigating it.<sup>36</sup>

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The briefer version of the story is more immediately personal as it focusses on the experience of growing from infancy to adulthood. Each of us is born into a world that is inundated with rhythm and vibration. Our bodies are humming and thrumming in response to shifting elements of light and sound and smell and touch. Our experience of breathing is a cadence of movement and sensation; a synthesis of sound, texture and skeletal muscular activity: wheezings, sibilances, gaspings, constrictions and free flowing smoothness. As infants, we experience the tactile dimensions of sound riding on the breath in the form of spontaneous cries, burps, sneezes, coughs, swallowings, yawnings, lip smackings, suckings and so forth. Through trial and error and serendipitous accident, we discover that by varying muscular tensions, our breathing body can produce different sounds. From the very beginning, touch and movement and sound have been linked in dynamic congruency. Our ability to verbally communicate has musical underpinnings.

Healthy infants are constantly blending their inherited dispositions for movement with playful experimentation. They reach, stretch, grasp, kick, twist and turn, pushing the boundaries, discovering new possibilities. This universal tendency now extends to breathing and we discover that sequential changes in muscle use can modify the spontaneous sounds emerging from our bodies.

Without any instructions to do so, we infants explored, varying the tensions in throat, chest and belly – exaggerating, prolonging,

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<sup>36</sup> In his book *"Sounds Wild and Broken"* David George Haskell goes deeply into this sonic history in a rich and poetic way.

restricting – and through this we began to recognise that feeling, texture, sound, and linkage with another being, can come together in meaningful ways. We begin to appreciate and to engage in, what Sheets-Johnstone in many of her writings calls 'synergies of meaningful movement'.

For anyone not born deaf, sound is ubiquitous. We swim through it like fish in an ocean of rhythmic tones. Sound comes from within us and at the same time, it seems to surround us. Pause your reading right now and listen, sound is all around. For the child, some sounds are particularly attention grabbing such as the sounds of our mother or our primary carer. We hear her laughing, talking, moaning and without even understanding the words, we sense her intended meaning in the texture, volume, pitch and tone of her voice. Around the same time we begin to realise that she is attentive to some of the sounds we make. We can cry in a certain way that brings her near. We can burble in a way that invites her attention. Increasingly, mother and child explore using sound as a way of tuning to each other and mutually tuning to objects and activities in the surrounding world. We become familiar with these integrated flows of physicality, emotion, intention and sound – and so arises our early experiences of speech and verbal relating.

Imagine yourself, a few months old, a growing dynamic of emergent corporeal, inter-corporeal, subjective and inter-subjective relating. While shifts and changes in any domain ripple through the others, in actual fact, we live as seamless wholes. Now, exploring verbal relating we deepen the inter-attunement of two animate subjects, ourself and in this example, our mother, using variations of sound as a trigger for meaningful linking. On an evolutionary time scale, the capacity for sophisticated spoken language is something that is quite new. This novelty perhaps explains why we humans are so obsessed with it. As babies in an already languaging world we learned the



local dialect and idiom, not through choice but because it was simply what was happening around us. Languaging in this way helped us to maintain, and to some extent control, the consistency and quality of caring that we needed in order to thrive.

As young children we vocalised obsessively and so through practice, these verbal talents expanded and diversified. We learned to name objects and activities, and to talk about them in simple ways. Eventually we learned to talk about imagined pasts and possible futures.

With encouragement and reinforcement from surrounding adults, it seems that for most of us this passion for talking gradually began to eclipse our appreciation of the tactile kinaesthetic ground of the preceding four domains of relational knowing. Names and naming held our interest while the deeper foundations of relating faded into the realm of the unremarkable and the take-it-for-grantedness. Gradually we came to believe that the universe was composed of things we can name and that if they couldn't be named, they were not important. There grew a subtle implication that if we couldn't verbalise something we didn't really know it or appreciate it. We might imagine it but it didn't really exist. I suspect that this tendency to equate meaningful experience with verbal activity hugely contributes to the common experience of inner dialog and running commentaries. It's a way we render our experience real and meaningful. A continual flow of verbalising assures us we are alive but in doing so other dimensions of relational linking and connecting fade from view.

## Story Relating

This last domain of relating, I call story relating. As infants, we were not only surrounded by talkative humans but we were inducted into myriad stories in the form of beliefs, assumptions, hopes and aspirations – ways of explaining things that defined our family and culture. Adult humans seem to live in worlds of story. Ecologist Trevor Goward once wrote, "Homo sapiens is above all a narrative animal, a teller of tales, a relater of deeds. No other creature comes at existence this way, deconstructing it, annotating it, articulating it into concretions of thought enough to fill whole libraries. Words are the lens – narrative the frame – through which we peer out at the world. It is hard to get across how profoundly weird this is: our overwhelming allegiance to words."<sup>37</sup>

There are an immense range of possible stories: neo-liberal stories, phallic capitalist stories, cog-in-an-industrial-machine stories. There are stories of oppression and hardship, stories of exploitation, survival of the fittest, symbiosis and compassion. There are stories of endless growth and accumulation – the shopping story – stories of interbeing, deep ecology, scientific explanation, religious, mythological, psychological, post-modern. We humans have a vast array of stories through which we make sense of this ever fresh cresting wave of now and in the process determine the course of our future actions. There is even the story of all these stories; interrelating, pushing and pulling and rubbing up against each other. Together they make a never ending story; an undivided holomovement, this dance of communal understanding.

In Zen, truth is sometimes portrayed as being round and slippery and slick. It is very difficult to grasp or understand. Analogously

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<sup>37</sup> This and many other writings of Trevor Goward can be found on his inspiring and informative website called "Ways of Enlivenment".

we might realise that truth is this 'undivided holo-movement'. When we focus on one particular aspect of it as if illumining it with a torch, the very act of doing this throws everything else into the shade of forgetfulness and ignorance. This is the slippery part of the tale – the Escher hand mystery and challenge – and we humans are called to work with it.

\* \* \*

In the early 1970s I was living in Vancouver, Canada and had the opportunity to attend three months of classes given by the great Tibetan yogi and teacher Kalu Rinpoche.<sup>38</sup> In the course of our studies, someone raised the question, "What is mind?" His answer was short and succinct. "Mind is that which knows." Of course, this led me immediately to another question. What is that which knows? What is it that is doing the knowing . . . and how? and where? and why? and when? These questions energised my life for many years and brought me to the six domains and dimensions of responsive knowing, fields of relating, dimensions of understanding. An expanse of knowing. An expanse of mind.

These three attempts at telling a story; a story of stories, a story of explanation and assumption and an evolutionary story of domains of relating might help to raise this question for you. Mind and knowing and being; where does one end and the other begin? What on earth is going on?

*It takes a few moments  
– this dropping in.  
As if . . .*

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<sup>38</sup> Rinpoche taught from a very famous Tibetan text by Gampopa, called "The Jewelled Ornament of Liberation"

*your nose  
was diving  
down*

*through kelp beds  
of knowing.*

*Was sinking through layerings of scent.*

*Slipping through the stinky ones  
and . . .*

*pausing,*

*in a space of flowers and grasses,*

*Your whole body, feeling its*

*tendrils growing into the sentience,*

*this almost silent singing of life,*

*a capping bodies into being.*

*Pausing to take your bearings,*

*familiarizing,*

*adjusting,*

*then . . .*

*opening further,*

*As if . . .*

*the smells of earth and earthworm,*

*flickerings of fungal conferencing,*

*this dense, moist, layer of conversation,*

*mysteries so near, yet so easily forgotten and neglected,*

*were inviting you into a blessing*

*both shocking and exhilarating.*

*We rest,*

*drinking in the timbre and tone,*

*the hintings and intimatings*

*this languaging of life.*

*The birds are speaking it!  
the wind and daisy bush,  
and this golden leaf fluttering down.*

*The smells and sounds of great grandmother earth  
and great grandfather earth,  
going about their mysterious doings;  
Touching and bequeathing us all with something  
deep and strange,  
holding us in an embrace of  
welcome and belonging;*

*Hovering, as the languaging of life emerges  
from deep in our bones  
and then leaps to heart and head  
to hands and lips  
and  
Finally . . . !  
We begin to speak!<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> "It Takes a Few Moments" written April 17, 2011, at Orgyen Hermitage

## Chapter Three

### *Primary "Equipment": Skills and Competencies for Approaching the Unknown*

*Wonder dislodges man from the prejudice of everyday, publicly pre-given, traditional and worn out familiarity ... (It) drives him from the already authorised and expressly explicated interpretation of the sense of the world and into the creative poverty of not yet knowing... – Eugen Fink<sup>40</sup>*

*Examining the full and multifaceted spectrum of the flow as it arises, noticing what is present and not shrinking from awareness of what is present . . . takes courage, energy, perseverance. Perhaps most basically it takes interest, interest in what it is to be human and in the complex diversity of being human. – Sheets-Johnstone<sup>41</sup>*

Scientists have laboratories filled with expensive equipment. Artists have studios complete with the tools of their particular craft. The situation is not much different for practitioners of natural awakening.

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<sup>40</sup> Quoted from Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in *The Primacy of Movement*, p 283

<sup>41</sup> *Insides and Outsides* by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, p135

As yogis of the natural world – competent explorers of the art of fully engaged sustainable living – our studio or lab requires no expensive equipment, buildings or institutions. Our research takes place in the midst of the on-going activity of life and living, the constantly transforming universe of 'beingness-in-action' that we are. Waking up in the morning or falling asleep at night, eating, drinking, talking, learning, working, socialising, relaxing or struggling – our ever fresh, here and now living is our temple, studio and laboratory all rolled into one. It is what we are and where we are, what we do and what we feel drawn to explore. Our primary equipment are qualities we already have, though we may not necessarily appreciate that this is the case and, even if we do, we may not value them. Let's look into this.

*Begin with your own life.*

*Begin with your own life.*

*In the very centre,*

*a deep well of luminosity*

*beyond any darkness or light,*

*this immensity of being*

*beyond any hoping or fear.*

*Dancing across the abyss.*

*On one side, daily crucifixion.*

*The other, terrifyingly spacious and free.*

*This life*

*This impossible melding*

*This mystery*

*Our beginning*

*Our opening*

*Our flower.*

A life of awakening both relies on, and grows from, two essential qualities. With these two in place, whatever you do and however you live is sure to be fruitful. Without them, I suspect no amount of 'spiritual' practice, retreat or meditation will help.

Regardless the outward form or inclination of one's particular path, whether it be traditional or eclectic, religious or secular, scientific or artistic, practical or philosophical, from the very beginning, we need a capacity for inspired wonder. We need to be equipped with child-like vibrant curiosity and pervasive interest in how the world works. At the same time, we also need to manifest a natural and uncontrived tendency to respond compassionately and skilfully when presented with an opportunity to help or be of service to others. In Buddhist traditions, these two qualities – wisdom and compassion – are seen as essential foundations for any form of meaningful living. They are the two legs that carry us through life. Together they comprise our primary equipment.





## *Curiosity, Interest and Wonder*

*. . . experimenting and theorising are dynamic practices that play a constitutive role in the production of objects and subjects and matter and meaning.*<sup>42</sup>

Tibetan translator Karl Brunnholzl has described wisdom as the inherent inquisitiveness and curiosity of one's own mind that is both precise and playful at the same time. I think this is a beautiful starting point in our attempt to understand what the word 'wisdom' might actually mean. We could say that it is 'inherent' because, as a characteristic of all living systems, it has been there from the beginning. It is 'precise' in clearly discerning one thing from another. This is straight and that is curved; this is a light and that is a dark.<sup>43</sup> Its 'playfulness' is reflected in the fact that all organisms are by nature experimentally active, as if through trying this and trying that they were exploring the many possibilities of a situation – adjusting 'behaviour' depending on what the current situation demands. This dynamic experimentation takes place through a variety of domains and dimensions: molecular, cellular, organ system, and individual organism.

The phrase "one's own mind" – or we might say, one's total expanse of knowing – draws attention to the fact that precision and playfulness are natural attributes of this immeasurable expanse of

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<sup>42</sup> Quoted from Karen Barad's book, *"Meeting the Universe Halfway"* p56

<sup>43</sup> This quality of precision could be described as a deep visceral, confidence/ assumption that to the extent and purposes of our current situation, the identified object of our interest can be treated as a discrete object/phenomena. From this perspective, precision is the expression of a sufficiently clear theory. The playfulness is the activity of testing the resilience or boundaries of that theory. Through playfulness we adjust the theory and through theorizing we modify the playfulness – a beautiful entanglement of precision and play.

inter-being~inter-knowing that moment by moment is comprising one's living. For human beings, interest, inquisitiveness, curiosity and wonder go hand in hand with a visceral feeling of organism aliveness – an alert, attentive, openness – a marriage of yearning to approach something new and intriguing, together with a degree of cautiousness, fear or reluctance to do the same. Check this out in your own experience.

Curiosity, inquisitiveness or questioning can manifest through various modalities. We could have intellectual curiosity, sensual curiosity, emotional curiosity or intuitive curiosity. Whatever we call it, this is a process that involves clarifying, investigating, meditating, contemplating, pondering, marvelling over, reflecting on, or thinking about, something. Our overall organismic wakefulness and alertness is itself a non-verbal expression of question/curiosity-in-action. This is perhaps a basic condition of sanity.

In her excellent essay, *"Does Philosophy Begin and End with Wonder"* Maxine Sheets-Johnstone distinguishes between what she calls shallow wonder and deep wonder.<sup>44</sup> The shallow form rarely penetrates socially acceptable norms and possibilities. We wonder about things, or enquire into them or think about them in terms of what personal relevance they have for us. This domain of conventional enquiry deals with the surfaces; names and concepts, descriptions and categories. We could wonder what the weather will be like tomorrow. Or if a flight will be on time. Or who to invite to a party. Or in a seemingly more profound way, how or why did something come into being? This type of question is often

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<sup>44</sup> This essay can be found in chapter seven of Sheets-Johnstone's book, *"The Primacy of Movement"*

looking for explanations or answers or solutions to problems by way of verbal concepts. We might ask, what bird is that and feel we have a satisfactory answer when told its name. Psychologically, this mode of question often indicates a need for certainty about whether we are right, or justified, or blameable. Through this conventional mode of questioning, we accumulate knowledge and a certain savvy about the world. In time we are filled to the brim with ideas, beliefs, preferences, and opinions. Some might even consider us to be richly informed, but this is still a reflection of shallow enquiry and shallow wonderment. It's not uncommon that in the midst of copious knowledge, people can continue to feel that they are profoundly missing something. Super-knowledgable people are not necessarily wise.

To remedy this, requires a visceral familiarity with deep and consistent wondering, coupled with a willingness to befriend our fears and anxieties about not knowing, contradiction, ambiguity, complexity in the face of the un-pin-downableness of dynamic situations. Deep wondering will transform the very base of who and what we are. Instead of enquiry guided by a need for certainty, we have enquiry that involves apprenticing to the ever fresh collaborative mystery of who and what we are and the matrix of relating in which we live. Surrendering into this wonderment – how is the universe functioning such that I exist in this state of being interested in how the universe is functioning? What is actually going on? and how does it work? Now, instead of being stuffed with concepts, opinions and stubborn certainties we discover Fink's "creative poverty of not yet knowing". *"Wonder dislodges man from the prejudice of everyday, publicly pre-given, traditional and worn out familiarity ... (It) drives him from the already authorised and expressly explicated interpretation of the sense of the world and into the creative poverty of not yet knowing."* This is the profound vow of poverty

taken by St Francis and all other great yogi-saints. Through this creative poverty, this openness/willingness to fully engage in the myriad domains of living we are, we find a unexpected wealth of love and clear seeing/presence; deep wonder imperceptibly morphing into profound reverence, awe and gratitude.

**L**iving creatures are continuously making sense of their surrounding universe. This is biology-in-process, sense-making-in-action, and is a necessary facet of being sentient. Making sense of the world is nothing special. We humans might endow this process with grandiose names; a state of enquiry, question or wonderment, but we should keep in mind that every sentient being is doing it. Our preceding philosophical detour in chapter-two hinted at various domains and dimensions of sense making.

Two hundred years ago in Europe, most people assumed that the world was a few thousand years old, and that God miraculously created everything that we see today. Darwin and Wallace hadn't published their theories of evolution. We knew nothing of genetics or developmental biology. We knew nothing of stellar cycles, planet formation, plate tectonics, chemistry and modern psychology. None of these concepts were available to help us explain and make sense of freshly arising experience. It was commonly assumed that a hierarchy of control, running from God to humans, structured our relationships and responsibilities with and to, the rest of the living world. Life took place in an authoritative ambiance in which we judged and were judged according to our ability to keep spoken or unspoken rules, precepts or conventions. Of course, these attitudes tended to concretise the social and political structures we found ourselves in. In such a milieu, deep wonder, question or enquiry rarely occurred and when it did, like a delicate flower it was easily

crushed, or alternately, it might have actually seemed dangerous. It threatened to upset the collective apple cart of cherished beliefs and opinions. People were sometimes burned alive for voicing views that looked challenging to entrenched structures of authority.

Although many readers of this book will have come to accept the value of on-going question/enquiry, we shouldn't take it for granted. Throughout history, as well as in the life of individuals and families, there are periods when question is perhaps encouraged, but there are also periods where conformity and non-question is covertly and sometimes even overtly encouraged if not outright demanded. Today, the various threats of climate disruption, ecological degradation and collapsing social systems are nudging many towards authoritarianism and even fascism. With digital surveillance, social media and consumer driven news cycles, the valuing of deep and nuanced enquiry, is becoming increasingly smothered by a mountain of endlessly repeated sound bites and implied threats or enticements to conform. In parts of North America today, even libraries and librarians, are being targeted with job loss or closure. This retreat into an imagined safety of unquestioning certainty, characterises both secular and religious fundamentalism. As American President, George W. Bush said shortly after the events of 9/11, "you are either with us, or against us." These simplistic attitudes reflect a pervasive anxiety in the face of the ultimately uncontrollable collaborative nature of living – a tragic reluctance to embrace the immeasurably vast, ever evolving communal reality of biology-in-process that we are.

It sometimes seems easier to have someone tell us what to do. Perhaps we feel safer with clearly defined structure; rules, guidelines, laws and certain outcomes. These same attitudes can colour our views of meditation and the spiritual life. Instead of feeling a deep, free-flowing multi-levelled curiosity about what is

going on, we shrink the path of awakening to a question of how to be right with God, or the church or the powers that be. Spirituality becomes becomes a matter of technique, rule and ritual rather than deep pervasive curiosity about what is going on and how we can best fit with it all.

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Organismic enquiry is innate to all animate creatures. We see this taking place in the domains of emergent corporeal, intercorporeal and subjective relating. As the biosphere evolved, intersubjective, verbal and story relating, joined with these earlier three at which point we humans began to characterise our experience of this primordial inter-being~inter-knowing process with words such as enquiry, curiosity-in-action, or question. For most of us, learning to competently enquire with the entire of one's being – not merely with mouthed verbal concepts – is a life long process. In its early stages, such a manner of living is like a delicate plant that needs nurturing. As seedlings we are more likely to thrive in the presence of good 'gardeners': parents, teachers, mentors or societal leaders. These are people whose living provides a supportive ambiance for us to become more confident and skilled in the arts of experimental enquiry. Without such mentors we can wilt.

In Buddhism, a fully ordained monk is referred to as a *bhikkhu* (Skt) or a *gelong* (Tib). I like the term *gelong* because it carries an extra hidden meaning that is quite relevant to our topic. The word when broken down can literally mean, 'one who is free to ask question'. It's worth looking into this. How free am I to explore and enquire into this immense mystery of life and living? Do I value such

enquiry? Are there things I can do to encourage it? Do I have the wisdom and the patience to allow understanding to arise at its own pace and in its own unpredictable way? Is this attitude to life my 'default setting'? Do I turn to it in the face of difficulty? Is curiosity, interest and wonder a place of refuge and a source of blessing?

*Imagine yourself as a living tree.*

*You as tree of life.*

*You as forest of life.*

*Below the ground, we cannot see.*

*Yet, we feel or know*

*in some unfathomable manner*

*our roots – aspects of wisdom – ungraspable suchness,*

*this inter-being~inter-knowing mystery that we are.*

*Above the ground – branches, leaves, flowers and fruits;*

*aspects of compassion that grow*

*from a bottomless rooting;*

*dark and potent,*

*this inter-being~inter-knowing nature that we are.*

*Swaying in the winds of living,*

*branches and fruits appear and disappear.*

*This is what we work with;*

*these flowerings of offering,*

*displayings of sharing,*

*these roots that nourish while anchoring firm.*

*We begin with this primordial tree of now.*

*The word 'this', indicating my experience*

*right now, this very moment,*

*the only experience I have to work with;*

*An adult, languaging, bi-pedal, primate, homo-sapien.*

*'Outward', are branchings of possibility.  
'Inward' are proliferating roots of ever deepening dynamic connection.  
We are forever beginning where we are  
balanced at the mystery point  
growing in all directions without going anywhere,  
until our roots look like branches  
and our branches look like roots  
darkness revealing light  
and light revealing eternity.*

*Contemplations in the early morning;  
A braiding of languaging and emotioning,  
cultures and histories,  
patterning of preference and avoidance,  
these riverings of conversation,  
This living tree;  
this tree of life and living that I am now.  
Flexing and bending in the winds of a living forest world.*

*My roots grow deep into the soil  
of my constantly dancing physiology.  
Branches and leaves of tissue and organ,  
flowing and bowing on currents of homeostasis,  
autoimmune function, and a host of second order  
autopoietic process – a community of being/becoming.*

*This tree of communion with roots ramifying finer and finer,  
growing from the soil of first order  
autopoietic cell function,  
primordial living systems  
structurally coupling as a  
cresting wave of life-in-action now.*



*And still the roots grow further,  
branching out into a cosmos of thermodynamics,  
gravity, physics, planetary process  
and cosmic dancings.*

*This very ordinary moment, with you.  
This very moment resonating fullness.  
Can you see it? Can we be it?  
Would you like some more tea!<sup>45</sup>*

Deep wondering inevitably brings us to an intimate appreciation for the inter-dependence of everything and everyone. We might call this the complimentary or reciprocal nature of existence. What I do affects you. What you do affects me. What my heart does affects my kidneys. What the weather is doing affects all of us just as we are collectively affecting climate and weather. Such inter-communing is happening continuously through myriad domains and dimensions of living. We depend on each other to survive and so it is in our interest to help each other to thrive.

*Expanding into the gifting fullness,  
living collaborations of sensitive responsiveness,  
Volumes of sentience within volumes of sentience,  
Oceans of knowing in the tiniest drops.*

In contrast to this, shallow wondering can at times be profoundly risky. In Buddhism it is well recognised that exclusive use of conceptual analysis, without compassionately caring for the well-being of others, can lead us into nihilistic states. This tendency is traditionally referred to as 'falling off the path on the side of emptiness'. Superficially cultivated, questioning everything can lead

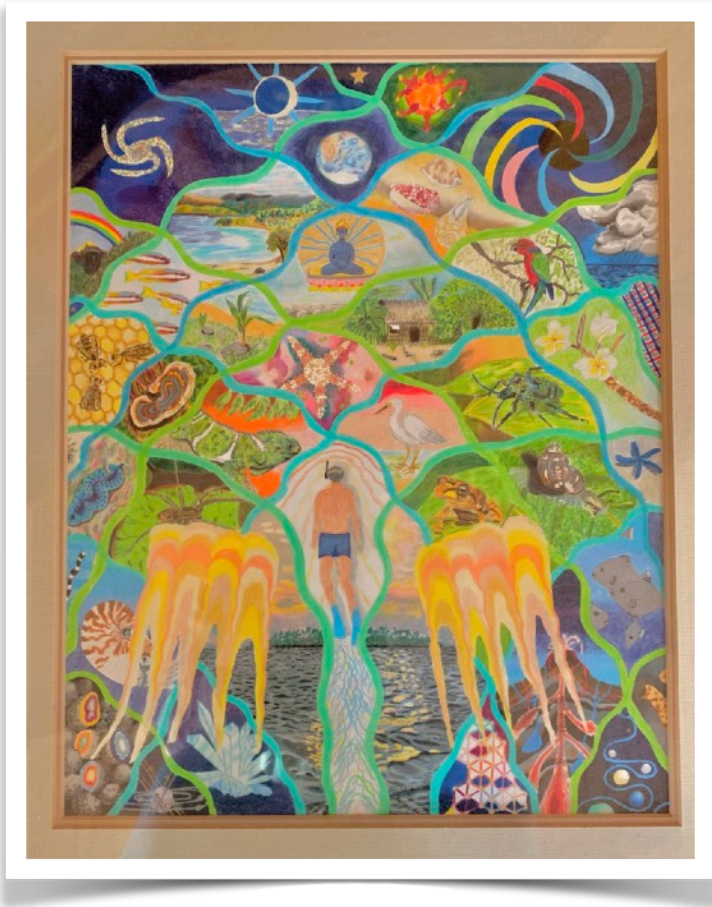
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<sup>45</sup> "The Roots of Now" from *A Sheaf of Poems 2010 – 2019*, GDT

not towards a spacious and open inclusivity of inter-being~inter-knowing but instead contribute to states of cynicism, distrust and defensive insularity.

It's difficult to move though life on one leg. Hopping along on the leg of investigation/analysis, the world becomes increasingly fragmented into parts and particles ad infinitum. Ultimately, phenomena is reduced to nothingness/emptiness/meaninglessness, and the relative nature of things is taken to imply that there is no substantial truth and no facts, just individual views, beliefs and opinions. Living as if we exist in a bubble of mind where nothing else is important can only end in disaster. To remedy this we need to restore our balance. We need to strengthen our leg of compassion. We could equally call it the presence of empathy, or attunement, or caring or love. To thrive on this pathless path of being and becoming, we not only need enquiry and question but we need to manifest a natural and uncontrived tendency to respond compassionately and skilfully when presented with an opportunity to help or be of service to others. Remember Escher's hands. Compassion with all its attributes matures in the affect of deep wondering. Deep wondering matures in the evolving dynamic of mutual inter-attunement. These two, precede all spiritual techniques and disciplines and together they comprise our primary equipment.

*The entire premise of this book  
rests on the assumption that we exist as  
multi-dimensional, multi-domained, dynamics of living.*



*Everything that we do and everything that we are,  
is an ongoing expression of this systemic living.*

## Chapter Four

### *Contemplative Science, Ecology, and a Feeling for the Whole*

*Here is a poetic hint, at how reverence, wonder, discernment and enquiry might underpin a true contemplative science. In a strange and almost mysterious way, to actually live with such a view is both our practice and the fruition of our practice.<sup>46</sup>*

A group of us were recently watching a wonderful video animation highlighting the dynamic complexity of replicating and transcribing DNA.<sup>47</sup> It's as if you were looking through a microscope capable of magnifying ten million times and seeing the rhythmic choreography of molecules dancing together their life stories. The whole thing was breath-taking. At one point, the commentator points out that this process of replication and transcription is taking place, right now, in nearly every cell of your body! Later that day Mary and I went out walking and I was flooded with the recognition that this fantastically rapid, complex thrumming of organic chemistry was happening in each leaf, in

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<sup>46</sup> This is an edited version of an essay I originally wrote and posted in 2009.

<sup>47</sup> "DNA Interactive" is available from <http://www.dnai.org> This superb 4 hour teaching DVD shows many aspects of DNA research including interviews with key scientists such as Watson and Crick and many magnificent animations done by Drew Berry.

every plant – fields of living green – meadows and forests all around us, humming with the busyness of intelligence unfolding.

Seen at the molecular level, the overall activity of a cell appears to be like a well organised city with countless components, each going about its life journey. It's as if everything knows exactly what to do; a staggering number of proteins and complexes of proteins, along with numerous other bio-chemical substances, constantly being formed and dismantled. Not only that, but each process of forming and un-forming is itself interacting with other transient forms in ways that give rise to yet other transient forms and so on. On the scale shown in Berry's animation, a human body would be the size and complexity of an entire planet!

I find myself wondering if the organelles within the cell are aware of the cell as a whole, not to mention the animal or the plant of which they are a part? If so, what kind of awareness would this be? Pursuing this idea a bit further, the other day I was looking into a hawkbeard, *crepis capillaris*. What's that, you might ask? It's a beautiful dandelion-like wildflower, so common here in New Zealand that it is usually ignored or just lumped into the category of 'weeds'. Our meadow is full of them. Looking closely into one compound sunburst flower head, I began to notice many tiny insects crawling around, sensing, eating, finding mates, and generally being the immense mystery that they are. A bit later, I put one of these populated flower heads under a stereo microscope and, at about 85 powers of magnification, the micro insects were revealed to be tiny wasp-like creatures. One was busy cleaning its wings while another came by to check it out. Attached to various places on their black bodies were glistening grains of yellow pollen. If one of these insects was the size of a human, the pollen grains would be the size of basketballs!

Back in the field, I looked up and realised that I was surrounded by thousands of these flowers, all waving in the breeze. Each one a home for tiny insects that, with my unassisted eyes, looked like moving black dots. I wonder to what degree the individual insects are aware of the field of flowers or, for that matter, the specific flower head they are living in? I wonder in what way the molecular dances within individual cells of the insect are 'aware' of the insect? All these vastly different dimensions of being and becoming fit together. They are necessary for each other. What we casually call 'life' is really a braided river of inter-becoming and inter-knowing – a flowing stream of ephemeral relations taking pace in myriad domains and dimensions.

Consider this person, looking into this particular flower and this particular population of insects. We could wonder to what extent Tarchin is aware of the entire meadow in which he is sitting. Would such an experience even be possible? And what about the protein synthesis going on inside me as I write these words – synthesis whose very existence powers and gives form to the movements of my fingers on the keyboard; reverberating symphonies of neural-muscular knowing, broadcasting throughout my entire being? Could these molecular components be aware of me or the meadow I'm sitting in? And in what way is the meadow and the surrounding water catchment area aware of the molecular components? These questions are perhaps unanswerable, yet these realms are all affecting each other. They are flowing through each other; responding, shifting and changing in perfect accord while simultaneously conserving the biological processes that are necessary for their on-going existence.

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In today's human world, there seems to be a compulsion to grapple with larger and larger realms of experience. It's as if the slogan, "bigger is better", has been so collectively internalised that we unconsciously assume it to be a fundamental truth of nature. Many people are passionate about saving the planet, saving cultures, saving species, or ecosystems. This is a wonderful phenomena. At the same time though, I find myself wondering if it is not a part of a great ignorance-making project. While wrestling with a really large, generalised realms of life, we tend to blank out or at least ignore the specific details of myriad other domains and dimensions of being. We are often so focused on the 'big' issues that we fail to see the blades of grass bending under our feet. Of course the opposite – obsession with detail and blindness to the larger view – can be just as crippling.

Our infatuation with large-scale abstraction has shaped many areas of life such as economics, statistics, planning and management, and we apply these abstractions in our attempts to understand ecologies, cultures, religious teachings, business and so forth. This obsession with the so called large picture has contributed to incalculable suffering in the form of enforced standardisation, and loss of diversity. We have somehow come to value the global and planetary above local. Local activity rarely seems profound. After all, it's just us – and look at us with all our foibles! What of profound value could we learn from our neighbours? On the other hand, overseas expertise, ancient knowledge, imported wisdom – ah . . . now that's worth spending money and energy on!

It seems that accompanying each realm of knowing or particular dimension of being, is a tendency to become oblivious to the vast array of component fields; things and events that are collectively supporting our current experience. Perhaps the very act of focusing on any single part of a whole is a form of abstraction. We abstract,

or extract, or pluck out a particular detail from the vast flowing matrix of situations and circumstances. From this point of view we humans are surely lost in abstraction. Is this why the challenge of livelihood and how to live healthfully with each other seems so complex and difficult to resolve? Perhaps this tendency to not see the trees for the forest or the forest for the trees is an inherent characteristic of perception.

I suspect that most people feel that their bodies and their social lives are the only important reality. They dismiss the molecular dancing of cells or the wholeness of the biosphere as being overly theoretical or abstract. Perhaps this is understandable. Whichever realm of knowing we are immediately engaged with always feels more alive and meaningful while other realms comprising the environment in which our living takes place are seen as merely mechanical or functional supports and hence less relevant. The field of experience I sense as 'me' is a living subject, while everything else is transformed into a less alive object. The fact that all these other living objects are experiencing themselves as a subject for whom I may be merely another object, rarely occurs. In Buddhism, this type of knowing/experience is called *viññāna*. It is a manner of consciousness, that always arises in the form of a duality. On one side is a 'self' that knows. On the other is the entity or experience that is known. For most people, the experience of there being a knower and a known is so intuitively natural that we rarely give it a thought. Yet this dualism unwittingly can support the disastrous conceit of feeling more important than anything else. Our challenge is to operate in this *viññāna* way of knowing while at the same time having a feeling or appreciation for the whole.

Technologies such as the internet and cell phones reinforce our thinking and experiencing in abstract ways. We have become bamboozled by our own intelligence. Ironically, at the same time we



are developing capacities for considering vast dimensions of space and time, we are losing the ability to value smallness and the local; what's next door, and immediate, and apparently ordinary. Our deeply engrained tendency to compartmentalise often obscures the fact that all the different levels and realms of being are mutually inter-penetrating and inter-responding. There is something flawed in our thinking when we ignore or undervalue where we are, in order to be concerned about a grander picture somewhere else. What we do here affects the micro worlds. What we do here affects the macro worlds. It is right here, and only here, that there is an opportunity to effectively engage. All other worries or concerns are just flutters of thinking. Salt and pepper condiments on the meat and potatoes of now.

*Pause with me for a moment.*

*Feel your breathing and appreciate where you are.*

*Soften throughout your body.*

*Brighten your senses and receive*

*this beautiful, great, open, multi-dimensional meadow of presence.*

*It's through you and around you.*

*A seamless space of generous allowing and sharp discernment,*

*Immediacy; exquisitely poised,*

*unlocking the doorways of empathy,*

*a feeling for the whole.*

Many people are questioning what to do about faceless corporations, about pollution, about loss of diversity, about conceit and deceit in people exercising political and economic power. Here are a few suggestions not often mentioned at rallies and protest meetings. Perhaps we need to rediscover what it means to be both humble and engaged. We need to learn the art of living with sensitive awareness and compassionate responsiveness. We need to reconnect with

curiosity and wonderment. We need to refine our feeling for the whole and explore the organic roots and branches that simultaneously make us trees in the forest of life, and forests in the tree of life. Roots anchor us in a multi-dimensional ground; a living biosphere, a present fruition of myriad histories of co-evolving beings. Our strength, and nourishment comes from this ground. Branches divide again and again as possible avenues of exploration and life involvement, each leading to different though related flowerings and fruit.

*Roots and branches,  
strength and indeterminacy,  
a causal matrix being us,  
a vast array of possible actions.*

*The further we trace them,  
the more they ramify and branch,  
branch leading to branch,  
root leading to root,  
a filigree weaving of lives and beingness  
solidly here.*

And so I come back to the meadow of hawksbeard. I come back to awareness. I come back to wonderment. I come back to a way of being that senses the whole of creation is alive. The sagely Hwa Yen and Keron philosopher/yogis of old glimpsed this vision of wholeness, as have mystic scientists of today. They spoke of worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction. This is a profound spiritual exploration and the ramifications of it are immense.



In the preceding chapters I have tried to sketch out a possible 'view' of life – an understanding – an approach to living that is immeasurably vast, radically inclusive, constantly changing and fundamentally un-pin-down-able. We could think of this as the ground of being and becoming – the all-embracing ground. Such a view or understanding emerges naturally from our inherently inquisitive and compassionate natures. All of our life experience contributes to this: our myriad relatings, studies, contemplations, meetings and partings, successes and failures.

*In the immeasurable expanse of nature-in-process,  
In faith and trust and wonderment,  
We give ourselves to this suchness,  
This seamless mystery of birthing/dying.*

Although *Gifts of Wonderment* is divided into three sections: View – the all-embracing ground; Meditation/Path; and Action/Outflow, it would be a mistake to assume that this is a linear progression. Each one is simultaneously shaping and responding to the other two. In the next section we will consider some contemplative explorations that could flow out from this all embracing view.

*Note:*

*The next two volumes are still in various states of rough draft. If and when they come to a stage where I'm happy to share them, they will posted here on GDT. Meanwhile, I hope that this unpolished draft will inspire your journey of wisdom and compassion for the sake of all living beings.*

Volume Two

## *Meditation/Path*

*Spacious, loving, with feet solid in the earth  
We nurture the hints at blessedness  
The myriad faces of luminous knowing.*



*"One's thoughts are in tune with every situation."*

## *Action/Outflow*

*Moving as this flow of compassion  
and deepening enquiry,  
we engage with all beings in ways that support  
the integrity, stability and beauty  
of the entire field of life and living.*



*"All one's actions spring from this."*