

A Journey into Compassion:
Explorations through Spiritual Practice and Ordeal

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1991

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore a connection between my personal experiences of paranormal (non-ordinary) consciousness, modern consciousness research, indigenous perspectives on health, and the spiritual pursuit of compassion. My methodology is grounded in a notion of 'direct experience' and what comes of it. Insights are derived primarily *from* direct experience through a process of self-observation and reflection whilst under the tutelage of a number of indigenous-minded Elders with whom I have long standing relationships. Research insights are conveyed through narrative writing, providing both a vehicle for carrying autobiographical stories of synchronicity, mystical encounter, and yogic/shamanic healing and a paradigmatic framework through which to represent and make meaning of experience. Through storytelling I work to demonstrate applications of *be-coming* (being directly aware of) felt-sense experience and deepening my acceptance of said experience. My intention throughout this writing is to demonstrate the efficacy and value of paranormal consciousness as a vehicle for deepening one's compassion, and enhancing our personal and collective well-being.

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DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to Sadie and Isaiah,
And to every mother and baby becoming.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the night of December 25th 2004, I was jolted awake with a dream of being stuck in the lobby of a collapsing hotel. The building was located adjacent to an ocean front road with waves crashing over it and into the building. As I finally made my way outside, everything was pandemonium. Cars and trees were being tossed amongst rubble. People were dead and dying around me. I woke up from this dream in the middle of the night feeling very disturbed. I got up to wander around the house for a while, but the experience stayed with me. Upon returning to bed I fell back into the same dream.

I have had these kinds of dreams before. They have a certain character that distinguishes them from more common dream experiences. For one thing, these dreams are lucid in nature (in that I am consciously aware of being asleep and dreaming) and therefore have an intense and lively quality. Unlike many lucid dreams however, they also have a textured sonic aspect, a subtle multi-tone ranging from a deep rumble to high pitch frequency. This difference informs me that the dream might be some sort of vision, and gives me cause to afterwards seek out further evidence of a trans-rational connection. After certain dreams, I have telephoned a loved one living on the other side of the continent to ask how her night was only to confirm yet another one of *those* nights of co-dreaming experience. On other occasions, due to different dynamics of the dream, I have just let the matter slide, only to discover days, weeks, or months later that the dream was a probable future vision as I (re)live major aspects of it with an ultra-clear experience of *dejavu*. And then there are times when the relevant connection is placed right in front of my face – as was the case on the morning of December 26th 2004, when I began reading newspaper reports of tsunami events resulting from an earthquake in the Indian Ocean.

This dream was an experience of paranormal phenomena that have increasingly marked my life in recent years and, to my mind, is yet another affirmation of synchronistic possibility. The very fact that *I*, of all people (a suburban-raised and mainstream-schooled North American), have tapped into these paranormal realms of consciousness, suggests that these realms are not the exclusive domain of dedicated mystics or (depending on your discourse) the mentally ill, but are available to anyone who, purposefully or not, opens to such awareness. This thesis is about my journey into compassion through engagement of

these paranormal realms of consciousness, or as my Cowichan (Coast Salish) friend and mentor Bill White describes it, "A journey of becoming (be-with-ing)."

Before venturing any further, I had better define what I mean by the terms 'consciousness' and 'paranormal'. Although I have encountered many definitions of the term consciousness (from the Latin *conscire*) I choose to apply the following two: One is *to know with*, suggesting as Rupert Sheldrake (1997) does, that we are 'inter-conscious', that we know in relation. The other is *the point of view of an observer*. With this combination I mean to imply that the point of view of an observer is a dynamic process of perceptive interaction with phenomena rather than a static objective opinion.

In my use of the term 'paranormal' I am referring to experiences of phenomena (through realms of conscious encounter) that are generally *not* validated by other members of one's culture. Whereas "normal" implies conformity with a typical or standard pattern, "para" implies something beside, beyond or auxiliary to. For example, if I, a person living in the consensus reality of mainstream western society, were to sit in a room occupied by a general cross-section of nine other people from my society and say "I see ten people in this room." most likely everyone would be able to affirm this truth. They might be bemused by so obvious a statement, but they would agree that there are in fact ten people present. If, however, I were to say to this same group of people "I see ancestor spirits in the room." my claims would likely be dismissed as nonsense. Because most members of my society do not access paranormal realms of consciousness enabling them to perceive ancestor spirits, they will not be able to affirm the truth of my statement. The phenomenon of ancestor spirits thereby remains outside the tenets of our consensus reality, and my perception of these spirits will be dismissed.

I do not explain this to ordain myself some greater spiritual rank than others, for these perceptions are available to anyone who willfully engages certain meditative, yogic, or (particularly) shamanic epistemologies. Rather, I mean to convey that the terms "normal" and "paranormal" are culturally relative. Were I to sit (as I have) amongst a group of Piaman (shamans of the Makushi people of Western Guyana) and declare that I saw ancestor spirits in the thatch hut, they would be as unimpressed (although equally as bemused at so obvious a statement) as my fellow Canadians would be about my declaration of seeing ten people in the

room. In many Indigenous and Eastern societies (particularly those with intact animistic traditions) many realms of consciousness beyond the rational waking state that mainstream western culture takes as normal are validated as legitimate, and the phenomena encountered via access to these realms are attributed much significance. Whether a phenomenon is “normal” is a matter of consensus, that which is generally agreed upon by the vast majority within one’s community, culture, or society.

Lucid-dream visions involving transcendence of spatial boundaries are but one realm of paranormal phenomena I have begun opening to. Other recent paranormal experiences include spontaneous recoveries from major illness, mystical experience of unity with everything and nothing, and opening to realms of shamanic healing practice. Part of my intention in writing this thesis is to share personal narratives, or “signature stories” (Randall, 1995) of how I have opened to these realms of experiences. Another part of my intention is to explicate a link between these experiences and my purposeful exploration of eastern health arts and indigenous spiritual practices. This will involve articulating my relationship with two Indigenous Elders who have personally helped me to navigate my experience in paranormal realms and building a conceptual bridge between their teachings and theoretical models in transpersonal psychology. My core intention is to demonstrate the efficacy and value of paranormal consciousness as a vehicle for deepening our compassion and enhancing the well-being of ourselves and all our relations.

To set a stage for the stories I am about to share, I am impelled to first offer context for my research inquiry. Much as the experiences I will be describing are of a deeply personal nature, they have emerged within the context of the society in which I live. How have I, a Caucasian male raised in the consensus reality of a middle-class Canadian suburb, come to undertake this unusual journey? What has prompted me to stumble upon the mysteries? As is the case for everyone, my actions both conscious and unconscious have been inspired by circumstances through which my life has been shaped.

Coming to the inquiry

My inquiry has been fueled by a sense that something is very wrong with my/our world. In making this assertion I cannot rule out the projection of my personal shadow. However, as

surely as causality is a non-linear, multi-plicit affair, so also is my personal shadow enmeshed in that of my family, community, culture and society. The distinction between personal issues and transpersonal issues is a categorical discernment that, when over-wrought, can be problematic. This issue connects with many that I want to write about. And whilst I am mindful of the dangers of projecting my shadow onto others, let me start with my perception of the outer world and then work my way back in.

In the last decade an increasing number of the world's top scientists, Nobel laureates among them, have been declaring that we are in grave danger of ecological collapse unless we make core changes to the way we live (Elgin, 1997). That respected members of the scientific establishment have finally begun to echo the serious concerns of most environmentalists and traditional indigenous people marks an epochal shift in conventional human consciousness where, for the first time in human history, no matter what one's cultural affiliations or political opinions, we can no longer reasonably assume that "everything is going to be okay". As teacher, scholar, and elder social activist Joanna Macy (1995) points out,

Until the late twentieth century, every generation throughout history lived with the tacit certainty that there would be generations to follow. Each assumed, without questioning, that its children and children's children would walk the same Earth, under the same sky. Hardships, failures, and personal death were encompassed in the vaster assurances of continuity. That certainty is now lost to us, whatever our politics. That loss, unmeasured and immeasurable, is the pivotal psychological reality of our time (p. 241).

Although there have been times in history where large groups of people encountered the despair of mass annihilation (for example, plagues and wars), now, for the first time in history, we are all faced with it.

With mounting, irrefutable evidence that human activity is inducing global ecological imbalance, we are rapidly approaching a soul-searching crossroads.

In our hearts, we know there is something maniacal about the way we are abusing the planetary environment . . . how often do we read reports of the devastation and say 'That's crazy!' We use the word, but in this context 'crazy' has no professional

status, no theoretical depth We look to psychiatrists to teach us the meaning of madness, but our dominant schools of psychotherapy are themselves creations of the same scientific and industrial culture that now weighs so brutally on the planet . . . they ignore the greater ecological realities that surround the psyche – as if the soul might be saved while the biosphere crumbles (Roszak, 1992, p. 19).

I live in a society in which ‘success’ is habitually measured by the popular majority in terms of maximal acquisition and display of material goods. Despite the mounting dangers of such excessive over-consumption, our political and corporate leaders demonstrate an incredible lack of wisdom as they nurture a consensus of materialistic growth and encourage us along our consumerist path. This feels insane. In a time when the survival of the human race and many of our more-than-human relations is in question, to continue with the status quo would seem to be cooperation with insanity. And so I write from the fringes of this society, doing what I can to ‘wake up’ and prepare for the end of a mass numbed-out-ness.

After decades as an itinerant wilderness guide, youth worker, and facilitator of initiatory journeys, I returned to academic study a few years ago in an attempt to gain credibility in the eyes of institutional authority. My colleagues and I had recently developed and piloted the Guiding Spirit Leadership Development Program, a cross-cultural wilderness-immersion program aimed at Child and Youth Care professionals, First Nations community workers, and outdoor/adventure-based programmers who were interested in rediscovering wilderness journey and rites of passage as a (w)holistic way of engaging healthy transformation. Upon completion of the very successful five-month pilot, a university-college showed strong interest in accrediting our program as part of its Child and Youth Care program. I thought that by undertaking a graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction, I would gain skills in expressing our epistemological and pedagogical ethos in a manner that I could translate to and merge with the institution’s more mainstream curricular mind-set. Also, having an M.A. under my belt might offer legitimacy to my/our (relatively) radical approach to education.

But the journey has not been easy. At a personal level, the process of settling into a geographic location and committing to academic study has been troublesome, in that it has brought me to face many of my reasons (healthy and not-so-healthy) for steering away from institutional culture. In particular, I have been confronted by my long-held resentment

towards what I perceived to be insensitive formalities of institutional authority structures. This has much to do with post-partum traumas I experienced at the hands of medical institutions shortly after birth (a matter I will address in the chapter 'Isaiah'), and the subsequent witnessing of a number of injustices that my parents experienced at the hands of religious and financial institutions. My voluntarily simplistic transient lifestyle had enabled me to pursue experimental educational, therapeutic and transformative processes without need to explain my rationale to administrative mindsets and funding bodies.

In the past few years of engaging academia I have struggled with how to convey my belief that the experiential aspect of my writing (and your reading) is as important to this thesis as it is to the psycho-somatic-spiritual work I also wish to describe. Through multiple recapitulations I have searched, often desperately, for a language that will suffice in conveying the synchronistic and magical nature of my experiences. Having met with numerous stylistic dead ends I am not sure if I can ever be successful at this, as much of my understanding abides outside the arena of modern discursive logic, and further, beyond the epistemic codes of this inherently dualistic language laden with stand-alone nouns. However, the thesis writing situation is such that some attempt must be made, and I must admit, this attempt has been worth the effort, especially for the inquiry that has emerged through the self-questioning inherent to this narrative process. As many a narrative writer will attest, the reflexive process of expressing and reconsidering one's stories can be therapeutic (Bruner, 1987; Conle, 1999).

Transpersonal psychiatrist and consciousness researcher Stanislav Grof (1988, 1990) believes that the ecological and social crises we are now faced with are manifestations of our present stage of evolution in consciousness. Therefore, it is unlikely that any lasting change is possible without a profound shift to a new level of consciousness. If we are to succeed in recalibrating our lives for a sustainable future, we will need to adopt a radically different approach to life from that which currently dominates. Professors of ecopsychology and deep ecology (Roszak, 1992; Roszak, Gomez and Kanner, 1995; Drenson & Inoue, 1995) further suggest that we must somehow expand our sense of self to include the natural world. Such an expansion of identity involves an inner transformation from 'ego' consciousness to 'eco' consciousness. Arne Naess (1987/1995) refers to this expanded consciousness as the

“Ecological Self” – a level of self that transcends the narrow boundaries of the ego and feels identification with nature. Through “self-realization” we come to identify with the world around us. The natural world becomes a part of our self and part of our identity, and any behavior leading to destruction of this world will be experienced as self-destruction. In this way, Naess advocates a psychological approach to environmental issues, rather than a moralistic one.

Because of an inescapable process of identification with others, with growing maturity, the self is widened and deepened. We ‘see ourselves in others.’ Self-realization is hindered if the self-realization of others, with whom we identify, is hindered. Love of our self will fight this obstacle by assisting in the self-realization of others according to the formula ‘live and let live!’ Thus, all that can be achieved by altruism – the *dutiful, moral* consideration of others – can be achieved – and much more – through widening and deepening our self (Naess, 1987/1995, p. 14).

With concern for the well-being of our planet in mind, and these recommendations firmly in hand and heart, I have found myself committing to a journey of self-realization – but the nagging question is: How do I *enact* such a transformation? Whilst I have for many years now held a conceptual understanding of my fundamental interconnection with others, I wonder how to move from this conceptual worldview/belief to a deeper lived-experience of it. When feeling threatened, I have all too often experienced a glaring chasm between my declared belief in ‘universal oneness’ and my competitive small-self-centered aggression. Despite all my ethical training, and despite my odd experiential glimpse of enlightenment, when I am ousted from my state of comfort, I can readily respond from a self-serving reptilian level of brain/body. I express a deeper unconscious pattern to cope with my situation, to ensure my self-centered survival. I experience an axiom I have oft heard in the study of martial arts: *Under duress, our tai-jitsu (technique) reverts to its true level of integration.* When I am under duress my notions of loving kindness are challenged and often undermined by deeply engrained hostile reactions. At some reptilian level of self, I choose to be ignorant and destructive. In light of this regressive tendency, I must somehow consciously engage these shadow realms of self and negotiate a more beneficial outcome.

Into compassion

Transpersonal psychologist and Theravadin Buddhist Jack Engler (2000) suggests the process of transcending from small-self-interest to large-Self-interest is not an easy one: "While beliefs, values, and cognitions change easily . . . core drives, impulses and motivations are much harder to change, and hardest of all is the narcissistic investment in the self." (para 17). It seems that if I am to effect a genuine transformation to larger-Self-identity, I must not only nurture a cognitive understanding of compassionate oneness, but also feel it and know it fully within my being.

How can a human being so participate in the peril or pain of another that without thought, spontaneously, he sacrifices his own life? Schopenhauer says that this is the breakthrough of the metaphysical realization that you and the other are one, that you are two aspects of the one life (Campbell, in Moyers, 1981, p.115).

Such a metaphysical realization arrived recently for me in the transformational experience of becoming a parent. In the moments before my son's birth, I *knew* that I would give my life for the sake of his. And as I now roll around on the ground with my baby boy, I feel an inescapable impulse to protect another beyond my small-self. Witnessing his mother nurture him, it is likewise evident that she includes this 'other' in her (precognitive) sense of self. We have all heard stories of sacrificing their lives to save that of their children. Although by the tenets of scientific materialism (and the epistemic codes of this English language) we are officially separate physical entities, I am doubtful any of us feel such separation in the depth of our being. All fearful enmeshments aside, this is an expression of selfless love, the deepest compassion. At this depth of compassion, our narcissistic small-self identity is transcended to include an experience of 'other' in our experience of self. Much as we get on with our individual lives, my wife and I look out for this baby-other, take care of him and protect him not *as if he were ourself* but because, at a deeper-lived level, we know him *as ourself*. I will share the story of his dramatic birth in the chapter 'Isaiah.' Compassion and its inherent kindness is the link between small-self and large-Self that I have been looking for.

Although such feelings are quite normal for parents, I wonder how we might extend this compassionate sense of self beyond our immediate family. Grof and Grof (1993), along with

many of their colleagues in the transpersonal field (Walsh and Vaughan, 1993), suggest that such spiritual emergence is the crucial means through which we can deepen our compassion.

People who are involved in the process of spiritual emergence tend to develop a new appreciation and reverence for all forms of life and a new understanding of the unity of all things, which often results in strong ecological concerns and greater tolerance toward other human beings. Consideration of all humanity, compassion for all life, and thinking in terms of the entire planet take priority over the narrow interests of individuals, families, political parties, classes, nations, and creeds. That which connects us all and that which we have in common become more important than our differences, which are seen as enhancing rather than threatening. In the attitudes characteristic of spiritual emergence, we can see the counterpoint to intolerance, irreverence towards life, and moral bankruptcy that are the root causes of the global crisis. Thus we hope that the growing interest in spirituality and the high incidence of spontaneous mystical experiences herald a shift in the consciousness of humanity that will help to reverse our current self-destructive course (Grof and Grof, 1993, p. 187).

An example of how spiritual emergence leads into compassion can be seen through a story that was once shared with me. A number of years ago, a close friend of mine was abandoned by her partner mere days before moving to a new country. Devastated as she was, and still in shock, she went on with the move anyway. She arrived in the city of New York with only one distant contact who shortly proved unreliable, and within days found herself alone with nowhere to stay. As she wandered around town, searching for shelter and sustenance, she eventually found her way to a small, non-profit Tibetan Buddhist centre. She sat down amidst a large group of approximately one hundred people for a *dharma* talk from one of the monks. After the talk ended and she got up to leave with the dispersing crowd, one of the monks, a hunched over elderly man, approached her to introduce himself. "My name is Nimski. What is yours?" After exchanging names and how-do-you-do's, he gently asked her, "Would you like to join us for tea?" and pointed to an outdoor balcony where the other monks were now gathering. She agreed, and thus began a weekly ritual engagement.

About eight months later, her experience of loss arrived fully and she collapsed into her sorrow. For over a week she lay paralyzed in her Brooklyn bedroom unable to move. She

could not get up, could not eat, could not go to work. She called no one, and refused all visitors. Her grief was so all consuming that she was very close to death.

Then one day, the elder monk Nimski arrived at her door. She had never told him where she lived. Her name did not appear in any public directory. She knew him by no other association than her unaccompanied visits to the Buddhist centre. Somehow, Nimski, who rarely left the centre's premises, had been impelled to journey across a massive city and locate her.

Stunned by his appearance and amazed by his means, she accepted his visit. As she lay back in her bed, this humble monk sat beside her and took hold of her hand. For the remainder of that day, through the night and following day, he did not let go of her hand, nor did he move his body. Instead, he sat with her through the depth of her pain and with the warmest tearful smile assured her: "You will love again".

Of course, I share this story with you to elicit an emotional response. Stories can be a powerful form of communication because they can provoke emotions and empathy, stimulating the reader to speculate and resonate with the characters in their experiences (Barone, 1983). But I also share this story to illuminate my motive for writing in narrative. For me, this story has been a source of deep inspiration, fueling me on a journey to become more compassionate. What could be more beneficial than such a journey?

I also share this story to illuminate the universal value of *genuine* compassion – to suffer (passion) with (com). Nimski acted not from a studied decision to help the poor and unfortunate, but from a spontaneous movement of be-coming. "Let there be such oneness between us that when one cries, the other tastes salt," cries Rosabelle Bellevue (in Lozoff, 2000, p.193). Nimski's kindness had a forceful intelligence, and tremendous momentum that naturally, choicelessly moved him to worthy action. Thakar (2001) proffers, "Compassion cannot be cultivated; it derives neither from intellectual conviction nor from emotional reaction. It is simply there when the wholeness of life becomes a fact that is truly lived" (para. 10). This understanding gives me tremendous insight into the yogic (yolking) relationship between inner renunciative work and the outer work of nurturing life.

Macy & Brown (1998) articulate a belief that we are on the brink of a revolutionary epoch that will result in a "Great Turning" which encompasses "a profound shift in our perception

of reality” (p. 21). The barrier to this change is inner/outer apathy towards the pain we feel for our world. When we are apathetic, we are afraid that opening up will expose us to pain, despair, or guilt. We are also worried, conditioned as we are by notions of *stiff upper lip*; *turn the other cheek*; and *just get over it*, that we may appear to others as morbid, weak, emotional or powerless. We avoid looking closely at the world because we distrust our own experience of it. This repression has consequences to our well being, resulting in fragmentation and alienation from our inner selves and from others.

In her workshop series *Coming back to life: Practices to connect our lives, our world* Macy (1995) articulates a process of therapeutic compassion. A central component in Macy’s workshops is “Despair Work”, a process of owning and honouring our pain for the world.

Just as grief work is a process by which bereaved persons unblock their numbed energies by acknowledging and grieving the loss of a loved one, so do we all need to unblock our feeling about our threatened planet and the possible demise of our species. Until we do, our power of creative response will be crippled (p. 250).

Through hundreds of workshops in church basements, community centers and classrooms, Macy has connected with people as they discover the immense power and beauty of caring. “They have demonstrated that our apparent public apathy is but a fear of experiencing and expressing this pain, and that once it is acknowledged and shared it opens the way to power” (p. 251). Through practices of compassionate caring, we become better able to relate to what Zorba the Greek called “the whole catastrophe,” (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987, p. 168) all the parts of it – the beautiful, the pleasant, the troublesome, and the unpleasant – with a certain amount of ease and humor.

There is a deep joy that comes when we stop denying the painful aspects of life and instead allow our selves to be-come the full range of our experience: life and death, pleasure and pain, darkness and light. Even in the face of tremendous suffering in the world there can be a joy that comes, not from rejecting pain and seeking pleasure, but rather from our ability to sit in meditation even when it is difficult and open to truth. The work of practice begins by allowing ourselves to face fully our own sadness, fear, anxiety, desperation – to die to our limited ideas

about how things should be and to love and accept the truth of things as they are.
(Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987, p.168)

Research Intentions

To help realize a change into a sustainable, compassionate, society I must not only talk about such change, I must personally engage it. In my work as a wilderness guide and facilitator of initiatory programs for youth, I have often heard the saying: "*You can con a con, and you can fool a fool, but you can NEVER kid a kid.*" This reminds me of another gem once spoken by a wise Elder: "*Young people learn not by what we tell them, but by what they see out of the corner of their eye.*" In my study of Japanese arts, I have been taught to use the title *Sensei* when addressing one's teacher. This honourific term has been awkwardly translated into English as *teacher* or *respected instructor*. However, the most literally accurate translation I have encountered is *one who has gone before*.

With these notions in mind, *who I am, what I have been through, and what I am willing to go through* is of utmost importance if I am to be of benefit to others. If I am to be an effective facilitator of transformational (paranormal) practices, then it is of paramount importance that I must first lead by example of my own engagement. The extent to which I can compassionately nurture and help interpret the transformational experience of my participants depends entirely upon the extent of my own experience in these paranormal states. Whilst working with people at these depths of consciousness, it is futile to pretend to have knowledge beyond that which I have gained through direct experience. Powerful dimensions of our personal and collective psyches are at play, and the true depth of my capacity will be readily made evident.

By the same criteria, if I am to be an effective advocate for the efficacy of practices involving paranormal consciousness in the academic arena, then I must conduct my academic research in a manner that exemplifies my capacity to illuminate the benefit of such practices. With this in mind, a central aspect of my research intention is to achieve an *ekphrasis*, meaning a synchrony between method and topic. Central questions I carry through this thesis writing are: How can I write about my paranormal experiences in a compassionate manner? How can my telling of transpersonal experiences nurture a healthy communication between you and me the reader and the writer?

In order to make meaning of my varied paranormal experiences I have inevitably gravitated towards teachings that make sense to me. In so doing, I have endeavoured to find a *yoga* (meaning *to yoke*, from the Sanskrit word *yuj*) that can serve as a hub to unify the variegated and otherwise disjointed limbs of my inquiry. My core research intention has thus been to realize a connection between my personal paranormal experiences, modern consciousness research, and indigenous (including ancient oriental) processes involving paranormal consciousness. Whereas traditional (modernist) Cartesian-Newtonian-based paradigms of a mechanistic universe are unable to generate a coherent interpretation of paranormal experiences involving transcendence of time, space and physical causality, transpersonal theory and the ancient teachings of indigenous people can readily accommodate such phenomena.

Indigenous-mind

Given that there are many models of sustainable indigenous societies, but *no* models of sustainable industrial societies (Campbell, 1981, Grof, 1988; Elgin, 1997, Meade, 1995), I have long wondered what is it about indigenous peoples' ways of knowing and being that nurture their greater harmony with the natural world. As a possible means to affecting a larger Self-realization, and a consequent transformation into ecological sustainability as described in transpersonal and eco-psychology, I have been impelled to explore a number of philosophical perspectives, rituals and purification practices of the indigenous-minded people with whom I have worked and associated.

Before going any further, I would like to offer a clarification of the terms *indigenous-minded*. When using this term I am referring to expressions of cultural systems (within societies) with epistemologies that have been minimally or un-modified by the influence of colonial imposition and/or industrial and post-industrial society. The parameter I use for considering the extent to which these *indigenous* or *traditional* cultures have been modified, is the degree to which their ways of knowing, validated through multiple dimensions of consciousness and often perceptive of energetic phenomena such as *ki/chi*, *prana*, *life-force* and archetypal phenomena such as *non-corporeal entities* and *spirit helpers*, have been debased and de-legitimized by (at first) the Church and more recently the orthodoxy of scientific materialism. No doubt, this lens evokes a spectral gradation rather than a clear -

indigenous versus non-indigenous (and eastern versus non-eastern) binary discernment. I use the term indigenous-minded to suggest that we are all indigenous, only, we have each, to varying degrees, become unmindful of our archaic ancestry, our deeper connection with the natural world around us, and our own wild nature within. The extent to which anyone has rediscovered the above-mentioned aspects of their deeper nature is the extent to which they are indigenous-minded.

As a man of western European descent who has worked closely with Indigenous (First Nations) Elders and educators for the past six years, I find that this philosophical orientation sets me walking more on thin ice than egg-shells. I take great risk by first condemning the short-comings of my own white, rational culture, and then implying that some of what currently passes for *traditional aboriginal* culture is far from it. At the same time I must be cautious of my own ignorance. As a television-bred middle class white boy, I am undoubtedly constrained to “write and think with the tendencies and ideology of the culture of my origins” (Scott, 1998, p. 2). In my work with Indigenous Elders, I have frequently found myself reconsidering my interpretations of what they have shared. My early assumptions about form, context and essence are recurrently shifting in my evolving perception of ritual, ceremony and practice. Learning from these people is an ongoing process that often takes me by surprise into very different aspects of understanding. Having had the rug so often pulled from under my perspective stance, I can only claim tentative understanding of their ancient ways of knowing and being in the world. However, for the purposes of writing this thesis I must abide by my present discernments.

In the worldview of indigenous-minded people everywhere, the worlds we know from dreams and visions, inhabited by gods and spirits, including our own deceased ancestors, are accorded recognition of equal reality to that of our rational waking state. Metzner (2005) refers to this way of knowing and valuing non-material worlds as *shamanic*. The term “shaman” is a Siberian word for seer, acetic, medicine person, and in the past few decades has commonly been used to represent “a type of medicine man or woman especially distinguished by the use of journeys to hidden worlds otherwise mainly known through myth, dream, and near-death experiences” (Harner, para. 8). In shamanistic societies,

. . . people have always devoted considerable attention to cultivating a direct perceptual and spiritual relationship with animals, plants and the Earth itself in all its magnificent variety. Our modern materialist worldview, with its obsessive focus on technological progress and on the control and exploitation of what are called "natural resources", has become more or less completely dissociated from such a spiritual awareness of nature (para. 3).

Indigenous ways of knowing (from this point forward, I will refer to *indigenous-minded* and *shamanic* as *indigenous*) are sensitive to the natural world and, in their purest expression, are universally harmonious with human and more-than-human relations. These ways of knowing/living are very close to what Choctaw-Chikisaw mystic Sequoyah Trublood refers to as the "original instructions". Through Trublood's extensive personal experience of communing with indigenous Elders throughout the world (particularly the Hopi of southwestern U.S., and the Kogi of Sierra Columbia), he is aware that certain indigenous societies have remained very close to these original instructions. Others indigenous societies have drifted away to varying degrees, and our own modern society has drifted *far* away from these instructions. The Kogi, one of the last remaining indigenous cultures unaffected by colonialism/corporatism, refer to us moderns as "the younger brother" who must reconsider and soon change his irresponsible ways (Trublood, personal communications, June, 2000 – May, 2005)

Through over twenty years of practicing martial arts (at first kara-te – *empty-hand* and jiu-do – *gentle-way*, then Brazilian jiu-jitsu), and gradually transitioning to Indian yogas (Iyengar, asthanga, chakra, kriya), I have noticed many commonalities between these eastern "growth disciplines" (Tart, 1990) and my more recent exposure to indigenous transformational practices such as vision quest, sweat lodge, cold water purification and breath of life ceremony. In the broader picture, these practices are but a few amongst a wide spectrum of ancient spiritual practices that are specifically designed to facilitate personal growth and transformation (Campbell, 1972; Eliade, 1958; Grof, 1988; Lozoff, 2000; Moyers, 1981; Plotkin, 2003).

In recent years of academic study, I have also begun to notice strong correlations between these growth disciplines and the therapeutic processes articulated in somatically focused

psychotherapies such as holotropic breathwork (Grof, 1988), somatic experiencing (Levine, 1995), hakomi (Kurtz, n.d. on-line), focusing (Gendlin, 1978), wilderness-based 'soulcraft' (Plotkin, 2003) and adventure therapy (Priest & Gass, 1997). These therapies focus upon the primacy of direct awareness of experience, and employ many of the methods and techniques of consciousness change that were known in the ancient systems of shamanism, alchemy and yoga (Metzner, 1997).

Although psychotherapy can at times be counter-productive to the process of spiritual development, particularly where said development involves purposeful disintegration of one's ego (Plotkin, 2003), in general the experiential therapies bring us into awareness of subtler levels of self. Through dedicated practice we will sooner or later come to dance along the veil of our conscious meeting our unconscious. Whether we are uncovering stored memories of trauma, rejected aspects of our personal shadow, archetypal demons or the groundlessness of no-self, we are faced with the opportunity of becoming more than we have otherwise perceived ourselves to be.

A number of years ago, whilst participating in my first ten-day Vipassana (insight meditation) retreat, I encountered a statement in the discourse teachings of Goenka (2000) explicating a principle that I perceive to be common to *all* of the above-mentioned practices:

Any practice which helps us to develop awareness and equanimity in place of blind reactions at the deepest habit-patterns of our mind, through the direct experience of sensation in the body, is a practice of healing, growth and transformation.

Since discovering this principle, I have found it a useful frame of reference in my engagement of growth disciplines, spiritual practices and related paranormal experiences. This principle serves as a practical guideline in my endeavours to be-come that which is presently unknown, to face and move towards new experience, and to accept the felt sense that arises from that experience. In all such engagements I work to voluntarily open and deepen my awareness *towards* and *into* what is not presently known. I will explain at length my embodiment of this principle in a latter section of the chapter 'Methodology.'

All in all, my process of writing this thesis is a multi-layered narrative affair. At one level, I am the narrator simply narrating (as in telling) stories. These are autobiographical

narratives – stories of becoming compassionate through purposeful spiritual practice and unexpected ordeals. These personal stories of small-self take place within the context of larger levels of Self, ranging from the context of my immediate environment, to cultural understandings, theoretical and philosophical frameworks. These multitudes of epistemology and discourse abide within the grand narrative of creation itself through which unfolds the cosmic drama of life (*Lila*). My narrative research inquiry nestles amidst and between these nodes of small-self and large-Self and links them with compassion as I purposefully reflect and make meaning through their relationship. At the same time, my narrative research process works reflexively to ask: How is the personal narrative telling? How does the manner in which I construct stories to represent and make meaning of my experience inform us of the narrative discourse from which I operate? What insight does this bear in relation to my life experience?

Through the telling of these stories I work to offer insight into how my spiritual practices have challenged me to evolve in my relationships with self and more-than-self, and have thus prepared me to engage ordeals through which I open to mystic experiences and yogic/shamanic healing. Informed by the principle of deepening awareness and acceptance of my direct experience, I endeavour to demonstrate how paranormal experiences have enabled me to engage a beautiful/terrifying journey of growth and expanded identity beyond, within and beneath my socially conditioned “skin encapsulated ego” (Grof, 1988). Amidst and between these stories I will offer some interpretation, linking theoretical frameworks, articulating contexts, elucidating personal and cultural assumptions, and, where possible, discerning my epistemological foundations.

In the spirit of experiential learning, let us next move on to an example of such story telling and then from there consider this methodology in greater depth.

INTO THE FIRE

Ultimately we have to go it alone, through the dark night of the soul. But we can't do it by ourselves (Wilbur, 1993, p. 157).

One summer night in July of 2001, I came very close to dying on the floor of a cabin near Waiprou Alberta. That summer I had been working as a facilitator, wilderness guide, and consultant for a number of Rediscovery camps. These are nature based, experiential programs for native and non-native youth that combine elements of contemporary outdoor education and adventure therapy with traditional indigenous ways of understanding and being with the land. One of the programs, Red Thunder Rediscovery, was running canoe expeditions in Northern Saskatchewan. I opted to head up there and guide a few trips with them – partly so I could get back in touch with the land there, partly to visit and sweat with an old Cree medicine man I knew, and partly to reconnect with a loved one (whom I will call Tara) who had just moved to the region with her RCMP husband.

After a few weeks of paddling the Churchill River, I was in a clear head-space as I went to visit Tara. This is when she disclosed to me the most terrible news about her life. Through this disclosure, she shared with me an enormous psychic burden of deeply repressed pain. The exchange was (by far) the most open communication we have ever had together. While these disclosures came as a shock, the fact that she was opening up to share her pain with me was also a beautiful blessing. For me, it was a sign that my commitment to becoming more empathetically available, and *being* (at some subtle level) trustworthy was worthwhile. For her it was a sign of gaining courage despite terror; showing that she was preparing to face and move through a major storm. For both of us it was a quickening; a shift in life.

In my case, the shift commenced with a sense of being *hit*, or, as my Cowichan friend Bill White would later explain, being *struck by an echo*. Although my capacity for inner energetic work had been rapidly deepening over the past few years, and this new sharing was a beautiful sign of love and trust between Tara and me, the experience of her sharing now triggered a set of profound physical manifestations for me. I had now taken on a burden of suffering that seeped well into my being and within days I felt a deep rot begin to surface in

my lower belly. Something deep down in my lower abdomen began to threaten my health. Some inner toxic sludge began to ooze. Nothing like this had ever before loomed so menacingly in to my consciousness. Hatha yoga practice and vipassana sittings would clear it somewhat, bringing me an hour or so of relative peace afterwards, but this clearing seemed to only bring more to the surface, faster and stronger. It was too much. After 3 days of attempting to mitigate this energy I was in trouble.

With growing awareness of the depth of commitment I would need to help resolve my trouble, I made my way to the sweat lodge of Mishum (Grandpa) Daigneault, a powerful old Cree medicine man who lived a few hours drive away in Isle La Crosse Saskatchewan. It was Sunday, and I figured he might be having a sweat lodge. As I walked up his long dirt driveway, his son looked deep into my eyes and greeted me: "I remember you". He then nodded an acknowledgement of what he noticed and said, "You come right on in. You're welcome here."

After having a bite to eat in the kitchen of their old trailer home, and quietly catching up with the old man and woman I hadn't seen in 10 months, we went into the sweat lodge. I was feeling so much pain as I entered the lodge that I let the ancestors know *I would do anything necessary to go through this*. On this day of disturbance deeper than any I had known before, I offered to dissolve. I offered to burn. I offered to feel everything, for the sake of healing in relation. And in certain moments, I offered to die.

The old man placed me in the warrior seat, a bare patch of earth at the western end of the lodge (opposite the entrance). This spot is left bare, so as to receive and bear the first ray of equinox sunlight (among other things I do not yet understand). For many of the Cree (and Salish) people with whom I sweat, the western door also represents letting go, the end of day, return to night, death, and decay; all necessary precursors to receiving transformative renewal.

What occurred in this lodge was unlike anything I had experienced before: rattles glowing; ancestors dancing over the rocks; my body shuddering with energy as I (was) nearly lifted off the ground; and most intriguing – when the 4th round ended and the door opened, there was a dry cigarette lying on the ground in front of me (dry in a steam soaked sweat lodge). "Hmm," I thought, "Someone must have kept it wrapped up and just put it there."

Then a drop of sweat from my nose landed on it, dissolving into and soaking through my rationale for its presence.

Whilst I struggled to fathom this, a man was pulling prayer flags from the rafters. As he reached up to remove a flag just above me, I ducked a bit to get out of his way, and turned my head to catch sight of another cigarette (dry, in a steam-soaked sweat lodge) tucked into the rafter behind my head. As he pulled the flag, the cigarette came loose, bounced off my shoulder and landed on the ground in front of me, right beside the other one. *Tobacco* below me; *tobacco* above me; *tobacco* in front of me. It would be years before I was to begin understanding this message.

About a week later, whilst working with another Rediscovery program in southern Alberta, I came down with a urinary tract infection. At first it seemed like no big deal, just a mild itching sensation. But a few days later, in the course of one night, my kidneys began to ache, urinating became torture, and flu like fevers and aches began. At this point, I was co-leading a young men's rites of passage program and we were 2 days into a 7-day mountain trip. I knew my infection was going systemic, and I knew the danger of continuing further into the bush on an arduous expedition. So I self-evacuated back to base camp, and then by vehicle back to the nearest town to get some cranberry juice and food. I then drove back to a friend's cabin in the Waiprous wilderness and hunkered down for the storm.

Why didn't I go to a doctor? because of what I have been learning from Indigenous-minded shamans (healers) that I have come to work with in the past few years. These people have an understanding about illness that runs far deeper than the rational scientific materialism of allopathic medicine. They "operate from an integrated world-view, in which physical healing, psychological problem-solving, and conscious exploration of spiritual or sacred realms of being are all considered as aspects of the way, or work, or practice" (Metzner, 1987, para. 7). Through this world-view all illness stems from an imbalance at a transpersonal psycho/spiritual level, with physical manifestation of disease merely being a consequent expression. In treating a person's malady, therefore, these shamans usually work to diagnose and resolve the subtler psycho/spiritual relational problem, and guide people through experiences that change their deeper (often subconscious) mental reactions. By accomplishing this change, by somehow returning stuckness into flow, the resolution of physical problems will follow.

With this understanding, I opted to forego the western medicine. This new illness was not a matter of random coincidence of some bacteria happening to get a hold in my urinary tract. The entire mechanistic process of physical manifestation was but a symptom of a deeper disturbance. Thus, any attempt to focus on alleviation of the symptom would have thoroughly missed the point. This new illness was somehow stemming from a subtler level of causality: a psycho/spiritual imbalance that I had recently agreed to help resolve. So, the solution must also come from that level. Despite my vague understanding of these deeper realms, I sensed I needed to deepen my commitment to healing. The only way to do this was to live it, do it, be it and to walk my walk. So I tried.

Whenever my fever hit 104°F I took a few Tylenol to tap it down a bit. This seemed like a healthy precaution given that fevers any higher can lead to seizures and numerous related complications. Other than this, I was trying to manage it without drugs. For the next four days I wallowed in shakes, sweats, recurring fever and delirium. Each night I sweat enough to completely saturate my sleeping bag and the slab of foam I was lying on. Each morning I kept thinking that the worst was over because I was able to get up and walk around, but as the day progressed, things gradually worsened until I was curled up on the ground again.

After four days with minimal sleep or food, I was barely able to move. I was also eliminating major blood clots in my urine. I started to wonder if I was doing the best thing after all. A very kind hearted neighbor had been checking up on me every day, and with each visit brought advice from her (nurse) sister: "You will do permanent damage to your kidneys you know." "You could go sterile!" "Don't you think you should go to a hospital?" "You could die from this!" With these admonitions, and with my need to be in Victoria in five days time for work commitments, I decided to give up, call a doctor and go the allopathic route. *Maybe I'm just not ready for this.*

Just as I was about to crawl into my car and head for town with my last ounce of energy, my friend, teacher and Elder Sequoyah Trublood showed up out of the blue. He was in the region to do some work, and while he didn't know I was at the cabin, he "just had a vision" that he should drop by. Given that Sequoyah lives his amazing life through "just having visions", his arrival was serendipitous enough for me to cancel my appointment with the doctor and accept his help instead.

The next part of this story is the crux, and yet, is the hardest to explain. Sequoyah's help involved a prayerful process of assembling a sacred pipe. This is a process of unitive balancing between the 'bowl' (the divine feminine aspect; noticing, awareness, receptivity) and the 'stem' (the divine masculine aspect; intending, acceptance, activity). As Sequoyah prayerfully assembled the pipe he spoke, "Without total respect for the woman (feminine), the pipe won't work." He held the bowl lower than the stem and showed how they wouldn't join. "Without total respect for the man (masculine), the pipe won't work either" he said as he showed the bowl higher than the stem. "It is only through total respect and balance between man and woman that true love can come through." He joined the bowl and stem together in union, like two tantric wings of a dove, awareness and acceptance, flying into peace

Then, ever so prayerful, he began loading the sacred pipe with tobacco, one of his most cherished medicines "grown" in his own yard "with nothing but prayer". Together, with this sacred medicine, we gave thanks to the ancestors ("who move through us and we are"), and Creator ("who moves through us and we are"). We offered prayers of gratitude for *everything* that we had received because nothing less than everything has been gifted to us as an opportunity for learning. We offered prayers of trust that everything that has happened, is happening, and will happen is "eternally known in the mind of Creator." We offered prayers of humility, acknowledging that "our puny minds are incapable of fathoming the depth and beauty of creation."

As we prayed and smoked the pipe that night, it became clear to me what I was about to do. Like a mirror folding into self-reflection, I felt a very old pattern receding forward through the history of my being. My illness, this illness, had its causal roots in shame – shame that has been passed on through generations; shame that looks like humility, but is in fact not. I had long been aware of the value of transcending ego-pride, but only now did I begin to see how I had been mistakenly using shame to counteract my pride. Shame and humility look so similar – no wonder they have been so easily confused in religions. Shame, I began to realize, is a dangerous pitfall off one side of the humble path, and pride the pitfall off the other side.

What I really began to see was that for me to transcend this illness, I needed to surrender into the deepest acceptance. I needed to let go of this shame, this deeply held pattern by

letting go of something deeper within. I needed to deepen my faith and trust in healing forces greater than I knew of. This was not faith and trust at the “belief level”, for beliefs are easy to hold without living them. This was faith and trust at a much deeper level. A level at which I needed to let go of my fear for my health, for my life. Faith, trust, love or shameful apprehension – this was the trade off that I had to *live* that night. I knew, somehow, that if I carried shame and fear with me into the night, I would be hurt. But if I could let go of these energies by deepening my trust, I would be ok.

I realized that by taking Tylenol to subdue my fever I had been hedging my bets. So that night as I lay down in the cabin I ditched the Tylenol, let the pain and fever rise, and entered into a deeper uncertainty. The heat soon became so intense that I felt like a large truck was slowly crushing my cranium. As the pain mounted I began to hear whispers and sense all around the room some kind of gentle buzzing presence. I could not see what it/they was/were, but I could feel it, as though it/they were witnessing. Regardless, my curiosity towards this presence was outweighed by my determination to willfully surrender into the unknown. If it/they were here to help with this annihilation then so be it.

After enduring the most excruciating pain I finally blacked out, the experience of which I cannot remember. When I came to in the middle of the night six hours later, my illness had almost completely resolved!

Over the following week, as I journeyed to the west coast and helped coordinate a conference, I had the most amazing night sweats and dreams full of vivid information. Each morning I woke up feeling refreshed and deeply grateful to be alive. On the first day of the conference I held a workshop that went exceptionally well, and afterwards I just wandered around in a state of bliss that proved very contagious.

Implications

Through my willingness to fully experience and accept an acute illness, I somehow accessed what Grof and Grof (1993) refer to as a “transpersonal crisis with strong shamanic features.” In this “core experience of the shamanic journey . . . there is great emphasis on physical suffering and encounter with death followed by rebirth and elements of ascent or magical flight” (pp. 140-41). According to Grof and Grof (1993) every shaman (facilitator of healing) must begin their life’s work with a personal experience of illness becoming fire.

Whether working to heal a sickness or wound within ourselves or others, we must turn a static symptom of blocked life energy into a dynamic experience. Metzner (1987) explains that we must become the "wounded healer" and "journey into the inner world in order to combat or destroy the 'spirits' or 'forces' that are manifesting as physical or psychic pathology" (para. 9). In so doing, we must die a little, or a lot, depending on the crisis/opportunity we are faced with. The greater the crisis/opportunity, the more we must set fire to our expectations, anticipated outcomes, agendas. "We're the workers. We're being put in the middle of this fire to show that we can walk through it, and be cleansed" (Sequoyah Trublood, personal communication, February 2003). Or as Mishum Daigneault once joked about his sweat lodge, "The catholic priests told me that I am going to burn in hell. So, this is where I come to practice" (Albert Daigneault, personal communication, October 8th, 2000).

For the Elders with whom I practice sweat lodge the most powerful healing can occur when we turn to the western doorway. This is a time when day turns to night, and we look into the shadow of our self. The keepers of the western doorway are the bear people. Bear people are revered for their capacity to self-diagnose and cure their own ailments. They are well enough in tune with their bodily self to intuit what has gone awry, and they are well enough in tune with their larger self (environment) to seek out appropriate remedies. Sometimes these remedies, like the illnesses they will redress, are rooted deep below the surface. So we inquire, and we dig. We pray for the bear medicine, and the wisdom that it will lead us to. It takes much courage to step into the darkness of the western doorway. Many deeply rooted assumptions must be questioned. To become bear medicine requires becoming vulnerable.

My experience of healing that night in the cabin was merely a conscious step in awakening to a very long and arduous journey of becoming (as in being-with). Since then I have increasingly come to perceive the practice of bear medicine as a form of internal warriorship akin to the most noble martial traditions. "The penetrating brilliance of swords wielded by followers of the Way, strikes at the evil enemy lurking deep within their own souls and bodies" (Ueshiba, 1992, p. 34). The enemy – some demon, some ignorance, some aversion, some blindness – always lies within. It is here also, in the midst of our fear, that the battle must be fought and resolved.

METHODOLOGY

My research methodology is grounded in the notion of 'direct experience' and what comes of it. By direct experience I am referring to a process of accessing direct awareness of felt sense experience within our body/mind, from which we then derive insights and knowledge. I will explain each of these terms as we progress through this chapter, but first I will articulate how this learning process differs from most traditional (modern) academic approaches to learning.

According to Priest and Gass (1997) a traditional academic process focuses primarily upon cognitive assimilation of information. Typically it involves the following steps: We *receive data about a principle*, usually in the form of symbols, such as numbers in a book or words in a lecture or particular illustration of the principle. We then *assimilate and organize information* as knowledge, indicating that we have truly learned the information rather than merely memorized it. We then *infer a specific application from the general principle*, implying cognitive intelligence, which is the ability to apply learning. We then actually *apply the learning* to a real situation through an experience. From this experience comes an *imaginal understanding*, or deeper intuitive grasp of what has happened.

While this method of learning can be highly efficient in terms of how quickly and easily information can be transmitted from a teacher to students, statistics have shown that on average as little as 5% of information is retained this way (Priest and Gass, 1997). Part of the problem is that this cogni-centric process often depends on a symbolic medium. If a learner is not fluent in the symbols and language used (ie. reading, math) then they are unable to get past the second step, and are unable to translate the learnings into concrete sequences of action. Another part of the problem is that somatic aspects of learning are neglected. The assumption is that 'we learn with our heads'.

When learning by direct experience, on the other hand, the progression is essentially reversed. First we *have an encounter*, we do something that causes an effect. From this we receive a wide range of sensory input and are able to observe the causes and effects of that action. As the experience begins to sink in, we begin to *process images and forms*, and develop an intuitive grasp of what has occurred. Next, we *form a rational understanding* of the cause and effects of what has happened so that we may predict events based on similar

circumstances. Then we *understand the general principles* from which our understandings might arise. Ultimately, we will go on to apply the action in a new situation, staying within the limits of the generalized principle as we *test our hypothesis*.

Coleman (1979, in Priest & Gass, 1997), explains these differences in terms of the two ways we may attempt to learn/teach a symbolic language,

The first way is experiential in nature and is the 'way all children learn a first language: the natural way, by being in the linguistic environment, by trying and failing and finally succeeding, in making oneself understood and understanding others. It is a painful, time-consuming, and emotion-producing experience, but an effective one.' The second way is cognitive and is the 'typical method of school learning of a second language: 'memorizing' the rules of grammar, the meaning of words, not in terms of experience, but in terms of the words of the first language one knows. This process is less painful, less emotion producing, and less effective' . . . The difference is that the experiential way 'grounds each word, each phrase in a rich bed of experience. One remembers a word, a phrase, because the very emotions it provoked when it was not understood by another or when it was understood and evoked a response from the other. One cannot forget it, because its usage is an intrinsic part of the fabric of experience that constitutes one's life' (Priest and Gass, 1997, pp. 15-6).

Our conceptual understanding and use of language is thus shaped by the way we experience it in the narrative of our lives. Essentially this is a process of learning by doing with reflection, the process of which constitutes a narrative way of knowing (Bruner, 1987, 1996).

Narrative Pretext

Bruner (1987) suggests that the ways of telling stories and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them "become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future" (p.31). In keeping with this perspective, a growing body of neuro-physiological research suggests that our perception of any phenomenon is contingent upon a narrative pretext developed through historical precedent.

In order to cognize a phenomenon we must re-cognize it through a neural network of associated memories (Dispenza, 2004; Pert, 2004).

To illustrate this process Dispenza (2004) offers the example of how the indigenous people of a Caribbean island could not perceive Christopher Columbus' tall ships as they first arrived in the harbour. These ships were such an utterly novel phenomena, that the islanders had no historical precedent of associative memories through which to re-cognize them. It was not until the shaman of the tribe stood focusing on the strange patterns on the water, journeying through 'paranormal' realms of consciousness, until he was able to perceive the ships. He then went back to his people and told them the story of the tall ships, describing their shape, size, number, etc. Because the people trusted their shaman, and believed in his abilities to perceive truth, they were afforded a necessary context, and were thus then able to perceive the ships.

If our perception of the outside world is dependent upon a narrative precedent having been set through a historical discourse, then the narrative structures we perpetually construct establish what we are able and not able to perceive as relevant data (Dispenza, 2004; Pert, 2004). Furthermore, because all stories have a beginning (or a history), a middle (or a present) and an ending (or a future), it follows that the interpretation of current events is as much shaped by the meaning we ascribe to the future as it is by the meanings we ascribe to the past (Bruner, 1987, 1996). The future we anticipate allies with the meanings we have made of the past and we sustain an interpretive continuity which shapes the way we perceive the present and co-create the future.

With this story and process in mind, I wonder how it was that the shaman became able to see Columbus' ships approaching the harbour. Having never witnessed this phenomenon before how did he come to perceive something beyond the bounds of his current reality? How did his capacity to perceive transcend the constraints of habitual perceptive association? These questions have been at the root of my inquiry, and the answers I am about to offer serve as the foundation of my methodology.

I believe that the shaman engaged an epistemology that involved accessing a direct awareness of experience not so much *beyond* his habitual narrative construction of meaning, as *prior to* it. In this way, he was able to suspend the conditioned boundaries of his storied sense of self by achieving a state of identity groundlessness in which the strictures that

normally inhibited the boundaries of his reality did not apply. In so doing he was thus able to transcend the narrative pretext that habitually informed his perception. These discernments will take some explaining.

Direct Experience

William James, considered by many as the father of (modern) experiential education (Priest and Gass, 1997), suggests all knowledge must be empirical, that is, derived from experience. He proposed a radical empiricism that neither admits into its construction any element that is not directly experienced, nor excludes from it any element that is directly experienced. "For such a philosophy, the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system." (James, 1912/1996, in Metzner, 2005, para 15).

Alongside James' radical empiricism, one might consider Smith's (1988) research into the historical roots of the 'empirical method' employed in today's modern science. Exploring the etymology of the term *empirical*, Smith unearthed the term '*emperia*', the Greek word for *experience*, which means,

strictly to claim one's experience, through observation and sense data, as the basis of knowledge. And that is completely different from some form of 'out there' objectivism. Observations involve the eye, which means empirical research becomes a question of which eye one uses, the inner, the outer, the transcendental third, or a dynamic reciprocity among the three. Or again, empirical research involves interpretation of sense data, so we might ask which part of the anatomy is to be acknowledged as capable of receiving it – the brain, the heart, or, say, the stomach. Empirical research has to do with the whole person standing in the whole of life trying to make sense of his/her experience of it all in its wholeness (pp. 418-419).

Recent neurological research suggests that our bodies are in receipt of over 4 billion sensory impulses each second, and yet, only about 200,000 make it through to conscious awareness (Dispenza, 2004; Pert, 2004). With so much empirical data to choose from, the question becomes: with what instruments of perception shall we engage observation? What range of observables shall we consider? The modern scientist will RELY ON ~~stiek~~ with just the physical "eye of the flesh" (Wilbur, 1993, p. 188) to scientifically gather adjunct data,

and “the mind’s eye” (p. 188) to coordinate, clarify, criticize, and synthesize. The transpersonal researcher, shaman, yogi and mystic will engage and validate quite a few more. As the great Indian yogi Sri Yukteswar once admonished his disciple Paramahansa Yogananda: “Wisdom is not assimilated with the eyes, but with the atoms. When your conviction of a truth is not merely in your brain but in your being, you may diffidently vouch for its meaning” (In Yogananda, 1946, p. 153).

In the vipassana meditation tradition of Ubah Kin, Goenka (1998) speaks of three distinct kinds of wisdom. *Suta maya panna* – the wisdom gained by listening to others; *cinta maya panna* – intellectual, analytical understanding; and, *bhavana maya panna* – wisdom based on direct personal experience.

We must know ourselves, not just intellectually in the realm of ideas and theories, and not just emotionally or devotionally, simply accepting blindly what we have heard or read. Such knowledge is not enough. Rather, we must know reality experientially. We must experience directly the reality of this mental-physical phenomenon (pp. 4-5).

Goenka further explains that ‘direct experience’ is a pre-conceptual level of reality. It is perceived through a ‘direct awareness’ of felt-sense experience within our body. The epistemological basis of this awareness is not contingent upon thought. The experience itself is not to be confused with our ideas about things. For example, if someone holds up their hand and asks what we see, most likely we would say “A hand”. Actually though we don’t see a hand at all. What the eyes see is color and form and light and shadow, and then the mind jumps in and quickly puts a concept on that constellation of perception. If I sit for a long while in meditation I might eventually feel tightness, pressure, hardness, or tingling in my hip. From this I might say “My hip hurts”. But “my hip” is a concept. There is no sensation called “hip” or “hand” or “knee”. These are concepts. In reality the felt sensations are what we are experiencing directly, not the concepts (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987). Our perception is through ‘direct awareness of the felt sense level of experience’ rather than conceptual thought processes.

Eugene Gendlin (1981), one of the pioneers (in western society) of somatically focused healing suggests that there is a vast reservoir of information available through our ‘felt sense’. He explains that felt sense is an internal bodily awareness of a situation or person or

event, a internal aura that encompasses everything we feel and know about a given subject at a given time. This paranormal realm of awareness cannot be accessed by thinking about our felt sense, but only by accessing a direct experiential awareness of sensations within our body.

Tolle (1999) refers to this felt sense as finding the life underneath our life situation. He says,

Use your senses fully. Be where you are. Look around. Just look, don't interpret. See the lights, shapes, colours, textures. Be aware of the silent presence of each thing. Listen to the sounds; don't judge them. Listen to the silence underneath the sounds. Touch something – anything – and feel and acknowledge its Being. Observe the rhythm of your breathing; feel the air flowing in and out, feel the energy inside your body. Allow everything to be, within and without. Allow the 'isness' of all things. Move into the Now (p. 63).

In my experience, achieving this *now* state is the key to rewiring our patterns of associative meaning-making and achieving a transformation of our reality. One Elder shaman with whom I have studied (he also played a role in saving my son's life) often admonishes jokingly, "Get out of your bone head!" Although this comment may at first glance seem indicative of an anti-rational romanticism, upon deeper consideration, I believe it can be considered to point to richly rewarding and vitally important realms of paranormal experience. As many of the facilitators of paranormal healing with whom I have associated explain, the essential ingredients to healing and transformation simply lie beyond the thinking process. For many of these people, the thinking process is considered a hindrance to transformation in that it can often reinforce our patterns of narrative construction.

To help clarify how the practice of accessing direct awareness of the felt sense of our experience can be transformational, let me share a story of how I first came to consciously undertake such a process, and how this epistemology has since informed my way of knowing and being in the world.

Much as I had held conceptual understanding of epistemological distinctions between thought and awareness for many years, I gained experiential insight to these discernments in March of 2000, whilst participating in my first 10-day vipassana meditation retreat. Vipassana meditation is one of India's most ancient techniques of meditation. It was

rediscovered by Gotama Buddha more than 2500 years ago and was a central aspect of his earliest teachings. Vipassana, which means to see things as they really are, is a way of self-transformation through self-observation. It focuses on the deep interconnection between mind and body, which can be experienced directly by disciplined attention to the physical sensations that form the life of the body, and that continuously interconnect and condition the life of the mind (Goenka, 1998).

Near the mid way point of my first retreat, I had learned to focus my concentration enough to notice (be directly aware of) what sensations were arising in any one location in my body-construct. With a precision the size of a small marble, I could focus and feel quite clearly what was simply happening at a quantum vibrational level anywhere on or in my body. This was a totally new awakening for me. And a powerful experiencing of transcending, among other things, previously held illusions of solidity.

To this point in the course (day 5), the instructors had been carefully explaining to us the distinction between conceptual *thought* and pre-conceptual, *direct awareness*. The experience of direct awareness cannot be expressed in and of itself. It can only be articulated through production of words that are intentionally related to it (by a certain coding convention which determines what counts as similar in the right way, (Czarniawska, 2004)). I can only ever write about direct awareness from outside of it. In the fraction of a glimpse of a moment it takes to snap together a conception, we are that much removed from direct awareness. And this is okay, just so long as the difference is acknowledged.

In vipassana meditation one is constantly encouraged to focus upon direct awareness. This is not easy when one has a lifetime of training in random mental chatter and focused thinking! Nevertheless, I was gradually getting the hang of it and, as mentioned, was learning to focus more and more precisely into subtler levels of energy/matter. What I now began to notice though, was the connection between the sensation I was feeling, and my conceptual understanding of human physiology. Years earlier I had completed a minor degree in kinesiology and, through this study, had become quite conceptually familiar with the location of different tissues, organs, glands and systems within my body. I now began to notice, for example, how the sensation within my thyroid gland, whilst never in stasis, was often resonating differently from the sensation in the muscular tissue just a few centimeters

away; how the vibration of the dense bone in my pelvis was often different from that of my liver, and other such comparisons.

“Aha!” I thought, “connection”. As I learned to move through my body with such precise awareness, I also began applying my conceptual understanding of medical physiology and, to a lesser extent (based on my lesser theoretical knowledge), *chi* energy systems. All of this I began experiencing simultaneously and found it extremely fascinating. Physiology, at the gross level, and chi, at a subtler level, were now being verified by direct quantum level experience. I was now experiencing truth of a deeper, trans-rational level.

Later during a break in meditation, I approached the main instructor (who also happened to be a medical doctor) with my revelation. I asked if these experiences of sensation were ultimately meant to *merge* completely with my conceptual understanding of physiological/energy systems? Her answer, surprisingly, was a clear ‘NO.’ She explained to me that while awareness and thought may appear to merge, they are merely flickering back and forth in the mind. She advised that I discern between these epistemic structures, and, whilst meditating, that I continue returning from conceptual thought to direct awareness (L. Henderson, personal communication, March, 2000).

As I have consequently surmised through tacit derivations from my own experiential research, and analysis of literature from other more adept practitioners, this flicker between thought and awareness can occur up to 8 times per second in meditative states, and even faster (up to 30 times per second) during non-meditative states. While at a gross level these experiences – one of pre-conceptual direct awareness within the moment, the other of conceptual understanding just after the moment – may appear to be simultaneous, they are in fact alternating (at least in ‘horizontal time’ if not ‘vertical time’, but that is another topic). With practice and focus, a felt sense of the difference between the experience of awareness and thought can become increasingly palpable. While at a grosser level the two have seemingly merged, they are still, epistemologically speaking, *separate*.

Rewiring narrative pretexts

With regard to the shamanic process of transcending our perceptive boundaries and thus transforming our potential reality, we must engage direct awareness in order to reach the primordial roots of our conditioned reaction to our felt sense experience of phenomena.

These conditioned reactions are the narrative pretexts that usually abide subconsciously, yet constantly act to inform and shape our perception. Goenka (1998) explains that these conditioned reactions, or *sankhara*, are the fifth of five aggregates in the perceptive process of reality composition. The first is *rupa* – or matter, which composes the physical body of tiny subatomic particles (known as *kalapa*). Parts of this physical body are organized as sensory apparatus. The next aggregate is *vinnana* – or consciousness/cognition. This refers *not* to abstract consciousness or conceptual levels of cognition, but rather to the immediate stimulus of sensory apparatus in the body through reception of stimuli. In this context, the subtlest level of mind is considered to be the subtlest level of matter. This is the meeting point between consciousness and matter. The next aggregate is *sanna* – or perception/recognition. The stimulus has triggered a process whereby information is relayed electro-chemically and identification of the ‘kind’ of stimulus is made. The next aggregate is *vedana* – or sensation. The stimulus, having been received by sensory apparatus and identified by initial perceptive process then translates into a sensation occurring in the body. The next aggregate is *sankhara* – or reaction, mental conditioning (Goenka, 1998).

Whilst we cannot alter the first four aggregates of *rupa*, *vinnana*, *sanna*, or *vedana*, we can alter our creation of the fifth aggregate *sankhara*. This is achieved by becoming directly aware of the *vedana*/sensation, and by be-coming it, by simply observing and accepting the sensation rather than trying to avoid it. To discuss how this works, let us return to the story of my first vipassana retreat.

One of the strategies applied in these 10-day meditation retreats is ‘sittings of strong determination.’ On the 4th day of retreat we began the practice of sitting as still as possible for an hour at a time. Good god this was excruciating! No matter what position I set myself in, after some time, usually 10 or 15 minutes, some part of my body would be on fire with intense pain. Usually it was deep within my left hip. The instructors just kept reminding us to ‘remain aware of and equanimous with these sensations.’ Pain, was merely a sensation of the fire element, they said. Much as fluid cohesion was merely the sensation of water element, vacuous motion merely the sensation of air element, and thick density merely the sensation of earth element. These four elements make up all of existence, and they make up the physical construct of our bodies. They are *all always present in our bodies. And they are always changing.*

With the above-mentioned principles of reality composition in mind, I began to understand that my suffering from the pain was not due to the intense sensation of fire, but due to my conditioned reaction to the sensation of fire. Whilst sitting in excruciating pain, I could do nothing about the actual sensations arising, but I could become aware of their changing nature. After a few days of concentrated practice, sure enough, I did notice that the intense pain in my left hip did come and go to some extent over the duration of the hour. But always, when the bell rang to indicate that our hour was up, I, like most everyone else in the meditation room, took a long time to slowly stretch out my creaky joints before getting up. It was a pretty comical scene to notice all these people sighing and groaning whilst unfolding their bodies at a snail's pace. It often took me up to 10 minutes of walking before the stiffness abated.

Then, on day 6, a profound shift occurred. In the morning I had begun to experience the simplicity of 'being with' the intense fiery sensations in my hip without my habitual aversion. This was an entirely new experience for me. Somehow, the *reality* of my pain began to come and go. And then, during the afternoon sitting of strong determination, I was able to be directly aware and accepting of the sensation to the point where all sense of pain dissolved! I had achieved the state of being no longer subtly averse to it, and so it did not bother me. Even amidst the most intense sensation of fire within my left hip, I could now calmly attune my perception to notice the other sensations of water, air, and earth also within the physical construct of my hip. When I let go of my resistance to the sensations/vibrations I was afraid of, the other sensations/vibrations became available to my perception. When the bell rang to indicate that the hour was up (same bell, same hour of sitting still), I got up and walked out the door without an ounce of stiffness. My old understanding of physical reality was no longer adequate to explain my direct experience. My mind was thus rendered open to as yet unforeseen possibilities.

Through direct experience, the nature of how one grows or regresses, how one produces suffering or frees oneself from suffering is understood. This observation-based, self-exploratory journey to the common root of mind and body illuminates the laws that operate one's thoughts, feelings, judgments and sensations (Goenka, 1998). By becoming directly aware of the process of our experience (*rupa, vinnana, sanna, vedana*), and learning to consciously observe the results of our conditioned reaction (*sankhara*) to our experiences we

effectively 'detach' synaptic junctions of old habitual neural networks and shift the resultant patterns of neuro-endocrine experience within our body (Dispenza, 2004; Pert, 2004). I believe this is the true application of the often misconstrued Buddhist notion of 'detachment.' When we fully accept our experience we therein let go of (detach from) our aversions, which are the source of our desire (craving) for things to be different. In this way we can be more present to new possibilities in each moment. One of the better explanations of detachment I have encountered in literature is offered by Morrie Schwartz (in Ablom, 1997) mere months before his slow death from Lou Gehrig's disease.

Detachment doesn't mean you don't let the experience penetrate you. On the contrary, you let it penetrate you fully. That is how you are able to leave it . . . Take any emotion – love for a woman, or grief for a loved one, or what I'm going through, fear and pain from a deadly illness. If you hold back on the emotions – if you don't allow yourself to go all the way through them – you can never get to be detached, you are too busy being afraid. You're afraid of the pain, you're afraid of the grief, you're afraid of the vulnerability that love entails.

But by throwing yourself into these emotions, by allowing yourself to dive in all the way, over your head even, you experience them fully and completely. You know what pain is. You know what love is. You know what grief is. And only then can you say: Alright, I have experienced that emotion. Now I'm free to detach from that emotion for a moment (Schwartz, in Ablom, 1997, p. 103-4)

Ultimately, all that we are really detaching from is our aversion to *what is*. As we dis-identify from the constraints of our conditioned reaction we thereby dis-identify with the narrative pretext of the 'dominant story' that has governed our perception. We become cognizant of our "discourse that is aware of its own lack of foundation" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 22). This allows our 'self' to receive new information, to open to new feelings and lived experiences, and to effect unique outcomes. Through this process of observing our felt sense experience and detaching from the root of our blind reaction we are likewise effecting a change at the root of our perception. When our felt sense experience is made conscious through direct awareness we are able to shift the narrative structure through which we perceive and make meaning of our experience (Levine, 1995).

The key to this transformation lies in an intention to *accept what is*. As Goldstein and Kornfield (1988) suggest,

If we don't accept some aspect of ourselves – a feeling, a physical or mental sense of ourselves – then we cannot learn about it. We cannot discover its nature and become free in relationship to it. We become afraid, we resist, we judge, and we try to push away. We cannot look deeply and push away at the same time. When mindfulness is well developed and the ground of acceptance is laid, then the body and mind are filled with a sense of comfort. Even if something difficult or painful has arisen, this comfort is underlying it (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987, p.43).

I believe that my successful resolution of acute illness was contingent upon my willingness (intention) to *fully accept* the journey. By letting go of a familiar pattern of expectation I was able to broaden my perception of possibility and thereby transcend the existing limitations of my reality. “Ahh, I see the ships.”

Self observation through narrative

Having said all this, how do I put these principles of direct awareness and acceptance of felt sense experience to work in my research methodology? Whilst they may be exemplified in my storied recreation of events such as the cabin healing (and the evidence of success verified by my continued corporeal existence and health), how can these principles be applied to narrative production of insights? What are the qualities that have enabled me to transcend dis-ease, and how can I bring them to my thesis writing? With these questions I illuminate an interpretive theme and a narrative meta-plot of transformation (Czarniawska, 2004), and my narrative telling becomes a reflexively conscious act of deriving insight.

With regard to my overt storytelling so far (the lucid dream synchronicity, the cabin healing) I notice that I am drawn to Bruner's (1996) notion of confronting “trouble”. With myself as the agent, I work/find myself into troublesome scenarios. My stories are driven by trouble as I act through crisis (/opportunity) and strive towards “a revolutionary change of affairs with a new order of legitimacy” (p. 94). Often, this involves accessing paranormal states of consciousness to encounter and retrieve some otherwise hidden aspect of truth and thus return to wholeness. This naked journey of reclamation from the shadows enables a

“restitution of initial legitimacy” (p. 94) and enables an eventual liberty from illness and suffering.

I have often heard Sequoyah say, “Nothing ever comes into creation without first coming into consciousness.” I understand this comment to be a reference toward the grand narrative of creation itself. In this sense, all of existence is a narrative of life, ‘first there was the word’, and through this resonance unfolds the cosmic drama of life (*Lila*). Nested within this grand story of creation are the stories we foster through our limited perceptions, each one partial and constrained by singular expression in time and space as we move from tension to *telos* (Bruner, 1987). As a narrative researcher, I am working to move in between these dimensions of narrative. In telling the small stories of personal experience, I set up the conditions to reflect upon their telling, and then engage a reflexive process of analysis and reconsideration. Through narration of my experiences I am afforded the potential to self observe and notice the subtle manner in which my narrative pretexts formulate my interpretations and shape my stories. Creation (of a story representing an experience) thus becomes a sounding board of possibility, a mirror offering potential insight, and a metaphor for all of creation.

For example, let us consider the metaphor of practicing yoga asanas (postures), Sustaining postural habits is a means whereby the unconscious mind contains and restricts your range of choices. The mind has established its arena, beyond which you are not allowed to move. A certain pattern of habits is permitted. If you attempt to step out of that pattern, you are restrained by the fascial network. It prevents you from ‘going wild’. It is, in effect, a sort of connective tissue straight jacket. Unconsciously you create this internal fascial straight jacket to preserve the security of the familiar to ensure that you don’t do anything out of character (Tuganait, 2003, p. 27).

The habit patterns of our mind establish the narrative pretext, or the range of what stories can be told.

Conle (1999) contends that a researcher’s quality of life and mode of narrative may be closely related. The process of self observation enables me to notice how the postural habit patterns of my mind are informing my narrative at any given time. In my practice of yoga asanas I sometimes find myself pushing towards an idea of the ‘completed’ or ‘ideal’

posture. Rather than focus upon where I am in the posture, I instead get caught focusing upon the gap between where I am and where I think I should be. As Schiffman (1996) explains,

This gap, more often than not, contains a subtle frustration, a conflict, a feeling that where you are is insufficient –or worse, who you are is insufficient – and that if you were truly doing yoga properly and were a ‘good’ or ‘evolved’ person, you would be somewhere other than where you are. If this is the case, your practice will be permeated with the effort of going somewhere else. It will be future-oriented, the present moment being significant only as a stepping stone to the future. And you will be missing the present (p.75).

In short, the future oriented habit pattern of mind excludes the story of present tense encounter.

Being aware of my state of mind helps me to notice how I am reacting to an experience and why this might be so. If I am struggling to be present it will show in a constriction of breath, usually in conjunction with an increasingly distracted mind and a numbing out from my felt-sense. In a sense, I become rigid, both figuratively and literally. When I react with aversion to these subtlest of sensations, I become more stressed, my flexibility decreases (my body tightens) and my capacity to engage and consider new possibilities is reduced. The greater the threat I feel, the more I hold to strong opinions and project judgments onto others in order to find a focus for my unacknowledged alarm. The story created from my narrative pretext is one of resistance and strife. Self observation within a practice, be it yoga asana or writing, illuminates the restrictive patterns of my narrative construction at play, and offers insight into the mostly autonomic (habitually unconscious) routines that governs my life.

Self observation also helps me to notice when I am accessing direct awareness. Whilst it is not exactly possible to consciously notice that one’s mind is in direct awareness the very moment we are in it (at least not in horizontal time), I am capable of an interpolation of flickering in and out of pure presence in the moment and noticing myself in the moment so rapidly that I can generally say, “Ah, I am in and out of direct awareness right now.”

By engaging a direct awareness of felt sense experience of a phenomenon through storying I come to notice its ever changing nature, and am able to achieve ever-shifting “now perspectives” (Conle, 1999, p. 15) bringing new information and new circumstances to

influence me. By interpolating this direct awareness of change with reflections upon the thoughts and feelings that typically create a story (phenomenon) I disrupt the familiar assumptions of solidity that sustain its apparent reality. In this way I am able to realize that “The told event (the storied notion of reality) therefore is not ‘reality itself,’ but reality from a particular vantage point, the current now perspective” (Conle, 1999, p. 15). As the vantage point changes, so does the story and with it the reality I am able to perceive. The questions I return to in each moment are: Can I find and hold (constantly return to) the direct awareness of this felt-sense experience? Can I breathe into and from this present-in-tensity? Can I observe the changing nature of my reality and thereby detach from my sankara (conditioned reactions)? If so, then my methodology becomes a journey into compassion, a process of being *with* my experience.

Into Compassion

Through years of weekly sweat lodge practice I have noticed that on days when I am struggling with mental/emotional negativity I tend to get burned by the steam. On other days when I am in a gentler more peaceful state of mind I tend not to get burned. I have noticed this happens regardless of how other people are experiencing the lodge. On any given day, what is *too hot* for one person will not necessarily be too hot for another person. The next week it may be the latter person who gets burned. This phenomenon has everything to do with our state of mind at the time, regardless of our level of experience in the practice. As water is poured on the glowing hot stones and steam creeps down from the ceiling, we are confronted with a moment of elemental truth – a self-reflective immersion in fire-earth-air-water from which there is no escape. The sweat lodge takes us into an edge zone of fiery ordeal which can harm us or transform us depending on our present relationship with it.

Schiffman (1996) describes a process of gently “playing the edge” of difficulty. In the practice of yoga asana this involves finding the intensity in a stretch just *before* pain, but not pain itself, and simply noticing. Another element is our *concentration edge*; how well we can sustain our attention to a matter. And another element is our *endurance edge*; how long we can hold a position (eg. a posture) or pattern (eg. distance running). “Sensing where your edges are and learning to hold the body there with awareness...” will eventually result in a subtle shift and expansion of one’s limits. “Skill in yoga has little to do with your degree of

flexibility or where your edges happen to be. Rather, it is a function of how sensitively you can play your edges, no matter where they are” (p. 75).

Common to many Japanese martial arts is the principle of *shin-gi-tai* - *shin* referring to heart or spirit, *gi* referring to technique, and *tai* referring to one body or person. This symbol is also more abstractly translated into *tsutomureba-kanarazu-tatsu* – meaning (roughly) perseverance is the key to success. Through an intention (spirit) to refine (technique) our self through bodily practice, we are able to overcome our difficulties. These principles of success can apply to any practice, including the practice of academic research and writing, so long as we commit to bringing ourselves to the edges of our ability.

The key to playing these edges successfully is to approach them in the spirit of compassion. One of the Elders with whom I engage the sweat lodge ceremony (I will refrain from sharing his name here) explains that as we prepare to face difficulty brought forth by scorching heat we must find (attune to) a “quam quam e schqwal e wun” (a strong mind/feeling), “aik schqwal e wun” (a good mind/feeling), and “eee es schqwal e wun” (a fun mind/feeling). As Sequoyah Trublood has explained on numerous occasions, *Every thought, every feeling, every word and every action is a prayer that we send into creation.* When we engage a process of self observation whilst playing the edge of our capacity, we come to realize that attuning to a healthy intention *literally* affects our bodily state of well being. In a sense this is akin to certain strategies in somatically focused psychotherapy in which positive feelings are evoked to interpolate with negative feelings of experiencing difficulty. When we focus our attention in this way, we are better able to transcend hardship by achieving a gestalt and releasing stuck energy in to flow (Levine, 1995). Through deepening our awareness and acceptance of subtle sensations, we find comfort (with-strength) which enables us to “face the unfaceable” (Engler, 2000), let go of our postural habits, and embrace new possibility. As we become more gentle and flexible within our capacity for compassionate existence grows.

Elder Voices

In writing this thesis, I am endeavouring to blend aspects of *emergent* knowledge and *immergent* or transmitted knowledge. *Emergent* knowledge is that which arises from my own direct awareness of experience, and emerges through my narrative construction.

Emergent knowledge includes and, more importantly, *honours* my tacit and intuitive dimensions of awareness as crucial ingredients in this process of gaining knowledge. *Immergent*, or transmitted knowledge is the shared/imposed teachings of Elders, teachers, parents (eg. book knowledge, lectures, Elders' advice). These sources of transmitted knowledge play a crucial role in my experience, not only in their capacity to help me interpret and make healthy meaning, but also in their capacity to inspire. The material I have read, and the verbal advice I have received regarding research inquiry, consciousness, mysticism and shamanism etc. offers a valuable map as I set about navigating experiential terrain and then return from to review. In particular, certain personal communications with Elders have proven pivotal in helping me to engage and reintegrate from extra-ordinary experiences.

In my story of stepping 'into the fire', for example, my decision to surrender into a hellish unknown was influenced by the serendipitous arrival of Sequoyah Trublood *just after* I had given up my purpose. Had this synchronicity not occurred exactly when it did, I doubt I would have had the faith to surrender further as I eventually did. Somehow, I was motivated to place my trust in this man's teachings. His personal communication was not only through the words he spoke, but through the timing of his arrival, the deeply relational way in which he lives, and the love that he emanates. The validity of what he said, the power of his sharing stemmed from who he *is* as a person. Who then, is Sequoyah?

I first met Sequoyah Trublood in June of 2000, when he agreed to help my colleagues and I pilot a 5-month immersion wilderness-guide training program called *Guiding Spirit*. This was a few months after I had taken my first vipassana retreat and had since been meditating regularly. As we sat around a council fire one evening Sequoyah spoke at length about *acceptance*,

The only reason there is any suffering in this world, the only reason we struggle in pain, is due to our judgments. Nothing else. The only way to release ourselves from suffering is to be in a place of acceptance.... We suffer when we want something to be different from the way it is. When we do this we are turning our back on the original instructions of creator.... Everything we are going through right now has always been known in the mind of creator. Nothing ever happens that has not been known in eternity. Everything is happening right now *exactly* the way it is meant to,

otherwise it wouldn't be happening. When we accept this, we find peace in our lives" (S. Trublood, personal communication, July 2000)

As we passed the pipe around that night and took turns opening our hearts, it began to rain. Whilst many of us began getting squirmy, thinking of relocating indoors, Sequoyah simply smiled,

These raindrops coming to join us are not bad things. They are the bodies of our ancestors kissing us and sending us thanks. All the atoms in our bodies are coming and going with these atoms in the water. The consciousness of our ancestors exists within these atoms, and exist within us now. We are the consciousness and bodies of our ancestors (S. Trublood, personal communication, July 2000).

And so, we all just sat in the rain and carried on. Sequoyah was not the least bit bothered by the rain, nor the many mosquitoes hovering around him. He was simply glowing with an infectious smile. The evening was amongst the most magical I have ever experienced. The next day Sequoyah explained a triangle of insight once came to him in a revelatory dream:

We cannot be in a place of feeling and offering love unless we are in a place of peace. We cannot be in a place of peace unless we are in a place of acceptance. These three aspects, peace, love and acceptance are like a triangle. The only way we can bring this triangle into our life is by offering great thanks for exactly what is – right now, right here. This acceptance brings us into a state of peace. This peace brings us in to a state of love. (S. Trublood, personal communication, July, 2000).

This core teaching of acceptance made complete sense to me. It was congruent with all I had been learning in hatha yoga, sweat lodge and vipassana. I was enthralled to meet a teacher with such cross-cultural understandings. And I quickly became a disciple of sorts. Over the years of learning from him and working with him since I have heard bits and pieces of his life story, some of which I will share with you now.

Sequoyah Trublood is an internationally respected Elder/mystic/heretic of the Choctaw, Chikisaw and Cherokee Nations, with a bit of German and English blood in him too. His biography reads like an overly laden Hollywood script: Born on a reservation, grew up barefoot, abused and abusive parents, landed in residential school, joined the military, became a captain in military intelligence, lead covert green beret

reconnaissance missions into Laos during the Vietnam war, guarded CIA drug shipments out of Cambodia, was a guinea pig for military in-house experimentation with psychoactive substances, left Vietnam drug addicted, returned home and continued working for military intelligence whilst trafficking drugs, landed in jail, bottomed out in solitary confinement, learned to meditate.

Emerged from prison in the early 80s, lived for 5 years in the yoga ashram of Swami Satchidananda, started the Cherokee Challenge wilderness program for youth, traveled the world and traveled some more (numerous alien abductions and astral journeys), was crushed inside his car in a head-on collision with a tractor-trailer only to find himself standing in the nearby ditch unharmed, began communing with healers and seers from many cultures, led many sun dances, experienced excruciating initiations by Hopi Elders. A few years ago he was called (in dreamtime) to visit the Kogi people (of the Columbian high Sierra – arguably the most intact indigenous culture on the planet) by whom he has since been adopted as one of their ‘Mamos’ (medicine people).

Sequoyah now spends most of his time going where he is called, leading ceremonies and offer workshops on the “original instructions”, telepathy and yogic shape-shifting. Sometimes it is a phone call and a request to come visit this or that part of the world. Other times it is some other kind of call – such as the time he was called to head over to a cabin in which I was nearing death in the Summer of 2001.

A year later, in July 2002, Sequoyah was helping me lead a 6-day canoe trip for a Rediscovery Youth Leadership Program. We were 4 days out on the North Saskatchewan River, in the Rocky Mountains of eastern Alberta. Fed by a dam upstream, the river had a predictable high water mark in the afternoon and then lowered through the night. We had set camp for the evening on a bench-land about a hundred meters from the rivers’ edge, and dinner had just been called. One of our practices in these programs was to circle up and offer gratitude before the meal. I noticed everyone was circling except Sequoyah, who was heading in the *opposite* direction towards the river. As he was prone to such unpredictability, we just carried on with our circle. Until he shouted to us in his deep Cherokee drawl, “Hey you guys, there’s someone’s canoe floating down the river!”

A number of us sprang into action, and managed to rescue the canoe a few hundred metres downstream, just before it disappeared around a cliff-edge set of rapids. Once we

settled back at camp we deduced that the river had risen after our arrival, and two of our paddlers were sloppy in shoring their canoe high enough. It was a good experiential lesson. And then there was the Sequoyah's version of events, indicative of so many Sequoyah stories, and the serendipitous way he lives his life: "Yeah I don't know. I wuz getting ready to come over and have dinner with ya, but then I was told to go to the river. I don't know why I went. I guess I never ask why. But I usually find out: *Oh that's why!*" If he had gone to the river 10 seconds earlier, the canoe would have still been ashore. If he had gone 10 seconds later, it would have been beyond retrieval. And we would have been 'up the creek.'

Whilst working with Sequoyah on extended wilderness trips, I am personally drawn into the resonance of his synchronistic experience. I am constantly intrigued by the manner in which the most amazing array of harmonious co-incidences frequently unfold when he is present. As you can imagine, this makes him an incredible asset whilst facilitating group process. In the spirit of heuristic inquiry, I endeavour to learn everything I can from this man; I seek to know his experience.

In the process of describing my relationship with Sequoyah in this thesis, I perceive him more as co-researcher than as a subject. Rather than lose him in the process of descriptive analysis, I prefer that he remain visible in the 'examination of the data' and continue to be portrayed as a whole person. I seek to sustain his presence because, to my mind, he embodies through his very life-way the kind of heuristic process into which I aspire. Through his emphasis upon connectedness and relationship, he demonstrates an authentic faith in the "unshakable connection" between "what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling and awareness." (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 38-9). In his commitment to accept everything as a gift, he embodies a "reintegration of derived knowledge that itself is an act of creative discovery, a synthesis that includes intuition and tacit understanding" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). The sense of 'I' he holds is inseparable from the community of others with whom he relates.

Another Indigenous-minded person with whom I have had the immense honour to associate is William White, a Cowichan (Coast Salish) educator and advisor for the University of Victoria. I first met Bill in the Spring of 1999, whilst preparing to implement the above-mentioned wilderness-guide training program. In his capacity as the Aboriginal Liaison Officer with the University, Bill had much experience in bridging the gaps between

the traditional teachings of his own Cowichan culture, the teachings of other First Nation cultures, and the modus operandi a western academic institution through which he now conducted his business.

Bill became my first mentor in the realms of extra-ordinary consciousness, helping me to understand the subtleties of relational (paranormal) consciousness whilst navigating the vagaries of a predominantly rational cultural mindset. He is amongst the few people I have met who is fluently “bi-cultural” (Brokenleg, personal communication, February 18, 2001), in that he is able to shift between an *indigenous mind* and a *western mind* with great ease. From Bill, I have learned to access many paranormal realms, and then process these experiences in a rational manner, much as I have shared in my discussion of self observation through narrative. Bill refers to this process as *framing*.

Bill White and I have taken many long walks together, discussing many fascinating dimensions and aspects of life. As we have moved along in our journeys and discussion certain characteristics of his life-way have grown apparent. For example, whilst in discussion, he will often stop, or change direction. Sometimes he will turn around to go back to a place where a point was made. I am speaking not just figuratively here, but literally – physically, geographically. For Bill, the figurative *is* the literal *is* the actual. Every *thing* in his experience occurs in relation with *every* thing in time/space. In Bill’s perception, every event that has ever ‘taken place’ in a location, every word and thought in relation to the land upon which it manifested, leaves an ever-present echo. We then mingle with this echo as we traverse in conversation. That which we speak is therein added to the trans-temporal relational reality of the place in which we have spoken it. One might say Bill White *echo-locates* in ecological consciousness. The *what* and *how* he shares is constantly infused with *where* and *when*. For Bill, *life is language is space is reality*. And thus, he always chooses his words carefully. For example, “When you speak a word, you bring it into existence. It resounds and ripples forth from that place and time. What we say becomes us. We become the words we speak” (W. White, personal communication, March, 2004).

Bill explains that one of the crucial functions of story telling in his native culture is that of renewal. In one respect, this is a process of engagement that fosters community (from Latin *com* – together and *munic* – service). Through the process of telling a sacred story motifs, meanings, ethics and morals are passed on and everyone benefits, the speaker, the

listener, all parties in relation as the community is renewed. However, Bill takes care to point out that this renewal is not merely a habitual reminder of cultural affiliation and procedure, it is an actual process of identity renewal. He explains that the old people will a sacred story to a person four times in their life. Each telling serves not only to help the listener make meaning of their experiences so far, but also sows the seeds of preparation for change. Typically, these stories are told as the person enters a transformational period, childhood, initiation into adulthood, becoming a parent, becoming an Elder. The story serves as an icon upon which we reflect and notice how we have changed (since we last heard the story) and thus becomes a catalyst for change.

In the next few chapters I will tell stories of events that have catalyzed major changes in my life. These changes have come about through the reflexive process of self observation through narrative as discussed above. Although much of this reflexive activity is subsumed into an invisible practice through multiple reconsiderations and rewrites so far, I will at times endeavour to make my reflections and their results more apparent.

FASTING IN DESPAIR

In the Summer Fall of 2002 I served as a project leader for a wilderness-based Youth Leadership Program for metis and indigenous young adults. This program involved living in the Alberta mountains for the better part of ten weeks, and then traveling to live for another ten weeks with indigenous Makushi people in a remote region of southwestern Guyana. We had thirteen participants ranging in age from eighteen to twenty nine, two staff members and the occasional guest facilitator. This was an immersion group experience.

During this program, we had one participant who was determined to cause trouble no matter how much we tried to appease her. She was a physically stunning person of mixed indigenous ethnicity, highly intelligent and articulate, politically passionate, and a powerful public speaker. She was a natural leader. She was also extremely adept at wreaking havoc on any semblance of healthy group process. After numerous blow outs and attempted remedies during the Canadian portion of the program, we took a chance and allowed her to come to Guyana, hoping the shift to an exotic location would have some kind of transformative effect.

In hindsight, this was a drastic mistake. Within days of being in Guyana she had begun declaring that the program was an excuse for slavery, and that I, as senior staff person, was yet another oppressive patriarch. Given that I am a physically large male with a deep voice, and a tendency to assert myself strongly, I had to acknowledge this possible reality, or at least the reality of this perception. I thought my willingness to vulnerably reconsider my influence on others would encourage her to do the same, but to no avail. As the weeks progressed she began making herself extremely sick, claiming that the food was not fit for human consumption. The group polarized into allies and enemies and, by the midway point of the Guyana experience, she had so effectively fostered mistrust that the group was in an extreme state of infighting. Eventually she left early due to "inhuman" conditions, but not before rifling through many people's belongings and hatching a covert operation (with her allies) to bring down the various organizations that had raised funds to make the program possible.

I had been through many group disintegrations before, but none like this. People were now deeply angry and pointing fingers at each other in a quagmire of blame. No matter what

steps I had been taking to compensate and rebuild trust, the energy of divisiveness was winning more and more. I found myself at such a loss that I committed to undertake a fast (no food or water) until something came clear. Opting to fast in a foreign landscape whilst maintaining responsibility for a group of youth under my care was a rather crazy choice, but the situation had deteriorated to such a point that I felt I had no other viable option. I had a sense that the depth of this disturbance was such that our physical well-being was now endangered. Thus, I must somehow reach this depth of disturbance through my own physicality and renegotiate the signature of echoes. Until my experience in the cabin the year before, I had always been afraid of losing my physical power. I had never really fasted before, just the odd day here and there. But desperate times now called for desperate measures. Stepping into my immense fear of loss was a necessary measure.

Just prior to beginning the fast I had been reading Peter Levine's (1995) *Somatic Experiencing*, a book describing the physiological processes involved in the generation, storage, and resolution of trauma within the human body. Levine suggests unresolved traumas leave a signature or echo in certain regions, and at certain depths of our somatic being. While we often manage to live with these *breaches* within our body's energy flow, the effect is akin to having one foot on the accelerator and the other foot on the brake. A great deal of energy is required to maintain this locked/frozen state of imbalance, often with longer-term consequences to our health.

Borrowing from Freud's concept of 'repetition compulsion' Levine suggests that our subconscious is constantly working to resolve these breaches, regardless of our conscious awareness or volition. Through our behaviours, relationships, emotions and dreams we continue to put ourselves in situations strangely reminiscent of an original trauma in order to learn new solutions. Typically, this is done by creating (or *happening into*) circumstances similar in character to those that existed at the time of the traumatic event, so as to renegotiate the energetic signature of the event and achieve a better outcome. By setting up our interpersonal relationships to re-experience the problem, we set up a potential for intra-personal resolution of the traumatic breach within.

If we consider the notion that our outer world is bound to affect our inner world, the Guyana immersion process was a recipe for major changes: strange diet, sleeping in hammocks, poisonous critters everywhere, extremely hot climate, no refrigeration, no

running water. This radical change in environment and the disruptive effect it has on our daily habits, is like adding heat to our energy flow. Long-quieted aspects of our somatic being begin to rumble, shift, and accelerate. Frozen material begins to thaw, and traumas that have for ages been carefully locked down within our psyche and body can sometimes surface. Trouble arises, however when this process occurs too rapidly and/or without our conscious commitment. The experience can be terrifying if we are not willing or able to accept it, and all too often, we can end up re-traumatizing ourselves and/or projecting our shadow onto others. Levine (1995) suspects this is the primary cause of war and strife in the world.

In my experience as a facilitator of group-process, I have witnessed these dynamics play out repeatedly. With even just one person in the group feeling unconsciously over-challenged, many more of us can be triggered to live out our shadow's agenda. From here, we can all readily stumble into a fearful denominator of mistrust. Reading Levine's book in the midst of our degenerating group process provided me with valuable insight into the processes at play in the consciousness of our group members, myself included. I began to understand how this disruptive participant had managed to project her internal chaos out into the world around her.

Fasting indefinitely was my attempt to be with and resolve this situation. I did not know what would result. I only knew that the best thing I could attempt to do was deepen my walk. I had been telling these youth all about Sequoyah's teachings, all about letting go of our judgments and deepening our acceptance of what is, but words were obviously not enough. I had to live what I was speaking as deeply as I possibly could. I wanted to address my own traumas by purposefully evoking their resonance and consciously renegotiating my inner relationship with these disturbing sensations. So, I stepped into one of my deepest reptilian fears (of starvation) and asked for help from the ancestors.

The process was agonizing, but it worked. By demonstrating that I was willing/able to try this hard, to literally wither away for the sake of restoring harmony, even the most mistrustful participants began to come around. In a sense, I gained the respect of people who had been goaded into believing that I was an insensitive oppressor. By the fourth day without food or water (and incidentally, no sleep) I was stumbling around so meekly that the label simply could not hold. And yet, despite my apparent physical condition, I was now

thoroughly enjoying life! I had succeeded in detaching from my sankhara of fearing starvation, and had thereby rewired the narrative pretext that previously governed my limiting relationship with food. Witnessing my happiness *through* extreme hardship had a dramatic impact on the group.

On the morning of the fifth day I decided to break the fast. One of the local Makushi Elders approached me with a cup of tea, a handful of peanuts and bananas and thanked me for what I had done. I took these offerings and walked out into the middle of an open field. As the sun began to rise, I turned to face east and thank the ancestors from that direction. Just as I raised my hands full of food a massive surge of energy penetrated my body. I burst into tears. A similar surge moved me as I gave thanks to those in the south, west, north, to invisible spirit in the sky, and great mother earth who fed me. I had seen Sequoyah pierce through the veil between realms during his prayers in pipe ceremony. Only now did I begin to fathom the essence of his actions.

By the end of the program we had managed to turn our group process around significantly. We did not remedy all of the ill-will, but at least most people were able to see the damage that had manifested from a refusal to acknowledge and take responsibility for our own destructive tendencies. I came away from this experience with a strong awareness that I must continue getting to know my shadow, my inner enemy. “‘Them’ as the enemy, who gets blamed for everything that goes wrong in our life, is possibly the most pathetic and the most dangerous of all our delusions” (Metzner, 2005, p. 8).

Reflecting upon the Guyana experience in light of recent insights into issues of power and rank, I notice that the young woman who proved so disruptive might have had a few more legitimate points than I gave her credit for at the time. Much as I may have attempted to treat people equally and fairly I did not fully acknowledge the rank I held within the group. Although I did my best to share the authority I held in my role as the primary group leader, I was not fully aware of how the subtler aspects of my rank (such as being white, male, tall and healthy) had an effect on many of the people I worked with. I had perceived the young woman to ‘have issues’ with authority figures that she was projecting onto me. But I did not see how I was helping to perpetuate these issues by remaining oblivious to certain aspects of my power. Although my subsequent fast was a success in many respects, one of the unintentional effects of this success was an increase in my spiritual rank. With this in mind I

can better see why some group members remained cautious of my intention until the end. Although the fast was a tremendous breakthrough in many ways, at times I still wonder: to what extent was it means of coercion?

The following year I agreed to lead another Youth Leadership Program in Guyana. In this year of the program, my major challenge arrived in the form of a (beautiful questing) young man (I will call him David) who had grown up in a rough environment. He was physically very powerful and was habituated to intimidating people to gain their respect. At the same time, he was keen to grow and change and was deeply determined to stick it out – a good sign. This year, we put much emphasis into encouraging people to face their inner-selves with clarity and courage. And for the most part people did very well. By the time we boarded our plane for Guyana we had healthy group process going. For much of my youth-working life I had believed that this was the key to success – establish a healthy tone and all will attune. This was a trickle down theory of sorts.

But once again, as soon as the environment squeezed us, things somehow got ugly. A few people, David most evidently, began growing hostile. I tried for a while to focus on improving our ethics. “To succeed here we must be in the spirit of giving.” I also tried to identify and applaud the behaviour of those who were adapting most successfully, the tone setters. But this was of little use. Ethics were no match for threatened reptilian brains, and hostilities continued to intensify. My relationship with David grew so intense, that it seemed no matter how I attempted to relate to him, he felt judged by me. No matter how gently I attempted to suggest he try to shift his behaviour, he became very angry.

At the same time, it was dawning upon me that our group was a microcosm of humanity. We were doing very well for the most part. But here was this one aspect who just wasn't up to snuff, just didn't have the capacity, couldn't make the cut. *When someone refuses to adapt their behaviour, they must face consequences* (went the tried and true adage). Establishing direct links between action and consequence was one of the pillars of my experiential education pedagogy. After two decades of youth work, years of wilderness guiding, post secondary education, and countless hours of autodidactic research, I had developed an abundant tool kit of theories, games, activities and strategies to help people engage an experiential change process. And yet, upon honest reflection, I had to admit that I had not always met with success. There would always be one or two people within a group who

remained disaffected, no matter how well the rest of the group was doing. Such was the case now. The better everyone else was doing, the more David felt intimidated, and the more aggressive he became.

I did not want to send David home because of what it now meant to me at every level of being. Punishing him with failure by excluding him from our company of worthy souls would have been akin to tucking him away in a prison – out of sight out of mind. In my determination to solve this recurring riddle I had to acknowledge some grim truths about the way I operated. The trickle-down-tone theory was crucially flawed. All of my training and experience now felt useless. I did not have the answer. I only knew that if I wanted things to change, first I had to change.

The situation plagued me so deeply that I opted to engage another four-day fast right in the middle of the program. Again, I did so in order to let go of my judgments and to surrender deeply, deeper than the depth at which our pain was tucked away frozen, as deeply as I could in the hope, faith, trust, that the necessary insights would arrive.

Whilst engaging this fast I was reading *How to be a Help and not a Nuisance* by Karen Kissell Wegela (1996), in which she explains the practice of ‘touch and go’ as a means of fully accepting the moment to moment uncomfortable sensations of whatever is.

This means that when a feeling or thought arises, we touch it – feel it completely. We can touch quite completely in a moment. It is like tasting an anchovy. We can taste the salty, pungent flavor in just a moment. We can do the same thing with whatever arises during our practice. Instead of skittering away, we touch. We move toward what is happening instead of trying to get away. Rather than rejecting our experience we show an interest in it... Then, having touched it, we let it go. We touch and then we go out with our outbreath. Going is a kind of relaxation; we loosen our grip on ourselves. We might find that there can be an unforced rhythm of touching and going, not unlike the in and out of our breath. (Wegela, 1996, pp. 52-3)

By engaging this method throughout my four days of fasting, I was able to rapidly access and clear many deeply held judgments towards self and other. During this time I began to glimpse insights into a number of phenomena such as, how breatharian yogis survive by being in a *constantly* clear state of non-judgment and how kriya yogis are able to

practice kumbhaka (full breath retention) for hours at a time. These people have so thoroughly cleared the slate of their narrative pretext (through detachment from their sankhara) that they can choose at will how to shape their existence in relation to the energy of creation (Creator, God, Great Spirit, universal ki, chi, prana, etc.). As I deepened my commitment to this process of detachment, I found my self increasingly in a state of non-judgmental, non-specific, non-rational, 'soft-focus' mind.

And then a new capacity arrived. I began sensing the age at which fragments of David's soul departed and the energetic signature of the traumatic event that followed shortly thereafter. Eventually, I was able to recognize an echo-resonance of the age at which he first formed the judgment pattern that was currently expressing through his body-being. It was like he was literally that age again. In my altered state of consciousness, I could finally *see* and understand him. From here, I was able to enter into a similar age consciousness as I related with him. At first he (his child-self) was surprised, even suspicious, but when he noticed my deep humility, my withering body, and my profound vulnerability, he began to open up and share. This turned out to be the doorway to healing for David and me. We sat for hours one night as three-year-olds, playing in the sand and talking about loneliness. We connected with some of our deepest pains. In this state, we were able to diffuse our expectations of self and other, expectations that had been built up throughout our lives, expectations that, when not lived up to, had typically resulted in punishment through abandonment. In this way, we developed a deep empathy, a genuine trust, and everything else followed from there. We experienced a profound healing together, and the group process took a turn for the better.

In the Spring of 2003, just prior to this Guyana program, I had been reading about the Hakomi therapy method of Ron Kurtz (no date, on-line). At the time I found the material somewhat interesting, particularly in that Kurtz ascribed much value to achieving a contemplative state of mind whilst engaging with clients. But it was not until I revisited the material two years later that I felt a profound *aha* in relation to his perspectives. Kurtz believes the healing relationship involves two basic things. First, we (the helper) have to demonstrate that we are trustworthy, non-judgmental and compassionate. Second, we have to demonstrate that we are present, attentive and really understand what's going on for the

person. If we can consistently demonstrate those things to the person, we will earn the cooperation of the unconscious.

The unconscious is waiting for somebody who can do that. If the client has painful secrets, shame, confusion and emotional pain, the therapist will need extraordinary sensitivity, understanding and caring to become an ally of the unconscious. The unconscious has been managing this pain for a long time. It won't allow just anyone to become part of that process. The healing relationship is about gaining the trust and cooperation of the unconscious through compassion and understanding. If you can do that, therapy really happens. Building such a relationship doesn't have to take three months or three years. It can take as little as fifteen minutes. But creating it requires more than just technical skills (para 33).

Kurtz explains that the creation of a healing relationship requires that the helper be a certain kind of person, "a person who is naturally compassionate, able to be radically present, able to give full attention to another, able to see deeply into people and to understand what is seen" (para 35). This requires our engagement of a certain non-egocentric state of mind. When helping others through difficulty we need to be free of as many ego-centered habits as possible. "Realizing that and teaching that was the next big vertical jump for Hakomi. This jump was beyond just the use of mindfulness and non-violence. It was about who the therapist was, the therapist's being. It was about the therapist's consciousness" (para 35).

Whilst reading and resonating with Kurtz's philosophy, I felt a tremendous affirmation that my evolution as a facilitator is essentially the same as my evolution as a human being. The continued development of my personhood is not only a matter of expanding my understanding in the rational sense, but is also a spiritual matter of deepening insight into levels of consciousness beyond the ordinary, rational and objective.

KENSHO
(enlightenment experience)

In January of 2003, after returning from my *first* Guyana stint, I ended a troublesome long-term relationship. From my recent research into trauma theory (Levine, 1995), and corroboration with bodily experience, I had become aware of a large traumatic charge frozen (most evidently) deep within the right side of my belly. I now wanted to welcome this charge more fully into my consciousness, to offer it expression and resolve. To do so, I felt I had to begin sharing this feeling with the person with whom I wanted to be most intimate. But she refused to hear me. She did not want me to give voice to this aspect of myself. And so I saw how our relationship sustained the pattern of repression, and, terrified as I was to do so, I finally had the courage to change it.

For weeks after the break up I felt like I was on a hormonal roller coaster. And yet I knew I had to ride it out. In addition to my regular practices of vipassana, hatha yoga, and sweat lodge, I now began running most every day to the ocean and slowly surrendering my bodily self into the water. The experience of ending this old relationship was accelerating deep levels of toxic energy within me, so I felt I had to access a deep level of volition to release it. Whilst immersing my body in the water I offered to feel every sensation and simultaneously asked for our peaceful resolution. I offered to let go my fear of discomfort, in the hopes that my and our suffering would somehow be diminished. This was my beginning of a very powerful practice. The sankara (blind reactions) that were released through acceptance of such intense sensations began opening my awareness to new levels of vibrational reality.

About three weeks into this new practice, I went to visit an old friend on Gabriola Island for the first time in over a year. Sitting in his tiny cobb (earthen-walled) cabin, I began sharing with him how this practice was helping me to unthaw an old trauma deep within my belly. He too was experiencing the end of a turbulent relationship, so I endeavoured to share with him quite intimately. As I retold the experience, of bringing loving acceptance to a pain long since buried, I found myself feeling an energetic surge within, of love embracing, mingling with and accepting pain. This was accompanied by a trembly discharge from who knows how long an imprisonment, a pyro-cathartic sweat, and mild swoon. Only now, this

time, the experience continued to magnify in intensity – double, ten-fold, a hundred-fold into powerful resonant sensations surging up from my perineum, through my body core, and out through the crown of my head.

Over the next few hours, as we talked and walked to a nearby park, my body felt lighter and lighter, vibrating increasingly within a seemingly infinite field of energy clear and beautiful. We made our way to a favorite field where we threw some Frisbee and continued our conversation. Having practiced vipassana and yoga for many years now, I had become somewhat adept at noticing sensations in my body through direct awareness. But now, for the first time I could recall, I began noticing not only the direct awareness of any area of my body, but also the direct awareness *of* cortical activity in the outer areas of my cranium, the direct awareness of deeper cranial limbic activity, and deeper brainstem reptilian activity! For hours as we threw the Frisbee, I practiced mingling and noticing different combinations of direct awareness with mental/bodily activity. And then, as the *profound* realization of this energetic/material mutual interpenetration grew inescapable, I turned my attention to the skin-edge boundaries of my physical body and the world around me. I began breathing, being, and noticing that my body was not at all separate from the milieu of my manifest existence. From this awareness I could not help but *realize* that my bodily experience is intimately embedded in every phenomenon that (apparently) surrounds me, my breath but a vehicle for millions of atoms be-coming, my skin but a porous membrane of autopoiesis, my ‘self’ letting go all dualistic notions of core and periphery. As I experientially pondered how far causal relation goes, I could find neither edge nor end of associative relevance. I realized that the arbitrary decision to stop and draw a boundary line comes all too quickly from a panicky intellect on the brink of overwhelm, cut off from and ignorant of its own organicity in the deeper intelligence of atoms coming and going with every *re-spir*-ation.

As our Frisbee activity wound down we drew physically closer together, and into deeper conversation. And I now found myself noticing my various levels, areas and resonances of direct awareness as my friend spoke. Up until this moment, I had always presumed that many of the things he talked about (for example, archaic Japanese carpentry, Euclidian geometry) were of little relevance to me, and I would kick myself a bit, feeling badly for not being able to sustain attention to his lines of thought. But now, I began to notice that as I journeyed with sustained awareness into my own felt-sense level of mind, I was in *some* kind

of synchronistic relation with him as he spoke. I didn't know the first thing about Euclidian geometry, and yet, no matter how seemingly incomprehensible these topics were to my intellect, I was now aware of a conscious felt-sense relation with it!

Somehow, at some level I was fathoming this man's understanding of the subject. Rather than holding to familiar habits of interpretive process, I was instead noticing and trusting my direct awareness response, and *therein* opening up the epistemic parameters of absorptive possibility. I was opening to a level of conscious experience of Euclidean geometry by seeking beyond cognitive function and specific analytical (en/de-coding) training processes. Insights formed from the fluid union of inside meeting out. It was all so simple.

I told my friend about this experience I was now having, beginning with my frank admittance of long-standing incomprehension of his ways. He then smirked as he confided that, yes, well, in fact, he often had no idea what I was talking about either! We had a good hearty laugh over it all.

I returned home to Victoria the next day, and over the next week these experiences continued to amplify. I found myself opening to insights so rapidly that I vocally recorded four ninety-minute cassettes, carrying the tape recorder around with me constantly as new connections came bubbling through. I also wrote a book as fast as I could scribble. At times, I sat in a chair in my living room and simply gazed *through* a wall to see the garden outside. It was like disbanding the illusion of solidity by recognizing the resonant pattern of the wall's structure, and then, much as one ignores or backgrounds one's attention on matters that are not immediately drawing our focus, I just saw through.

At other times, and sometimes simultaneously, I felt myself abiding in the most indescribably beautiful warmth of blissful no-thingness. I am loathe to attempt an explanation of this experience. I feel as though nothing that I could ever write would be poetic enough. Instead, I will offer a few literary citations with which I resonate on this subject.

Thus by reducing the intensity or compelling quality of outward perception and inward thoughts, one may come to a time of greater stillness. Ultimately one may become utterly silent inside, as though in a gap between thoughts, where one becomes completely perception-and-thought-free. One neither thinks nor perceives any mental or sensory content. Yet, despite this suspension of content, one emerges from such

events confident that one has remained awake inside, fully conscious. This experience, which has been called the pure consciousness event, or PCE, has been identified in virtually every tradition. Though PCEs typically happen to any single individual only occasionally, they are quite regular for some practitioners. The pure consciousness event may be defined as a wakeful but contentless (non-intentional) consciousness.

These PCEs, encounters with consciousness devoid of intentional content, may be just the least complex encounter with awareness *per se* that we students of consciousness seek. The PCE may serve, in short, as the E coli of consciousness studies (Forman, 1998, pp. 1-2).

I first read the above-quoted paper by Forman two years prior to my kensho experience. At the time I found it only mildly engaging. However, shortly after the above-mentioned experience I re-read Forman's paper and felt a *massive* recognition! This pre-post experiential contrast provides a potent indicator of how my worldview has been changed by the kensho experience.

Another author with whom I have since felt a strong affiliation is transpersonal psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (1988). Grof refers to such contentless consciousness as *The Supracosmic and Metacosmic Void*, an "experiential identification with the primordial Emptiness, Nothingness, and Silence, which seems to be the ultimate cradle of all existence (p. 147). The enigmatic nature of this phenomenon is the most paradoxical of transpersonal experiences.

While it is the source of everything, it cannot be derived from anything else; it is the uncreated and ineffable Supreme. The terms supracosmic and metacosmic used by sophisticated subjects to describe this experience refer to the fact that this Void seems to be both supraordinated to and underlying the phenomenal cosmos as we know it.

The void is beyond space and time, beyond form of any kind, and beyond polarities, such as light and darkness, good and evil, stability and motion, and ecstasy or agony. While nothing concrete exists in this state, nothing that is part of existence seems to be missing there either. This emptiness is thus, in a sense, pregnant with all of existence, since it contains everything in potential form. This experience has a

certain similarity with the experience of the interstellar space and with the concept of the dynamic void known from quantum-relativistic physics, although it is obviously on a much higher metaphysical level than either of the above.

The experience of the Void also transcends our ordinary concepts of causality. Subjects who are having this experience accept as self-evident that various forms of phenomenal worlds can emerge into existence out of this void without any obvious cause. The possibility of something originating out of nothing or of something vanishing without any traces does not appear absurd, as it would in everyday consciousness. The idea of something happening without a tangible precedent, sufficient cause, or initiating impulse simply is not questioned on this level of experience. Paradoxical and enigmatic passages from the Buddhist texts equating form with emptiness and emptiness with form suddenly appear crystal clear. The Void is emptiness that is pregnant with form, and the many forms on various levels of existence are essentially empty (pp. 147-8).

Although my 'aha' of familiarity with this description does not afford the same pre-post experiential reflection as did that with Foreman's, this experience of initially relating with literature after my experience has still been beneficial. Learning of how others have explored and mapped the territory of these realms for millennia offers much insight into my own fledgling process.

Goenka (2001) asserts that when all solidity is dissolved in meditation, and there's nothing but vibration remaining, that is *sunyata*. "Then you experience something beyond mind and matter – *sunna* – nothing to hold there. You have *sunna* of the mind and matter sphere and *sunna* of the beyond mind and matter sphere" (p. 72).

I had read Goenka's explanation of *sunna* in 2001, but did not grasp it at the time. But now this explanation, along with seemingly paradoxical Zen riddles that had always baffled and bemused me, made perfect sense. This unification of masculine/feminine, inner/outer, action/reception, yang/yin, fusion/fission, heaven/earth no longer struck me as paradoxical, but rather, as the essence of creation. This reconciliation of all dualities, of nothing/everything is the very birth and essence of language and life.

According to many traditions, these experiences are known in general as "enlightenment" (Foreman, 1998). "Their discriminating feature is a deep shift in epistemological structure:

the experienced relationship between self and one's perceptual objects changes profoundly. In many people this new structure becomes permanent." (p. 1). Foreman suggests these long-term shifts in epistemological structure take the form of two quantum leaps in experience; typically they develop sequentially.

The first is an experience of a permanent interior stillness, even while engaged in thought and activity – one remains aware of one's own awareness while simultaneously remaining conscious of thoughts, sensations and actions. Because of its phenomenological dualism – a heightened cognizance of awareness itself plus a consciousness of thoughts and objects – I call it the dualistic mystical state (DMS). The second shift is described as a perceived unity of one's own awareness *per se* with the objects around one, an immediate sense of a quasi-physical unity between self, objects and other people. States akin to this have been called 'extrovertive' – or sometimes 'nature' – mysticism; but I prefer to call it the unitive mystical state, UMS (Foreman, 1998, pp 1-2).

Although my two quantum leaps in experience did not emerge in the sequence that Foreman suggests is typical (- my unitive mystical state preceded that of my dualistic mystical state by 2 days...), I have little doubt that the experiences I have described above are exactly those that Foreman describes. It is as though I have been told my own story and recognized it utterly.

Reintegrative Troubles

This rapturous experience of enlightenment was not without its reintegrative troubles. For one thing, I managed to inadvertently offend people who were not then feeling the same sense of liberation as I. Although on the one hand, I frequently noticed people around me break into spontaneous glowing smiles as we crossed paths, others were suspicious of my state of mind. In the one graduate course I was taking at the time, I was faced with a professor whom I perceived to be deeply self-aggressive. He (later told me that he) perceived my behaviour to be glib, and disaffected. This led me to question how one discerns between worry-free and careless. And I have since wondered if I had carried traces of the latter; particularly given that I stubbornly refused to follow his agenda and eventually failed the course.

Emergence from this transcendent experience also left me with a reintegrative issue of reassessing an opinion to which I had long held fast. This was regarding the relatively high merit I gave to live (present encounter) oral communication versus written formats. On the fourth day of my kensho, I experienced a synchronicity of pulling a book of my shelf, a doctoral dissertation by D.G. Scott. I opened to a page with the poem 'Firebird' and thoroughly *melted into it*. The words resonated through my body-mind. I began to realize that any medium of transmission can lead to a profound communication, and in-depth understanding. It is simply a matter of effectively attuning one's attention to an appropriate realm of receptivity. Whilst 'present encounter' oral-visceral-energetic communication may offer better opportunity for holistic engagement, and whilst such oral-experiential traditions are well worth defending, preserving, and advocating for, I could no longer write off the written format as a less effective medium. Felt-sense attunement is a state of mind, no matter what matter/form of in-form-ation we are be-coming. Many of my long-held judgments against the doctrine of literacy were now coming apart, and in hindsight, it has taken me a while to accept this.

Most deflatingly, there was the issue of money. I had recently succeeded in having one of my papers accepted into the inaugural issue of *Illumine – the Journal for the Study of Religion in Society*. The centre that published this journal was now offering scholarships for graduate students and, given that I was broke, and given that I was feeling lucky, I decided to apply. But *that was it!* As soon as I sat down to the computer to write my application, my window into the infinite began closing. I understood well enough that clinging to my transcendent experience was the surest way to diminish it. This understanding had been one of my most profound recent insights. So, learning to hope for nothing other than what was, I carried on with my application and felt my bliss recede.

Reviewing literature in July of 2005, I came across a paper by Wilbur (1993) that shed some light in retrospect. In his discussion of spiritual pathologies Wilbur writes of "Pseudo-nirvana",

This is simply the mistaking of subtle of archetypal forms, illuminations, raptures, ecstasies, insights, or absorptions for final liberation. This is not a pathology unless one is in fact pursuing causal or ultimate levels of consciousness, in which cast the *entire* subtle realm and all its experiences, if clung to, are considered pathological,

‘makyo,’ subtle illusions – Zen actually calls it the ‘Zen sickness’ . . . An inability to accept the final death of the archetypal self (which is simply the subtlest level of the separate self-sense) locks consciousness into an attachment to some aspect of the manifest realm. The Great Death never occurs, and thus Formless Consciousness fails to differentiate from or transcend the manifest realm. Blocked by the subtlest contracting, grasping, seeking, or desiring; the final block: desire for liberation (Wilbur, 1993, p 150).

Cast in this light, I was (and continue to be) a mere novice in these realms of consciousness. My kensho experience was merely an introduction, a first step on a long and arduous journey of be-coming. My seeking of financial resources brought forth a number of intensities I carried regarding right livelihood in relation to voluntary simplicity in relation to early experiences of trauma and a questionable desire to fare well in this lifetime. I didn’t get the scholarship.

Into Communion

As I have approached the final re-write of this thesis I have been tempted to remove this chapter altogether. In my earlier attempts at yoking multiple limbs of my inquiry it seemed a central ingredient to the grand synthesis. But now, having otherwise narrowed my focus into stories of becoming compassionate, this story of consciousness exploration might seem like a bit of a red herring. Furthermore, given my awareness of issues such as hidden intention, I wonder how readers who have not shared similar experiences may feel having read the kensho story. Am I merely advertising a spiritual rank?

In the end I am opting to leave this story in place because it offers insight into the nature of simultaneity, and the embeddedness of self in relation to ‘the world’. These may be key ingredients to resolving the social/political/ecological/spiritual issues I identified in the introductory chapter.

Throughout the ages countless sages, saints, yogis and mystics have declared that ultimately there is no ‘I’ that is separate from everything else. Vipassana meditation instructors Goldstein and Kornfield (1987) refer to this individual sense of self as “our primary delusion.” (p. 144). “It’s just thought bubbles. The only way to effectively maintain the illusion of the self’s solidity is to keep churning out thoughts, plans, programs,

and the rest. If we keep them coming, we can quickly paste it all together and it seems to make something solid. A sense of self created entirely by thought and yet has no substance” (p. 145).

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, recent neurophysiological research suggests that we are in a state of perpetual sensory exchange with the world around us (Fleischman et al, 2000, Pert, 2004). As surely as we are constantly exchanging millions of atoms with every breath we are constantly emanating and responding to information. Although we can often be far from conscious of our direct somatic relationship with the outside world, we are nevertheless in relation with and affected by every encounter. At the level of direct awareness of felt sense experience, we *are* the subtleties of exchange. In this state of experiential non-differentiation, there is simply experience in each moment. And herein the reality dawns that all notions of ‘me’ or ‘mine’ are a flow of changing experience, happening according to certain laws, with no enduring entity behind the scenes controlling the show.

Where is the seer who is separate from the seen? Is the experience of seeing a tree happening in our head? Or out there where the tree is? Is it someplace in the middle? When we taste a hot pepper, is the taste in the pepper or in our mouth? The Buddhist teachings suggest that there is no experiencer separate from the experience. Where is the line that divides the dancer from the dance? (Wegella, 1996, p. 89).

In this deepest direct awareness, this deepest truth of self-experiencing, where there is nothing substantial or solid and I cannot find a separate self, I begin to fathom what Indigenous minded people, mystics, shamans, and healers have been expressing metaphorically *and literally* since time immemorial – ‘all my relations’.

Always try to be in communion with heaven and earth; then the world will appear in its true light. Self-conceit will vanish and you can blend with any attack. If your heart is large enough to envelop your adversaries, you can see right through them and avoid their attacks. And once you envelop them, you will be able to guide them along a path indicated to you by heaven and earth. (Ueshiba, in Stevens, 1992 pp. 79-80)

For the mystics and shamans from whom I am learning, *being* in this non-self-conceived state of surrender is often a necessary *condition* to becoming our deepest realization of spiritual Self. Our consciousness becomes the point of view of the ultimate observer, in which we are certainly experiencing and yet, paradoxically, there is no conceptual ‘I’ to hold

to. Plotkin (2003) refers to this as the *soul* level of Self experiencing Spirit in which “we are connected, but we are also each alone” (Wegela, 1996, p. 89).

Since the kensho experience I have been increasingly able to access both unitive and dualistic states of consciousness. By thoroughly concentrating my attention into the tiniest areas of bodily sensation I can enter a vast terrain of exploratory possibility, curiosity the elixer. At times, this small area becomes a holographic window into everything else that is occurring in my body. Like experiencing realities through the looking glass, or having a finger on the pulse of my manifest existence, the sensations here are an all-inclusive fractal of infinity ‘eventing’: The universe in a grain of sand. On other occasions I find I am *myself observing myself observing*, or I am *observing myself observing myself*. At times these perspectives fuse, telescoping ever further into and out from mirror image meta levels, calling into question *all* notions of self-constancy.

Buddhist nun Pema Chodron (2001) refers to this as *prajnaparamita* or *groundlessness* in perpetual uncertainty, “a process of being completely awake to the ongoing beginning of fully entering into we know not what” (p. 37). When we understand that there is no final attainment or stopping place, then we will have no fear. “To the extent that we stop struggling against uncertainty and ambiguity, to that extent we dissolve our fear” (p. 37). When I am able to suspend my hopes and expectations of some destination and simply attune to this edge of reality, my conceptual sense of self dissolves as *I be-come* the simplest of elements, fire becoming smoke and ash, in a con-fluence of heaven and earth. I open to feeling the elemental consciousness of trees, wind, wolfs, rocks, and every ‘be-ing’ that typically abides beyond the realm of my conceptual sense of self. Some boundless innate intelligence acknowledges my arrival into balance and congratulates me with quiet insight from the deepest wells of wisdom.

This is when the quietest ancestral voices within speak their truth. *Here*, in our deepest direct awareness and acceptance of ‘what is’ is where the Self-realization of our oneness (and our none-ness) abides. Here is the source and ongoing beginning of genuine kindness.

TOBACCO

All my relations, I would now like to draw a few more threads together with a story of new love meeting an old fear. This is a comprehensive story weaving together many temporal signatures/events in terms of age-specific soul fragmentation, energetic signatures and relational echoes, shamanic healing, transforming, and emerging into kindness.

Quite a few transpersonal psychotherapists (Grof foremost among them) suggest that the moment of birth crowning, as we emerge into the world of separation, is when we receive/inherit our karmic pattern/load/debt in life. Others say this karmic loading applies at conception. Others say karma doesn't exist, that our life is purely a matter of individuated creation.

Nevertheless, since as far back as I can remember, I have hated *tobacco*. From who-knows-how-early an age, I understood it only as the means by which loved ones 'disappeared' in a cloud of smoke and I was terrified ("*Where are you going?*").

So I left too, with the painful signature events echoing in my evasion and judgment and an inescapable connection between shame-based aggression and shame-based self-aggression. Please understand, my purpose here is not to vilify or fix blame, not at all. I only mean to say that, as I grew up, I developed a deep judgment against *tobacco*. This substance (such an evil substance) became the icon of my mistrust.

As a teenager, I was very athletic and kept myself incredibly fit. I vowed I would never go out with or marry a smoker. Although I eventually left home and thereby moved away from second hand smoke, my relationship with tobacco didn't change much. Whenever I was caught in the inescapable presence of someone smoking at a party or gathering, or in a restaurant, I would feel a pang of injustice. "I shouldn't have to breathe this!" I would tell myself. Smelling the odor of smoke in my clothes and hair the days after would fill me with disgust.

In my mid twenties, I moved to Japan, where for two years I surrendered to diligent Judo training at Hokkaido University. In so doing, I found my health improving as a number (but not all) of my historical illnesses 'spontaneously' resolved. At the same time, I found myself in the company of what seemed like an entire nation of avid smokers. White bread, white flour, canned coffee and cigarette vending machines were everywhere. "How unfortunate," I thought, "that they were taking up our worst habits."

Whilst living in Japan I met a woman and we began living together. She was an occasional smoker, trying to quit. One night, a drunken house-mate returned home from a night of clubbing. He offered her a cigarette and they sat smoking and laughing together in the living room, chatting about this and that. Eventually I furiously walked into the room, grabbed her cigarette and burned it into the top of my left hand. "*Tobacco* is bad for you."

Five years later (halfway between then and now) I began working with First Nations Elders, and was therein faced with the deepest of ironies. For these Elders, and for many indigenous-minded people around the world, *tobacco* is used as medicine. I couldn't quite understand this at first, but, given my love for their teachings (and my undoubtedly deep capacity for cognitive dissonance), I tucked this paradox into the shadows and continued learning what I could. When the pipe was passed around, I would cautiously smoke a bit.

More recently, (as mentioned in the 'into the fire' story) there was the experience of receiving the two cigarettes in Mishum's sweat lodge and the subsequent pipe ceremony with Sequoyah whilst in the depths of my kidney illness. This was when I began realizing there must be something I should learn from this substance.

In December of 2003, I returned from my *second* stint of facilitating a Youth Leadership Program in Guyana. Although such long-term immersion work has become familiar to me over the past few years, I had begun noticing that there was always some new depth of challenge/gift lying in wait at program's end. This time it began as a tiny sore on my foot that gradually flared up to look like a stafflococcus infection. Having had this kind of bacterial infections before and having learned to resolve them without anti-biotic medicine, I was not too worried. I saw this infection as just a small indicator of fatigue, and a call to rebalance.

But then, a few days later, another sore appeared on my back. "Hmm, I must be a little too gapped right now" (still living out of a backpack, readjusting to climate and culture, reintegrating another massive experience, finishing up contractual obligations just before Christmas). Around this time I went in for a session with an energy worker I knew in Calgary. He said that I was pretty 'blown open' at the first and second charkas, undoubtedly from all the infantile trauma issues I had been helping people renegotiate. But he also said, with a slightly puzzled tone, that I somehow had a strong myasm (rift) with tobacco. He had the sense that I should start working with tobacco. "Strange," thought my conscious mind.

A week later while visiting my partner's family in Kamloops, three more such infections flared up, one on my right middle finger tip, another in my left nasal passage, and the fifth on the sole of my left foot. Despite an easing of many of the stress-factors I had perceived to be contributing to the problem, and despite frequent applications of tea-tree oil, oregano oil, and silver water (things that usually help), my condition was growing worse. I was now having trouble walking.

By the time my partner and I arrived at my family's house (the house I grew up in) three days later, my left foot had swollen an inch all around. The original infection site on the top of my foot had a crater 8mm wide and who-knows-how deep, and there was black gangrenous skin developing around the perimeter of the sore. When I showed my family they thought I was crazy (again) to not go to a doctor and get antibiotics.

Was I being stubborn? Again, to my mind, this new illness was undoubtedly a manifestation of imbalance at the level of psycho/spiritual relations; catalyzed (perhaps) by issues I had recently been dealing with in my work, *in relation* to some pattern I had been co-weaving for who-knows-how-long now. Therefore, the solution must also come from that level. This disease on my skin was a surfacing opportunity for deeper realization – if I were willing. So, it was with these understandings in mind that I was yet again opting to forego the allopathic approach of western medicine.

As I sat in my family's living room, the place in which my deepest judgments of *tobacco* were formed, I began to realize nothing was working. I reached a point of crisis. All of my miraculous 'spontaneous' recoveries in the past sat like trophies collecting dust on the mantle. I now had gangrene (this was a first) and was beginning to feel utterly vulnerable. The truth of the matter was I had no answer, which left me in a place of question. From this place, I once again realized a need to let go of 'something' in the way I had been dealing with all these things.

And then, accepting the possibility of complete loss, every thing and one in the room back-dropped into a surreal echo. And it began to dawn so clearly – *tobacco*.

That night, as I went to bed, I held this substance not only in my hand and my lungs (as I had on many recent occasions) but also, for the first time, deep within in my heart. I let go of my familiar narrative, and asked for help surrendering into I knew not what.

What became clear to me was that my illness was (yet again) related to deep echoes of shame; shame that has been passed on through generations of seemingly infinite refractions (yet finite, in that they, like everything, are outlasted by love). What I really began to see was that for me to transcend this illness, I needed to turn around 180 degrees and walk right into the depth of judgment I held towards this substance, judgment that had long served the purpose/sentence of holding the pain away.

To let go of the disease, I needed to accept the disease, walk right into, feeling, loving (it) *fully*, embracing the emergenc(e) without asking 'y'.

I thanked tobacco; placed it in my mouth and chewed it into a poultice, then bandaged it to my foot and finger, and went to bed for a night of uncertainty. When I woke up early in the morning, my illness in these locations had begun resolving. After two weeks of prayerful smoking, chewing and poultice application, all the infections were gone.

Reflecting back through this experience, I can say I have never been much of a drug user. I recall how even when I was sick with a flu or skin infection, I would refuse offerings of aspirins, anti-inflammatories, and other commonly available symptom-suppressants. I remember somehow finding value in going *through* the experiences as naturally as possible. In general, my relationship with substances has been a distant one. I briefly experimented with drinking in my late teens, with LSD and mushrooms in my mid-twenties. My use of cannabis had been infrequent (three or four times a year) and largely recreational. Even with food, I have been more a person who eats to live than one who lives to eat.

This experience with tobacco brought me into a different perspective. I began to see how my rejection of this substance, and substances in general, represented a rejection of the feminine aspect of manifestation. This was associated with a painful disconnection from the nurturing aspects of motherhood, and from organic life in general. I began to better understand how our modern societies on the whole have attempted a separation from our organicity. I began to recognize how this separation has been drastically perpetuated through paediatric medicine of the twentieth century, as we were taken from our mother's body and placed in a far-away incubator, to be weighed and measured with rubber gloves, fed formula, and looked at through a window.

This tobacco experience was a new beginning of sorts. As I turned to face and embrace my painful memories of abandonment I began coming home to healthier relationships with

this substance and substances in general. I began realizing that the principles I applied to the practice of growth disciplines could be applied just as effectively with the use of plant medicines. In my occasional use of cannabis and other mind-altering substances since then, I have begun by setting clear and prayerful intentions, humbly asking for assistance. The difference in effect is astounding. Metzner (1987) explains this shift in terms of a "set-and-setting hypothesis". According to this hypothesis, widely accepted by consciousness researchers, "the actual content of a psychedelic experience is a function of the set (intention, beliefs, expectations, personality), and the setting (physical and social context), with the drug playing the role of a trigger, or catalyst of the transformative process" (para. 13).

Any poison can be a medicine and any medicine a poison, depending on our intended relationship with it. Only in moments when we truly, deeply, compassionately relate with a substance can we receive the gift it has to offer.

ACCELERATION

Many consciousness researchers remind us that the use of hallucinogenic substances is one of the oldest and most highly treasured shamanic traditions in indigenous societies (Grof, 1988; Tart, 1986, 1996; Metzner, 2005). In shamanic cultures worldwide, especially those of Central and South America, hallucinogenic plant preparations such as *ayahuasca*, *yage*, and *peyote* are ingested in order to obtain all manner of knowledge for healing, for prophecy, for communication with spirits, for anticipation of danger, or for understanding the universe. This involves a process of travelling or journeying through inner spaces, or 'wandering in one's mind' (from the Latin word *alucinare*. Other terms commonly used to describe these substances are "psychedelic", meaning "mind-manifesting" and "entheogenic" which has the same root as "enthusiasm" and means "releasing or expressing the divine within"). Conscious journeying with plant medicines is particularly integral to the animistic worldview of traditional cultures, in which humanity is in a relationship of co-consciousness, communication and cooperation with the animal kingdom, the plant kingdom and the elemental realms (Metzner, 2005).

On February 19th 2004, curious about these medicinal substances, and inspired by my recent evolution with tobacco and cannabis, I opted to take part in my first ever Ayahuasca ceremony with a shaman visiting from Peru. Ayahuasca is among the most powerful entheogenic medicines known, and is traditionally used by many indigenous shamans of South America. Until now I had relied primarily on the practice of growth disciplines to evoke altered states of consciousness. Ingesting ayahuasca would be a giant step into the unknown.

On the evening before I entered the ceremony, I met with Bill White to discuss what I was about to do. At this time he very concertedly offered a sober review of where he perceived me to be in my journey of be-coming. He said:

You have a tendency to try to solve problems prematurely, and in so doing, are made vulnerable to imbalance. It is evident that the creator walking with you, the ancestors who walk with you, and the teachings that walk with you have given you great gifts and shown you possibilities. But they have also given you warnings. You are still vulnerable. Do you know what I am talking about?

We then spoke of the relational issues that continue to cause me difficulty, and how I am prone to indulgent intensities that I sometimes still do not recognize until I am well out of balance and falling ill (for example, the kidney infection, the staf infections, etc.). He told me that I would need to be very careful of my vulnerability and the potential for these intensities to arise in the ensuing weeks, months, perhaps years afterwards. He said it would be crucial that I remain humble about my weaknesses, otherwise the power of the medicine could strike me and erase everything I have learned so far. (W. White, personal communication, February 18, 2004)

So I went into the ceremony taking heed of all this, and especially Bill's final focus of advice: "It is crucial that you ask the creator, the ancestors – or however you care to name them in your prayer – it is important that you ask them only to *remove what does not belong*." He further explained that, "They don't take kindly to receiving lists". Meaning it is best to let them (us, we, larger me, deeper soul, psyche beyond ego, creator, spirit...) decide what teachings to offer and gifts to bestow. The next evening, before ingesting the medicine, I wandered into the forest and prayed sincerely.

The ayahuasca experience was of a depth, richness and variety like none I had experienced before. For much of the night I felt a searing heat from the earth's core enter my perineum and move up through my centerline, meeting and mingling with sky consciousness moving down through the crown of my head. I perceived the entire reality around me as being made up of snake scales, which were simultaneously fractals and celtic knots. At one point later in the night I wandered into a field and felt myself as a medieval knight, returning home to report my dawning awareness. The following italicized text is an excerpt from my journal, written in the days after the event.

*The seed of shame is planted early and deep in the pit of the psyche-belly
When I finally let go of my western mind
my conquistador armour
shed this skin
I am left with an exact deflation
A wound of self-deprication inversely proportional to the projecting
glean of my shell*

*When I take off my armour
skin of vanity... even my puppy dog eagerness to learn...
i am left with an inward glance at my festering wounds
If I can look... deeper... deeper... however harrowing
I find this seed*

Shame

*Written with/in my blood. Every last drop.
a million cells. cells. prison cells
Whoever dared to name heaven and earth apart?
cast all of creation to hell
you shameful bastards*

But this seed is not mine to keep

Take it back deception

*Here, let me draw from the pit of my belly being
I am less tolerant now for concentrated little packs of poison
choosing to grow love instead
ever deepening,
pushing through shiny armour
like weeds through concrete
cracking the foundation of a monolithic mistake
rapturous rupture*

From the essence of self here is my blood

membrane of my every cell wall

membrane of conscious intention

membrane can only 'be' when sharing

*left hand on belly and right hand grasping the cell bars shaking
resonating*

let me rattle them alive

let me rattle them to death

ashes to

...ashes

dust to

...dust

crumbling bone of hand

To death? Really?

Not quite. When I was on my knees in the field puking and purging like I have never before, I begged the old ones for a moment to breathe. An inch away from passing out. An inch away and I called a time out to catch my breath.

For fear of death. And love of life

Suffice to say, we did some removing...

Two days later I took part in my first ever Holotropic Breathwork session. This is a method of accelerated breathing developed by Stanislav and Cristina Grof as a means of accessing previously unconscious biographic, perinatal and transpersonal experience. The word 'holotropic' means 'moving towards wholeness' (from the Greek *holo* – whole, and *trepin* – moving towards). Given that I was already familiar with a number of methods of accelerated breathing through my yoga practice of pranayama and through working with Sequoyah Trublood during breath of life ceremonies, I decided to dive into this session full bore and really go for it.

The experiences were remarkable. At an early stage of the session I accessed a state of consciousness similar to the meta-cosmic void experience I described in an earlier chapter. This then evolved into a feeling of being a baby pterodactyl breathlessly witnessing creation from my freshly cracked egg shell. After a while, (I am told over five minutes without breathing) the facilitator suggested I move on from this state. Shortly after resuming breathing I became frozen in my arms, front of legs and chest and face. This had much to do with the music, which had shifted from very earthy organic sounds to synthesized outer spacey sounds. Here again I stilled and noticed for a while, mindful of my aversion to high tech 'beam me up scotty' disaffectedness. (I tend to take strong issue with hyper-sanitary mindsets afraid of blood and mucuous and shit and all things lively.) So I hung out for a

while to consider how my own reactions to this disconnect have also now manifested the same in me. I then slowly began deepening breath again and feeling the prana/chi/life-energy return to my body.

Soon after, and for the remainder of the session, my arms lit up with tremendous pranic energy (from the Sanskrit word *prana*, meaning 'life force', similar to the notion of *chi* in Chinese and *ki* in Japanese) as I began moving left (feminine) and right (masculine) hands over various chakra centres in my body, including, for the first time, the 8th and 9th charkas above either side of my crown. I felt a tremendous love and gratitude flow through me as I began to realize the deeper essence of well-being, and how to receptively notice, self diagnose and actively administer treatment very early in the onset of imbalances. This experience of pranic flow shortly began coursing steadily through my arms and core, past my crown and down through my perineum to connect with mama's molten core. I began to notice – truly experience – my pranic (subtle energy) body encircling my physical body, and so I took to consciously noticing and moving energy through these regions as well.

Eventually I sat up into full lotus position and began drawing awareness to illness with my left hand whilst releasing it out my right hand. Then I *became* a pipe ceremony with Sequoyah. Experiencing the hub of union within masculine and feminine, feeling images of DNA strands merging with yin yang merging with pipe merging with the aikido circle brush stroke merging with earth becoming volcanic fire meeting breath from sky. The perceptual field of fractals was now dancing within celtic knots within snake scales. Everything I had learned about various healing practices was now integrating through vivid experiences of direct awareness.

Nearing the end of the session, the facilitator suggested we go for some difficult material. He asked if there was anywhere that I felt any kind of pressure. I told him how I was feeling a tightness around the girth of my cranium. (Note: I began experiencing these sensations of cranial compression a number of years earlier in October of 2002, on the second day of my fast in Guyana. It was like an energetic headband from the tip of my ears to the crown of my head, as if I were being dipped head-first in a pool of electricity. Simultaneously, I began to experience a beautiful constant multi-tonal ringing in my ears. These experiences were not disturbing, but very interesting and bizarre, as if I were tuning into some new frequency of electro-magnetic energy. Both of these experiences continued prominently for months

afterward and have since arisen with variable intensity. To this day, they remain in the background of my awareness, and can be brought forth into my attention at will). The facilitator asked if I wanted to explore this experience and I said yes. He then placed his hands on the top of my head and instructed me to breathe hard and push into the pressure. I began to suffocate. I began to spontaneously execute grappling maneuvers aimed at choking out my opponent. For what felt like ages, I writhed in this experience, returning again and again from the verge of suffocation to breathe maximally and push with all my will, stopping just short of passing out.

The most viable interpretation of these phenomena comes from Grof's peri-natal theory. Through over five decades of therapeutic practice and research involving phenomenological observation of thousands of clients, and through his own direct experience of holotropic states of consciousness, Grof (1988) has noticed that below the layer of childhood memories are powerful memories from labour and birth. He called these experiences *perinatal* (from *peri* -around or near and *natalis* - pertaining to birth). Grof also discovered that the experience of birthing is accompanied and informed by dramatic archetypal sequences of dying and spiritual rebirth. An individual's birthing dynamics are grouped along common themes linking one's emotional issues, physical problems, and profound universal spiritual questions. Grof calls these threads or chains "systems of condensed experience" or COEX's for short (pp 10-11). The perinatal roots of our COEX patterns tend to occur in four broad overlapping clusters of experience he terms the Basic Perinatal Matrices.

The first perinatal matrix (BPM I) is based around the amniotic unity between mother and fetus. Individuals accessing BPM I, in holotropic or paranormal states of consciousness, relive specific memories of intrauterine life such as the development of organs, sounds in the mother's body, and the physical and emotional chemistry inside the womb. These are accompanied by archetypal experiences of existence in heaven, paradise, spiritual unity between soul and Divine, and feelings of what Grof calls *oceanic* or *Apollonian* type of ecstasy. Individuals influenced by BPM I (in the process of therapeutic regression, or in their everyday life) experience a sense of meaningful connection with other people, nature, and all of existence, accompanied by feelings of basic security and belonging. Some individuals also experience *toxic womb* memories, based on maternal illness, substance abuse, or unwanted pregnancy. These experiences can be a profound source of paranoia,

hypochondria, and extreme distortions of self-image in later life. Fortunately, they can be worked through.

The second perinatal matrix (BPM II) is based around the onset of delivery. Here, the uterine walls are contracting around the fetus but the cervix is still closed, creating extreme feelings of entrapment and encagement in a "no-exit" situation. These emotions are frequently accompanied by archetypal images of the Fall from paradise, cosmic engulfment, or hell, depicted in various cultural forms relatively independent of the subject's cultural background. Individuals experiencing this matrix may encounter deep feelings of existential guilt, inferiority, depression and lack of meaning or connection in their lives.

The third perinatal matrix (BPM III) is based on the slow propulsion through the birth canal, as the powerful driving force of the contracting uterus pushes the infant down and through the narrow pelvic opening. When the uterine walls contract, the blood supply to the infant is temporarily restricted. These mechanical pressures can, along with manifestations of choking, activate powerful aggressive and sexual energies in the infant, and a determined sense of life-and-death struggle. These are accompanied by archetypal sequences of sacrifice, crucifixion, or purgatory. Individuals influenced by this matrix may feel a sense of being driven and compelled toward externally-defined goals they can never quite attain. (My experience of suffocating in relation to cranial pressure was a classic embodiment of the BPM III stage of (re)birthing.)

The fourth perinatal matrix (BPM IV) is based on the completed delivery and emergence from the mother. Detailed and frequently verifiable memories from the actual birth - such as the type of anesthesia used, forceps delivery, or conditions in the delivery room - are accompanied by archetypal sequences of spiritual rebirth, redemption, and transcendence. Individuals experiencing this matrix may have feelings of dramatic healing, breakthrough, and spiritual awakening, heightened enthusiasm and appreciation of all aspects of life. They will also stand strongly on ethical issues, and will be intolerant toward the abuse of power (Grof, 1988, pp. 11-36).

In a holotropic breathwork session any number of these matrices can be experienced in any sequence. When we enter a holotropic state with an open mind and no agenda, the psyche seems to 'select' the experience that is most charged or 'ripe' at that time. Grof calls this the 'radar function.' The experience that emerges could not have been predicted or

planned, but it invariably turns out to be relevant and effective to the participant's growth. "It is as if we open ourselves completely to discovering what is *really* going on at the deepest levels of our being at that time, and we allow *that* experience to evolve and teach us" (Boroson, 1999, para. 8). Grof contends that our COEX's are arranged as opportunities to encounter and resolve karma that has been generated through multiple lifetimes, and each holotropic experience moves the individual to the next appropriate step on their journey toward wholeness.

The next day, February 22nd, 2004, I took part in a sweat lodge ceremony. I found myself in heightened awareness of people's sickness, feeling the moment in which energetic (stuck, judgment) signatures were being dislodged by the heat, shifting, and trying to hide again (re-establish their wiring pattern in our unconscious). In the third round (western doorway) I offered to sing and drum a very old warrior song and encouraged others to breathe deeply whilst holding their left hand on a troubled part of their body and their right hand to the ground. Through this practice I was exposed to the most incredible pain. Once the door opened I crawled out and staggered to a nearby cold stream and dunked my body. As I crawled back from the stream, I curled up outside the lodge and I found myself simultaneously experiencing one woman's release of major trauma. I could feel toxins in her belly dislodge and, as if on cue, we began retching together. This went on for about fifteen minutes. In the fourth round of the lodge I was so overwhelmed by suffering that I desperately pressed my mouth to the earth, just barely hanging on. By the end of the round, I knew I had reached the end of my new capacity. I summoned all the energy I could to slowly crawl out side and sprawl flat out on the ground. Gazing dazedly up through trees; feeling the earth; breathing through my back. Utterly spent, and knowing I was now dangerously vulnerable, I thanked god/dess and the old ones for the doors that had been opened, and I humbly asked for help.

Two days later, on February 24th, I had the opportunity to recount these recent events with Bill White. As we strolled and chatted, wandering as we often had through time/space/echoes/conversation across the land, I asked him,

"How do you do it Bill?"

"You're referring to...?"

As we mingled amidst a river of students shuffling between classes I was feeling wide open to many synchronistic attunements. And I was struggling to not get caught up in the less healthy exchanges of energy. As countless people rushed by I clarified,

“When you’re moving through a crowd like this, I understand how you can select and sweep for useful energy, but I don’t get how you protect from the harmful energy. Do you receive it, notice it and then reactively discharge it through your right hand?”

Bill stopped walking. Tilted his head up and sideways as he often did whilst accessing ancestral knowledge, and then said, “No, to push such things away can draw forth your vulnerabilities, leaving you even more susceptible to catching unwanted energies.”

“So how do you protect from them then?”

“By drawing in deep love. Love for the old people. Love for the songs. Love for the prayers. If you draw this love and gratitude into your being, your weaknesses are protected, and you are better able to maintain balance. If you draw in this love, there is no room for dangerous energy to enter you.”

I had heard him say this many times before, but only now, after the ayahuasca, the holotropic breathwork, and the empathic purging experience in the sweat lodge, only now did I truly get it in my bones. Bill’s words reminded me of a story I have heard a number of times over the past few years. It is the story of an elderly man speaking to his grandson. The old man says “There are two wolves in my belly and they are having a raging battle. One is the wolf of love, compassion, hope, kindness . . . The other is the wolf of fear, despair, greed, violence . . .” When the child asks “Which wolf will win Grandpa?” the old man responds “The one that I feed.”

Whether engaging powerful substances, practices or ceremonies, our greatest safety is to surrender into the experience and trust in love. What we pay attention to grows, and in so doing reinforces the neural network that makes the narrative reality.

In the rawest days now, I find myself getting far less buffeted around by toxic oozings – not because I am skipping the experience of them, but because I invest less energy in identifying, labeling and concerning myself with their energy. The importance of nurturing *quamquam ee schkwalewun* (a strong mind/feeling), *aik schkwalewun* (a good mind/feeling), and *ees schkwalewun* (a fun mind/feeling) has become increasingly apparent.

ON SYNCHRONICITY

Reconsidering the stories I have written so far, I perceive a correlation between the timing of these experiences, and the timing of my deepening commitments to growth disciplines and spiritual practices. For example, my capacity to connect and evoke healing with the young man David in Guyana was precipitated by my sense of profound impasse and subsequent commitment to engage a fast. My resolution of a major kidney infection was precipitated by a deepening of my commitment in the sweat lodge, and, after reaching a strategic impasse in my self-treatment, a deepening faith in Sequoyah's teachings as I surrendered into a night of uncertainty. Likewise, my resolution of major bacterial skin infections was precipitated by a similar impasse in self-treatment, leading me into a subsequent commitment to resolve a long-standing judgment against tobacco. My glimpse of enlightenment that began on Gabriola Island was precipitated by my commitment to engage cold-water immersions as I consciously resolved a troublesome relationship and renegotiated old emotional traumas. In this chapter I will build a theoretical framework that articulates my perception of a synchronistic relationship between my chosen spiritual practices and my paranormal experiences. This framework might also offer insight into the unfolding of my most emotional story yet: the experience of my son's birth, which I will share in the next chapter "Isaiah".

The term synchronicity was first coined by Carl Jung in recognition of a connecting principle between phenomena existing outside of normal laws of cause and effect. Jung grouped synchronistic phenomena under three categories:

1. The coincidence of a psychic state in the observer with a simultaneous objective, external event that corresponds to the psychic state or content, where there is no evidence of a causal connection between the psychic state and the external event, and where, considering the psychic relativity of space and time, such a connection is not even conceivable.
2. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding (more or less simultaneous) external event taking place outside the observer's field of perception, i.e., at a distance, and only verifiable afterward.
3. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding, not yet existent future event that is distant in time and can likewise only be verified afterward.

An example of the first type of synchronicity was my first such major experience in October of 1997, as I sat beside the bed of an elderly woman who was about to pass away. She was my partner's grandmother. I didn't really know her. I had only met her a few times as she approached senility. The staff at the old folks home knew her time was near so they called family members to visit. Many people came and went through out the day. Eventually though, only a handful of us remained.

Her breathing had been very shallow, rapid and steady for much of the day, and as the room quieted down, I found myself entering a state of quiet mind. I sat by her bed and meditatively attuned to the rhythm of her breathing, just being with her. After a good stretch of time (perhaps 15 minutes), I suddenly felt a massive surge of energy rush up from my root chakra, and flood through my body, leading me to burst in to tears and tremble from head to toe. About 10 seconds *after* this surprising emotional/energetic surge began, her breathing began to shift, becoming and slower and slower, and with one big final sigh, she left this realm. This experience rattled me, leaving me with a profound sense of spiritual connection.

Relating this story of synchronistic experience back to the above-mentioned point about growth disciplines, I perceive my decision to sit meditatively and breathe with this woman to have stemmed from my then recent engagement in the practice of Iyengar yoga. After 15 years of increasingly dedicated training in the martial arts I had switched to a practice of yoga (having grown weary of competitively finding my peace at other's expense) and had begun to learn meditative practices of stilling one's mind. Had I not been ensconced in yoga practice at the time of this woman's departure, I am doubtful I would have been meditating or paying careful attention to breath whilst sitting at her bed side. I am doubtful I would have experienced this synchronicity without having been in so receptive a state of mind.

The majority of my synchronistic experiences have connected with dreaming experiences during times when I have been most disciplined in my spiritual practices. For example, another experience of type I synchronicity occurred early one morning in February of 2003, during the time of my initial forays into cold water immersion. The day before I had been listening to some reggae tunes on my CD player, but for some strange reason it had stopped playing. I was in the middle of other tasks so I didn't pay much attention to the matter, and I soon forgot about it altogether.

Later that night I experienced a most amazing dream in which I was searching along a creek bed for a way into underworld. I could sense it was near but somehow could not seem to find my way. Up and down the shore-line I quested until finally, I noticed a place where the bank overhung the stream by a few feet. This piqued my curiosity, so I went over there to crawl under and see. As soon as I entered the undercut I felt a massive surge of energy, at which point an enormous cheer rang out from the nearby mountain ridge, upon which a large gathering of Elders were joyously applauding my discovery.

Just then, I was abruptly lurched from my dream and sleep. It was exactly 4am, the time I had recently begun waking to sit in meditation. After a few startled moments, I noticed loud music had begun playing. Still groggy, I couldn't fathom who in the neighborhood would begin cranking tunes at this hour. Then I realized it was coming from my own basement suite. An upbeat reggae song with the lyrics: "Are you ready? Are you ready?" Feeling alarmed and suspicious of burglars, I went out into the living room area only to discover that CD player had *spontaneously* restarted where it had stopped playing the day before.

Regarding type II synchronicities, a clear example is the story I shared in the first chapter about a lucid dream involving massive waves of destruction, and then the next morning, reading about tsunami events along the shores of the Indian Ocean. Of relevance to our discussion here is the fact that this night of dreaming was precipitated by my having facilitated a family healing circle. This had required every ounce of my capacity as concentrated to hold space and pray for well being. I went to bed that night thoroughly exhausted and humbled by the day's events.

One of my most potent experiences of synchronicity was of the third type. This began occurring in the Spring of 2000, whilst preparing to lead the aforementioned Guiding Spirit Leadership Development Program. Due to the five-month immersion nature of the program, I had been preparing myself diligently through a number of practices including daily asthanga yoga and twice daily vipassana sittings. Also during this time, I seriously took up the practice of recording my dreams. Every night, before sleeping, I made sure my journal, pen, and small headlamp were readily available next to my pillow so I could record dreams upon waking. While I was not then aware of any formal practices of dream exploration, I did have a vague sense, from my earlier readings of Carl Jung's research on dreams, that this

could be a valuable practice in helping me uncover some of the otherwise veiled workings of my subconscious life.

Recording dreams became a fascinating practice. The more I committed to the recording process the more they began to remain with me upon waking. After months of practice I began to notice how when reviewing entries pertaining to normal waking life, I would only achieve a vague recollection of the events. But when I reviewed a recorded dream incident, I would at first have trouble making sense of it, but then, *fall* completely into the feeling, resonance, and full knowledge of the experience. While recollections of waking experiences generally became more diminished with distance into the past, dream experience somehow remained vibrant, no matter how many days, weeks, or months they had previously been experienced and recorded. As this sense of continuity intensified with practice, certain patterns of dream events became familiar.

I now noticed how one dream that I had been remembering only occasionally over the past few years was now frequently recurring. It was a situation-specific dream involving a tunnel in Rogers Pass BC, one of the longer tunnels, with a slight uphill slope and gentle right curve as one heads west. In these dreams, some kind of major accident kept happening causing us to be stuck in the tunnel near the western entrance. What was also peculiar about this series of dreams is how I would often lie in bed the morning afterwards in a state of yoga *nidra* (between wakefulness and sleep) and live out my responses to the emergency situation. Trained as I was in wilderness first aid and group leadership, I kept playing in my mind various combinations of triage response and marshalling fellow citizens.

Once our program commenced in June of 2000, I became more erratic with this practice, still recording dreams now and then, but otherwise getting busy with the many different roles I needed to play as we moved through the lived curriculum. Perhaps I had this tunnel dream again, but I cannot say for sure. Interestingly, as an aside, one of my coworkers, a Cree medicine-man, had a terrible dream one night that his cousin had died in a car crash. The next morning he woke up in mourning and began packing his bags to head back to his home territory. Only later that day did he call from a radio telephone to confirm the news.

After the program ended in early November, I spent a few weeks sorting things out and saying goodbye to people in the Calgary area as I prepared to move to the coast. On the night before my busy day of departure, I ended up staying awake with a friend until five am.

This put a big dent in the next day's travel agenda. We (a co-worker and I) did not end up leaving until late afternoon. We stopped for dinner in Golden BC, thus further delaying or progress, and then decided we would just drive until whenever seemed like a good place to stop and camp out. I remember how, whilst driving, I had thought about stopping in one place, and then not quite doing it; and then another place, but again, not quite. This went on until we arrived on the scene of an accident, November 27th, 2000, 6pm, about fifteen minutes after a tour bus had collided with a commercial truck in a tunnel in Rogers pass. *It was THE tunnel, near the western entrance, on a slight uphill slope with a gentle right curve as one heads west!* We were blocked off in the tunnel, and I was now on the scene of an event I had been dreaming about for years. As the most advanced medically trained person present, I took leadership, directing triage for over an hour before ambulances arrived. There were over thirty people injured or dead, numerous bystanders, and a variety of helpers. From a leadership perspective there was much to consider. But as it turned out, I had been preparing for this occasion for quite some time – in my dreams.

Dreamtime

One of the oldest viable explanations of trans-temporal dreaming comes from the Aboriginal cultures of Australia. For a traditional Aboriginal person, the Dreaming is not some phenomenon outside the bounds of their reality, but it gives their actual existence its reality and meaning (Charlesworth, 1984). Aboriginal cosmogonic understanding and ongoing worldview is attributed to the Dreamtime – the creative period before which it is generally understood that the land and its parts were innate or without purpose. While this Dreaming is often referred to in the more conventional, linear sense of historical time, Dreaming continues in our current reality as an immediate ongoing presence of the *everywhen* (Stanner, 1953). Dreaming is therefore an eternally abiding trans-temporal realm of consciousness, operating within what may be referred to as vertical (rather than horizontal) time.

Dreaming therefore, acts as the nexus or portal through which the Ancestor Spirits, the Country and the people, each being an integral, sentient part of the others, emanate, interact, exchange, birth and die. Together they form a collective consciousness, communicating, responding, and initiating through ongoing relationships. Primordial practices such as the

ability to locate in vast areas of land, and land management through drought and seasonal change are often communicated through transcendental experience during ceremony and ritual. The processes, beliefs and structure are a pluralistic response to a holistic, organic existence. The conscious and self-regulating concepts in Aboriginal culture, practices and beliefs collectively form a sentient, holistic ecology transcending multiple planes of reality (Rose, 1992, p.69).

Long-time consciousness researcher Ralph Metzner (2005) suggests that the fundamental reality of the universe “is a continuum, a unitive field or fabric or process, of both energy and consciousness, that is beyond time, space and all forms, and yet somehow mysteriously within them; simultaneously transcendent and immanent” (p. 10).

In traditional Asian religions, this unitive field is variously referred to as Tao, or Atman-Brahman, or Tantra (meaning ‘web’ or ‘fabric’) or the ‘jewelled net of Indra.’ Some Native North Americans refer to it as Wakan-Tanka, the all-pervading Creator Spirit. In the traditional Anglo-Saxon religion of the British Isles it was called the Wyrd, an invisible network of magical forces. In theistic religions like Christianity, this oneness corresponds to what is called the ‘Godhead’, a spiritual Beingness beyond the personal deity. In esoteric writings it is variously called The One, Absolute Beingness, the All That Is (p. 10).

These perennial philosophies are also harmonious with the language of systems theory in post-modern science (Metzner, 2005). In a systems view of humans and universe, things, objects and persons are temporary nodes, in ever-changing patterned relations with other nodes. This is a relational view of an infinitely complex, multi-level system of interrelationships, or *web of life*. “Consciousness then is the experiential side, the knowing, feeling, sensing, imaging of relations, the ‘knowing-with’” (p. 5).

Biologist Rupert Sheldrake (2001) echoes this perspective with a theory that all consciousness abides in *morpho-genetic fields*. Whereas more conventional theories would hold that consciousness is stored in the individual (typically located somewhere within the brain), and that thoughts and dreams are expressions of the individual’s unconscious, Sheldrake counters that these phenomena are principally a result of *morphic resonance*, occurring in relation with other events in time and space. “*Consciousness* means, literally, *con scire*, to know with, or to know together. I think that the reason that we are conscious is

because we are *interconscious* in relationship to other people” (para. 8). Rather than our brains acting as some kind of video recording and storage devices, our minds are more like TV receivers with which we tune into morphic fields in and around us.

In contrast to mechanistic theories of causality, Sheldrake’s hypothesis offers a general theory that explains and includes Jung’s understanding of the collective unconscious. The morphogenetic field consists of resonance patterns that are produced by the forms of things that occur within space and time. Through synchronistic attunement we can access trans-local aspects of larger consciousness.

One of the most compelling explanations of synchronicity and morphogenesis I have encountered is expressed in an interview with Cheyenne Elder Tantanayaho (2004).

Q: Well, don't people just die by accident too?

A: How deep do you want to go with this? Yes, on one level people die by accident. When people are not conscious of what they are doing and want to maintain that. You look at the reality around you... it's made up of billions and billions of atoms, huh? Ok? Some of those atoms have been tagged by your consciousness so that they show up, so that you see a density, huh? And it takes a shape and a form and that's what you see. Now you decide you are going to tag some more atoms by becoming more conscious. Your reality takes on a different density and a little different shape and you see more. Depending upon which atoms you ignite, which atoms you make conscious, is the reality that you perceive. So, if you perceive every one hundredth atom, then you see one type of reality. Accidents happen in that reality because most of what is going on in each person's life in that type of reality is a product of the environment. It's a product of what other people do. You tag some more atoms and you realize that hmmm, choices were made that created that product. You tag some more dots of consciousness until you get to the point where every dot is lit and you realize that you are the complete creator of your reality.

Q: So, there are no accidents.

A: Of course not.

Q: Ever.

A: Of course not. There is creation. Now, whether it's conscious creation or random creation is up to you.

Q: Whether it appears conscious or appears random is up to you.

A: No. Whether it IS conscious or IS random is up to you.

Q: I know that.

A: You can leave yourself flying down the freeway on automatic pilot...you can do that. You can do it half a sleep or intoxicated or whatever level of consciousness you want to have as you drive down that freeway. And a transport truck can crash into you, huh? Or you could crash into it. Or the wheel could fly off something and land on top of you and you're dead. It was an accident. It wasn't your fault. There was nothing you could do about it. Huh? Or you can be so conscious of where you are driving and why you are driving there, and be so conscious of everything going on around you that you get a funny feeling about the truck and so you slow down or pull off....(tape flips) ...an accident. Or you can say: "Why did I drive on that day when I knew better. Why did I choose to be there at that time? Why did I choose to create this reality? The wheel could have flown off to the side and nobody was hurt at all. But I chose to put my vehicle right there where it hit me. Why? What part of me wanted off this planet? What part of me said: 'Give me a good excuse to get out of here and I'm gone.' Huh? (tape noise)...for all of that. Now, some people come to me and I say: "It was an accident. He didn't mean to die." And that's true on that level of consciousness. And that's what that person needs to hear. That's where they need to operate right now because that's where they are choosing to operate from. That's not what you have chosen, son. You've chosen to take responsibility fully. And therefore in your reality, there are no accidents, huh? That's a harder one to live with isn't it?

Q: That's living blame free. You know what, that was one of the best things you've ever given me about _____. And we've been getting along very nicely since. I just catch myself when I'm getting ready to point the blaming finger. I catch myself and go: 'Hmmm.'

A: Good.

Q: And it works pretty good.

A: Yes (paras. 114-127).

I find this interpretation compelling not only for the clarity of its proposition, but also because I happened upon this interview transcript days after an experience of synchronicity involving a near-miss collision whilst riding my bicycle. As I was riding along my usual route home from the university, I turned down a back-road with a long downhill section and a series of 2-way-stop intersections in which I had the right of way. These cross streets were rarely traveled, so I usually just whisked through these intersections at high speed. But as I began accelerating down the hill that evening, I had a pronounced memory of a 'Foundations of Curriculum' class I had taken years earlier. Many of my classmates had been astounded by my rationale for not wearing a helmet whilst riding, and much debate had flourished over the pertinence of my ecological discourse. This wave of thought/memories came upon me so strongly that I found my hands tugging on the brake levers to slow down as I approached the first intersection. Sure enough, a car came racing through the stop sign right across my path. I missed being hit by a couple of metres. Had I continued on my brakeless trajectory, I would have been smeared.

Taking heed

The further I delve into paranormal realms of reality, the more I am discovering what this work entails. After the tunnel crash of November 2000, I commenced taking long walks with Bill White through the University campus. Bill was the first person I met in my new home of Victoria who could comfortably fathom the trans-temporal nature of my recent probably-future vision and subsequent experience. I recall some of his early words as follows,

You have received a gift; a very large gift; a very great gift. You must be careful to not ignore it. With this gift there is an important message, and you must be careful. As you move on to this new plane of power, the ancestors will test you. They will test you in areas where you are most vulnerable. Echoes will be cast forward into your path. Old patterns of karma. These patterns emerging as newer, bigger challenges. These patterns will continue to occur until they (the ancestors) have decided 'Okay, he understands'. It is for your safety, and for the safety of others that this happens (William White, personal communication, December 12, 2000).

And so it was that I began to face many challenges. At an interpersonal level I faced the challenge of feeling further alienated from my family, neighbors and certain friends as they struggled to accommodate my experience into their worldview, and the repercussions of my newly arrogant dismissal of their incomprehension. At a broader level I faced the challenge of noticing how thoroughly our consensus reality is manufactured by a dominant philosophical assumption of spatial constancy and temporal linearity whilst my voice was muted amidst its pervasiveness. And most disturbingly, I faced the challenge of repercussions wrought from my own assumption that my profound new exposure to paranormal realm of consciousness gave me license into all manner of unethical behaviour. Some of my unhealthy character disorders reigned freely for a while, and echoes were cast forth into my path.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, transpersonal researchers Grof and Grof (1988, 1990, 1993) contend that the major themes and events in our lives are woven into patterns of experience (systems of condensed experience – COEX) each of which is “superimposed over and anchored into a very particular aspect of the birth experience.” (Grof 1990, p. 25). Furthermore, COEX systems can reach into prenatal life and “into the realm of transpersonal phenomena such as past life experiences, archetypes of the collective unconscious, and identification with other life forms and universal processes” (p. 25). Boroson (1999) offers an example of how a COEX can be woven through a person’s pre-personal, personal and transpersonal experience, and can be linked to karmic patterns playing out over multiple lifetimes. The following citation is an account of experiences emerging through a series of Holotropic Breathwork sessions,

Samantha has suffered, most of her life, from persistent throat infections. Emotionally she feels inhibited from expressing herself. During her first holotropic breathwork session, she remembers a music teacher from elementary school who viscerally told her that she ‘couldn’t sing a note’. In another session, a childhood incident emerges in which her brother tried to strangle her. In re-experiencing this, she screams and screams – releasing long-held muscular tension in her throat. As her process deepens, in subsequent sessions, she experiences a moment of her birth when the cord was around her neck, and understands that at a deep, unconscious level, she has always confused her drive

to emerge and be free with a life-threatening, choking sensation. When her process deepens to the transpersonal level, she re-lives a past as a man be-headed for his religious convictions. And then one day, she has a shift on an entirely symbolic, spiritual level. She experiences herself as a swan, singing as it dies. For the first time in her life, she has an image of singing while dying, instead of singing or dying. Having released so much fear and tension in her throat through this process, she now rarely gets a throat infection (Boroson, 1999, para. 20).

Grof suggests that our primary challenge and evolutionary purpose in life is to willfully welcome, face and engage these COEX experiences in order to achieve resolution at all levels of consciousness. In a philosophy akin to many Buddhist enlightenment traditions he believes we have a finite amount of karma built up through lifetimes of conditioned reactions, and that we are able, if we so choose, to work through these patterns. Not all these experiences are pleasant as we align with people and events, and engage relationships that need to happen for us to learn and evolve. Sometimes it can be an extended ride in hell (“*Why does this ___ keep happening to me?*”) before we awaken to the pattern and resolve with some new capacity.

On many occasions I have heard Sequoyah say, “Everything that has ever happened has been eternally known in the mind of creator. Everything that is happening, and everything that will ever happen is eternally known in the mind of creator.” In light of this perspective, along with Bill White’s understanding of ancestral echoes, Grof’s peri-natal and COEX theories and Tantanayaho’s field of awareness, I am increasingly convinced that there is a level of larger Self at play in a grand scheme of unfolding. Through paranormal experiences ranging from the bliss of shunyata and beyond, to horrific mutilations and suffering, I have increasingly felt a profound *familiarity*. This sense of familiarity leaves me with an inkling – an occasional glimpse of vertical time perhaps – that this entire life is in fact a dejavu of the ‘original instructions’ that Sequoyah speaks of.

Whilst I am only occasionally attuned in these manners, there is something about their synchronistic nature that gives me a confidence, not so much in my ego-level self, but in my humble sense of connectedness with a realm of deeper causality. To paraphrase consciousness researcher Charles Tart: ‘The relief from suffering that comes from direct experience that the universe is meaningful, is far more effective than any specific, problem-

focused therapy.’ As Jung suggests, the collective unconscious is not just a psychic repository of our evolutionary experiences, but also contains a deep intelligence and wisdom that can help guide us in a healthy direction. I perceive that this connection is fostered by my increasing commitment to become aware of the moment-to-moment direct awareness of my inner/outer reality, and my willingness to be accepting of whatever may come my way. As if the universe is saying: “Hey, if you are willing to do the work, these are the realms of reality you will be opened to.”

ISAIAH

On March 29th, 2005, our son was born blue-skinned and limp. His umbilical cord had been constricted under his arm whilst squeezing through the birth canal, and in the last minute before his emergence he gave one final kick and then passed out. His mother Sadie had laboured beautifully through 8 hours of focused journey into the underworld. And then one hour after transition, surrounded by close friends, family, and a very adept midwife, this brave soul had begun to emerge. It had been going so well. But now here he was, unconscious and not breathing.

In the weeks leading up to his overdue birth, I had felt a mounting tension. Despite our heartfelt preparations, a beautiful blessing way, a powerful sweat lodge, something was not right. Some fearful stuckness had me worried. Some aspect of that which I/we had not dealt with was now catalyzing into play as the curtain prepared to part. This was an unavoidable time of reckoning. It was in our bones, no escape.

When Sadie reached the point of being ten days overdue, our midwife asked us to have an ultrasound. The results of this test showed a 'tight' cord, which could potentially cause constriction of baby's blood supply during contractions and/or during the final stages of delivery. At two weeks overdue, our midwife advised Sadie to take homeopathics which would hasten the onset of labour: Blue and Black Cohash, castor oil. Her pre-labour seemed to begin a number of times, but then receded.

Meanwhile, I had been doing what I could to work through it all. Knowing what I did about Grof's third and fourth perinatal matrices – the crux points of birthing into this world – I re-doubled my commitment to a yogic practice of *kumbhala pranayama* (retention of breath), offering a sign of willingness to go through this crucible stage as best I could. The longer he was overdue, the more I intensified my pranayama breath retentions and other practices. In the last few days before birth I was meditating vipassana each morning, followed by yoga asana practice mixed with pranayama practice involving four rounds of three full *kumbhala* breath retentions in each of the four directions. I held these breath retentions as long as I could before being overridden by panic. I also started fasting without food, and took to wind-sprinting up a nearby hill.

Two weeks and one day over due and still no labour. At this point I blew it. Having engaged my spiritual practices with a dangerous intensity my condition quickly became

infernal. At this point I confronted Sadie and in a very aggressive manner urged her to step in to the fire. I felt that this was what was needed to finally catalyze labour. Whether or not such was the case, all I managed to catalyze were tears of mistrust. Here was this woman every bit as scared as I was, even more so, and I was telling her she was not doing enough. What an idiot I had become!

Later that day Sadie's closest friend arrived to be our Doula of sorts. She saw the state I was in and asked me to consider what would be best for Sadie and the baby at this stage. So, determined as I was, I opted to let go of my intense regime. I continued with the running and yoga asana, but resumed eating and backed off with the breath retentions. This is when I began having dreams and visions, both day and night, of our baby being unable to breathe, lying on a table, not sure if s/he would stay. These visions were utterly terrifying.

Two weeks and three days over due and still no labour. Only now, Sadie's water had begun to leak and she was beginning to run a fever. All of our best-laid plans of a gentle homebirth were fading before us. On the evening of March 28, 2005, after sprinting myself into exhaustion, I walked up and down the nearby country road. With my mouth wide open with despair, wide open with loss, powerlessness, humility, sheer vulnerability. Everything that I ever believed in, everything that I did or pursued, everything that seemed to give my life meaning now appeared utterly false. With my soul exposed I cried out to the ancient ones: *"My medicine is useless! Everything I have ever learned is now useless! I don't know how to do this! I am lost."*

And so I began surrendering in a manner I never had before. This was unlike like all my previous surrenders: in Mishum's sweat lodge years before (before the kidney infection); in the Waiprous cabin shortly after; in my Guyana fasts; in the cold ocean; or into relationship with tobacco that winter of 2003. In all of these prior situations, I could surrender into the experience with a major degree of willingness to let go of my own physical existence. So much of my yoga practice had focused upon transcendence, on rising up to higher states of absorption (*dhyana*) that are progressively more devoid of form and content. My experiences of transmuting physical substance and form were more beneficial side-effects, little indicators of success on my way to increasingly formless states of *Samadhi/nirvana*.

But now faced with the loss of new life, my whole being screamed "No way!" This was a crossroads, and a turning point of my life's intention. Whilst I had for some time

understood the value of simply accepting my situation, whatever it may be, as a means of clearing karma, and hence becoming a lighter being able to love and heal more deeply, I now refused to do so. I was now willing to give my life, but with a very specific expectation: I wanted this baby to be born healthy, and I would do anything necessary. Every capacity I had ever developed, every bit of good karma I had nurtured, *everything* I was, now focused into this baby's well being. All my typically non-descript prayers of gratitude, and prayers of asking for the removal of 'whatever didn't belong' were gone and now replaced with a deeply petitionary: *Please help my child to live. Please help me help my child.* Thus began a deeper surrender of my freedom, including my life-long lingering coping strategy of aloofness.

I went into the house and tried calling Mishum, the old shaman up in Isle la Crosse Saskatchewan, hoping he would connect with his yuwipi spirit helpers and ask them to help us. I trusted Mishum's ability to evoke the support of these helpers, and I also knew that requesting this kind of favour required the deepest commitment on my part, the subsequent forgetting of which would only bring suffering. But no one was home. I then called and connected with a close comrade with whom I had worked closely on initiatory programs. He listened care-fully as I desperately spilled my heart out to him, and then assured me that in a situation of this gravity he felt there was no one more capable and trustworthy than I. He then added in the gravest tone, "Sometimes you have to let go of all the answers, and be in a place of no answers, before new answers arrive. And, you know, maybe they won't arrive. You just have to walk into that."

Later that evening our midwife visited and advised we return to the local hospital for monitoring. Sadie's blood pressure was now high and her fever rising. So off we went to the big concrete building full of fancy machines and helping professionals with a steady supply of sick people needing their help – the place I abhorred, the place we were now advised to stay. As Sadie's labour commenced later that night, I entered the deepest pit of ambivalence towards my own life. This birth, like my life, was turning out to be nothing like I had once imagined. In one moment after another I was overwhelmed by images of my every failure and all hope seemed lost. I just wanted out. Remembering the teachings of Bill and Sequoyah, and feeling as though my life depended on it, I just barely managed to hold onto a thread of prayer: *Please help this woman give natural birth to a healthy baby. What ever it*

is you will have me do today, that is exactly what I will do. I accept what ever may come, including my inability to accept what may come.

Over and over, again and again I repeated this prayer as I wallowed through the night in my abysmal sludge of regret until finally I emerged. When I came to around 4am Sadie's labour had once again slowed down. Now eerily aware of the effect I must have been having, I knelt down before her belly and told this little soul that I knew he knew what had been going on. I knew he knew everything about me, and that finally *I was here for him*, and ready to live with and love him with *all* my heart. Just then came a huge contraction, and others continued from there at 5-minute intervals.

And then, 9 hours later, the greatest ecstasy of giving birth came back to back with the deepest despair of loss. While one nurse pressed oxygen into his lungs, a midwife measured his strong heart, and another shook his body, I tugged on his left foot, and soft focused my heart around the room. Recognizing the dream, and acknowledging the ancestors, I pleaded with all my life that he come back to us.

*Please come back in
we want to love you
we want to learn from you
i give you my breath
i give you my life
i will give anything
listen to your mother cry for you
listen to how much she loves you
wants to be with you
please come back to us*

Our midwife, who was now back with Sadie implored her, "Sing your baby back to life!" Through her tears of unfathomable sorrow, Sadie began singing the Gayatri mantra, (an ancient great (*maha*) mantra, the supreme chant of enlightenment). And just then, he started breathing!

But only barely. Something was wrong. The doctor now in attendance decided we would need x-rays. As we whisked him away to the next room I stayed by his side, speaking

to him, touching him in any way I could, sheltering him, comforting him as he lay on a table, wheezing in terror, thanking him for returning and pleading that he stay.

A few x-rays later confirmed that he had a punctured lung, possibly due to his extra time in utero, possibly due to the aggressive resuscitation efforts. Whatever the case, the doctor now insisted that I depart the scene as he preferred to work alone. Before I had an inkling to protest, our midwife drew me back to the delivery room where I found Sadie in complete despondence. By holding out for a natural home-birth, she had pushed herself into a very high risk scenario which had now proven to be devastating. Had she made a mistake? No one could console her as she staggered with loss and wallowed between realms.

Having placed our baby in an incubator and hooked him up to oxygen, i.v. and all kinds of monitors, the doctor departed and I was allowed to resume contact with him. He was so scared. And it was so utterly obvious that all he wanted was to be with his mom. After touching and speaking with him for a while, I looked up at the head nurse and stated: "I believe it would be of benefit for him and his mother to connect." She hesitated for a moment, but then could not help but agree. Breaking all protocol, she and a number of other nurses unhooked the oxygen and a number of the monitor cords and we then wheeled him into the delivery room next door to meet his mother.

Sadie was in bed and in deep shock, barely alive. As we wheeled him in everyone in the room let out a gasp of joy. I placed his cot next to hers and they gazed into each other's eyes for the first time. As she reached out her hand and grabbed a hold of his, something in the world was made right. She sighed, "Ohhh, you're real". And they both began settling into their bodies. After dwelling a while in this purest communion, she then said: "We both need to stick around, don't we?" At which point a miracle occurred. Gazing into his mother's eyes, Isaiah became animated (in a manner that newborns don't) and then *very* distinctly nodded three times. The air cracked with electricity. Everyone in the room, our elder Bernice, our midwife, numerous friends, Sadie's mom, and a few nurses, we were all completely stunned. In this very moment, our child, along with levels of help we could not fathom, was encouraging his mother back to life.

Just then, two doctors came into the room. The one who had been treating so far, and another 'specialist' from Victoria. They promptly announced that they had some very important information to share with us about the condition of our son. Sadie, who was now

resonating in this miraculous communion nodded towards them and gently pleaded, "Can this wait?" But as she then turned to regain eye contact with her son, the specialist replied, "We need to speak with you about the critical condition your son is in, and inform you of your options. Your son has suffered a severe . . . and we believe it would be best for him to be transferred to . . ." Sadie looked back at them again and could barely put words together. A number of us glared at the doctors to shut up and notice what was happening here. Alas, "You have to understand, this cannot wait. If you do not hear what we have to say now . . ."

Sensing the disruption these doctors were causing, our midwife said, "How about we step out of the room and you tell me the situation. I can then relate the information back to the parents when they are better able to hear it." At which point she briskly ushered them out of the room. While those of us remaining in the room returned to witness this miraculous connection between mother and baby, outside in the hall began a loud ruckus. The specialist from Victoria was shouting at our midwife: "*Don't you people realize this baby will die!*"

Elder Bernice quickly left the room. Dressed in black as always, wild with grey hair, she glared piercingly as she approached the doctors, and then growled with all her magnificent might: "*You, will move it down the hall!*"

The specialist quickly retorted, "Don't you people understand? *This baby will die if he does not recei-*"

But in the fiercest hush Bernice interjected, "*I understand perfectly well that you will not speak that way around here. Now MOVE IT down the hall! NOW!*"

The scientific materialists were now toe to toe with a powerful Elder witch who knew from experience-in-her-bones the quantum reality at play in this critical juncture. We had just witnessed a profound miracle of soulful communication, and we would have none of the 'experts' ill-timed demands for fearful homage to their mechanistic worldview. Bernice was now an unstoppable fire. Her eyes were lasers. The whole ward was at a hush. Sensing the impasse, the local doctor conceded first, and the specialist grudgingly acquiesced.

("Mm hmm, those doctors and nurses have no idea how many people they have killed with that kind of talk" (S. Trublood, personal communication, May, 2005))

Disturbed by the commotion, and perhaps wary of appearing negligent, the head nurse quickly ended the visit, and we brought Isaiah Sequoyah Michael back into the nursery room. After nine-plus months of amniotic oneness, mother and child were now relegated to separate

rooms, so as to 'recover' from the experience. The situation was insane. And the battle was not over.

Whilst Sadie recuperated down the hall, our Doula and I took turns through the night standing along-side Isaiah, maintaining physical contact with him as best we could through the incubator door. Every time he began to panic, we rubbed his belly, arm or chest and made a toning sound. He responded by instantly calming down. Our Doula was an adept Reiki practitioner and she worked on him constantly. Also, for the first time ever, I found myself spontaneously sucking poisons from his chest. Whenever he cried, I had begun to see little tufts of black worm-like sludge moving around in his lungs. So I just fell into the practice of helping to draw it away. Again, the effect was instantaneously calming. Some of the nurses witnessing this were amazed, others were more suspicious of this strange activity from a strangely dressed man with a rattle and a bear tooth necklace.

At one point in the night, one of the more open-minded nurses sat beside me and took an interest in my determination to pursue such close connection with my newborn. We struck up a gentle conversation, and I eventually asked her how long it would be until he could be removed from the oxygen hood and many of the monitoring devices. She explained that his respiration rate was still a bit too high. But once it came down under 60rpm we could consider it.

I looked at the respiration monitor to see it was around 65. I then decided to breathe with Isaiah. I emptied my mind and just breathed with him. After some time, perhaps 20 minutes, I emerged from this trance state and looked up at the monitor. Our respiration rate had risen to 72! Oh my! 'Whoa' I said, 'Lets slow down. Here, try this.' I then began purposefully taking very deep slow breaths. Again, with an empty mind, I just offered my breath to this beautiful soul before me. When I looked up at monitor after perhaps fifteen minutes, Isaiah's respiration rate had dropped to 48. After ceasing the exercise it stabilized in the mid 50s, and the oxygen mask was taken off shortly after.

And so went the first 2 days and nights. Both Isaiah's and Sadie's conditions improved rapidly. Our community of friends and relatives supported us immensely. The nurses at the this small-town hospital were incredible, bending the rules to allow a number of us to stay each night. I repeatedly took cool showers in which I cried my heart clear and discharged

much of my trauma. Things were looking good, and we all began to relax. But this was only the eye of the storm.

The on call paediatrician (with whom we had the earlier altercation) had been coming by twice each day to monitor Isaiah's condition. He had expressed his satisfaction with Isaiah's rapid progress, but on the third day, he was growing worried by the fact that Isaiah had only peed once so far. This was a sign of either impaired renal function, or delayed renal activity due to the initial trauma of oxygen deprivation during the final stage of birth. The Doctor wanted to take an ultrasound to rule out the former condition and, in case of the later, was considering sending us to the 'second-level intensive care nursery' at a larger urban hospital, a place notorious for their unsympathetic separation of parents from new-borns.

Sensing the danger of this possibility, I called the doctor at his office and with my utmost capacity of articulation and I explained that, from the ways of knowing to which I ascribe, this was all connected to a deeper set of causal relations. The disruption of renal function was connected to the second chakra and was occurring in relation to my own patterned weakness in this area. This was the next depth of riddle to be solved, and of course I would go here, with all my heart and life. I implored him to understand that we (our community of healers) had been having tremendous success in helping Isaiah to recover so far, and I asked him to give us more time to effect this healing.

When the doctor arrived at the hospital later that afternoon he offered his well considered response, "I appreciate your sentiments, but they have nothing to do with this." I was devastated by his words. I had not anticipated how little regard he held for 'complementary' medicine. With proud assurance, the doctor then went on to tell me what he knew of (the mechanisms behind) Isaiah's delay in kidney function. He said it was due to a hormonal imbalance resulting from the birth trauma and his body's need to suppress secondary autonomic function to ensure the brain received oxygen. He was concerned that, should Isaiah's kidneys not begin to function at an adequate rate, "complications" could arise that he would not have the technical capacity to deal with at this hospital. The specialist from the larger urban hospital was advising him to send us down just incase.

In other words, he and the specialist were fearful of a worst-case scenario. Whilst they might have appreciated the value of eventual convalescence with mother as a key to resolving Isaiah's post-birth trauma, they placed *more* value in preparing to mitigate

potentially horrendous manifestations (consequences/symptoms) – regardless of how their actions might be further exacerbate his condition. I had no doubt that both of these doctors were highly adept paediatricians and deeply caring human beings. However, much as they may have intended to help our child and all other babies in their care, their highest priority was being ‘ready for the worst’.

The next afternoon, with Isaiah still having only peed once, these doctors made the call. Despite my fierce disapproval, Sadie and Isaiah, both still exhausted, were whisked away in an ambulance. We were dislodged from our place of convalescence, and our community of healers and helpers was dispersed. After scurrying to clean up our belongings, I followed Sadie and Isaiah to the urban hospital, a monstrous 7-story brick building full of disempowered sick people. After navigating a labyrinth of halls, I finally found the second-level nursery. Once inside I was told to scrub my hands and put on a gown due to a recent outbreak of an antibiotic resistant strain of staphylococcus bacteria. (Bacterial staphylococcus – “no problem,” I thought. I have navigated this one through fire, and I am pretty sure I can share my fire with Isaiah).

When I walked in and saw Isaiah my heart sank. After days of gradually wresting him from the little plastic box and bringing him into more and more contact with his mother, he was once again alone in an incubator with monitors attached all over him. Welcome to the matrix. As I approached him I was told to stand back whilst he was stabbed in the heel for blood tests, standard assessment procedure for all babies that arrive in this ward. I then hovered impatiently whilst a young intern nervously practiced her routine assessment skills on him. Once she was finished I began touching Isaiah, at which point, one of the nurses said, “Be careful you don’t upset him.” The ward was full of infants with life threatening conditions, many of them crying alone in their incubators. Nurses were hurriedly trying to keep up with their basic needs, but affectionate touch was not a high priority.

About an hour after our arrival Isaiah had a massive pee. But it was too late. We were now stuck here under a new set of strict rules. Sadie’s milk was coming in and all she wanted to do was feed, nurture and rest with him. However, she was placed in a room a number of hallways away, and Isaiah was not allowed to leave the nursery. He had an electro-magnetic wrist collar that would trigger an alarm if we attempted to take him past a certain point in the hallway outside the ward. This was standard procedure.

Whilst Sadie's mom and our Doula went off for the evening to find us a place to stay in town, I picked up my baby boy and held him in my arms. As we were now in Songhees territory, and close to the sweat lodge of a Sencothun Elder I sweat with, I sang him a prayer song that the old man always sings in the fourth round, as we pray to the northern doorway. *Que nay nah sech k-che* (help me now). I sang also to another baby across the room who cried frequently, and would only be soothed when picked up and held. At one point late in the night when he began crying again, one of the less compassionate nurses on the ward condescendingly exclaimed, "There he goes again! That baby is going to grow up to be a big cry baby!"

This was a very dangerous environment, and it was taking a lot of my life force to shield Isaiah from such energy. After a very intense week leading up to his birth, and this the fourth subsequent night with little sleep, I was approaching a state of exhaustion. With this came the realization that our situation was worsening. I was still sucking the worms away from my son's chest and kidneys, but as my heart now filled with disgust over our poor treatment, I was becoming less successful at releasing these entities from my own being. I started feeling involuntary jolts and lurches within my body. Sadie's mom arrived later in the night and we took turns holding Isaiah. I tried to sleep on the floor beside them but the nurses would not allow it. "The floors are too dirty," they said.

We were in trouble. We needed to get out of here. These people could not see how much damage they were doing by separating this new-born from his mother. I had remembered our midwife telling us what a horror show this place was, and she was right. I also remembered her mentioning that amidst all this inconsiderate systemic over-sight, there were a couple of doctors who were appreciative of holistic factors in post-natal care. One of them was due to be the head doctor on duty this next day.

As the nursery staff prepared for morning shift change, a one hour period during which no one but staff were allowed in the nursery whilst they discussed the condition of each patient (and newborns screamed unattended), I approached the nurse who had made the cynical comment about the "cry baby" and asked her a favour: "If you notice my baby crying, can you please just come over and touch him a little? It really helps him feel better knowing he is not alone." She nodded quizzically. And then, with my options and energy

running out, I went outside to a lounge and sat down to write the most important letter of my life:

ATTENTION DR. _____

Hello Doctor. My name is Patrick Amos. I am the father of Isaiah Bartram, a 3-day old baby who is now in your care. I am writing you this note now on the likelihood that we may not be able to discuss his/our condition in person.

Where to start... Although I am not a medically trained paediatrician, I have some basic knowledge of the physiological factors at play as my son recovers from his rocky first few post-natal hours. I understand how electrolyte balance is mitigated by ADH secretions; and how sodium levels in the blood stream offer key indicators of relative health. I value the diagnostic capacities of modern medical methodology.

At the same time, I am aware of the disruptive effect major stressors can have in equilibration of many autonomic functions. Upon our arrival here last night, Dr. _____ confirmed that the stresses of initially low APGAR and subsequent pneumothorax were the likely cause of his (Isaiah's) inhibited urinary function.

Since arriving here last night, Isaiah peed profusely at 6pm. And then again moderately at 4:20am. I hope you will agree that these are signs of considerable improvement. Likewise are (previous) signs of rising sodium levels as indicated in his periodic blood analysis.

Having endeavoured to relate to your perspective on this matter, I now ask you to attempt to relate to mine.

Presently, I am mildly disturbed as I write because I am 'on duty' as the provider of loving touch to Isaiah. My wife is sleeping in a strange room down an institutional hallway as she recovers from her most beautiful and terrifying experience of having birthed new life and then briefly lost it in the next moment(!) We have been told we MUST feed him 60cc's (of some kind of milk) every 4 hours or else yet another object will be attached to his body. So she is doing everything she can to meet this criterion. Her mother retired at 4:30 am to find accommodation. Our friend/doula had to depart at 1am.

And now, at 7am, I am presently absconding from my duty as I attend to this writing.

Shortly after Isaiah was born, all floppy and blue with cyanosis, I cut the cord with our midwife and then proceeded to help resuscitate him. While one nurse bagged him, another checked his heart rate, and another moved him around, I grabbed ahold of his left foot and

tugged at it as I beckoned with all my heart to his hovering soul... that he return to inhabit his body. He regained spontaneous respiration the moment I asked him to listen to his mother's wailing voice across the room.

Much as I know that the odds of (re-)establishing respiratory function are favourable if addressed early enough, I perceive any such transition to have a non-linear array of causal factors...

As we exited the room to do a few x-rays, I stayed with him, talking to his spirit, imploring him to further consolidate his embodiment. Kissing him... and touching his body. Aside from times thereafter when we were prohibited from maintaining direct physical contact with Isaiah (such as now, 7:20am, during your staff change...) at least one of our family/community has maintained such intimate contact. Some have performed Reiki, others pranic healing, others therapeutic touch, others just offering love and prayer. I personally have focused on titrating the discharge of neurophysiological energy that had breached in the trauma of prolonged asphyxiation. This (trauma), of course was major, but fortunately newborns have not yet lost their capacity to 'shake it off'.

I am a clinical counselor by occupation, focusing in somatics. (I lied to gain credibility...) I am happy to further discuss the paradigm from which I operate, and demonstrate the methodologies I/we have been employing as we treat Isaiah.

But the REAL reason I am writing is to inform you of what I perceive to be a genuine danger to Isaiah's well-being:

We are becoming fatigued. We are nearing exhaustion.

Since the nurses at _____ (small town) hospital began reducing his O2 supplement approximately 8 hours after his birth, I have known he is going to fully recover. The drastic intervention of A.R. (artificial respiration) was crucial. The x-rays and experience-based diagnoses were extremely valuable. The oxygen surely facilitated healing of his pleural and cardial membranes. The subsequent monitoring was reassuring to everyone.

The trouble is Doctor, as his condition has improved, the stresses that have resulted from his continued monitoring are now growing larger. With our forced transfer to _____ (large city) we are now without our community, without our home, and our son is being subjected to yet another array of blood tests.

My son, my wife and I are being FORCED from each others ongoing company. This IS dangerous to us.

If you are familiar with 'attachment theory' please try to understand that we believe profoundly in the importance of many post-partum months of immediate response to our baby's distress calls. If you would care to consider this matter in a cross-cultural light, our lifeway is very indigenous-minded. What western developmental models consider 'secure attachment', we perceive as falling far short of ideal.

In this light, I am imploring you to consider our situation from a holistic perspective, and therein realize that the best treatment for Isaiah will be to release him into our primary care.

We NEED to go home. I am begging you.

Sincerely, P. Amos

Rough hewn, but it would have to do. I rushed back to the special care nursery ward where Sadie and Andrea were now speaking with Dr. ____ (the previous shift supervisor). He was explaining that Isaiah's sodium levels were down to a dangerous level this morning, and that he felt it would be best to install an IV needle or an oral catheter... And just then I lost it on him, "No! he does not need your reactive interventions. He needs to *be with* his mother!!"

The doctor tried to respond but I wouldn't let him. With arms and face flailing I raged, "Their energy bodies are still fused! Their relationship is uroboric! They NEED to be together! This treatment is exacerbating his trauma. This separation is the reason his sodium is low. *You* are causing the problem!"

As Sadie and our doula tried to calm me down, one of the new morning shift nurses kindly ventured, "Ohhh, you need some rest." to which I retorted in exasperation, "NO! *We* need to go home!"

As she backed away in fear and sympathy, I began to fathom how bad this all looked. I felt like a freak. I looked like a freak. I was becoming a freak. I was approaching the verge of a nervous breakdown. Simply put, I was reaching a profound state of *dis-ease*. And this is when I felt it, the simple recipe of how indigenous medicine the world over is undone by colonial powers: Disrupt a persons' relational balance with human and more-than-human community by forcing them to relocate. Invalidate their way of knowing by saturating

everyone around them with overwhelming myopic assumptions. And watch them come apart with a condescending and/or sympathetic eye. *"The poor soul, he needs our help."*

I finally understood what it feels like to be at the mercy of well-intending ignorance. Residential schools (saving souls); modernization (saving time); 'developing countries' (saving societies); and now, medical materialists saving corporeal lives. I finally understood what it feels like to be looked at with the arrogance of benevolent pity. My karma as a Canadian of European decent had now come full circle into the deepest root of all that I cared for.

I needed rest. I was nearing exhaustion and panicking over the deteriorating condition of my son as these people blithely continued to torture him with separation from his mother! The disgust I felt, the rage against this idiocy only exacerbated my suffering and made me look even more ridiculous in their eyes. I had now been (self-) reduced to a point of helplessness. In my present condition I was no longer of benefit to Isaiah, Sadie, or anyone.

Returning

On this morning of Friday April 1st, I went to a hotel room about 5 miles away (the closest one to the hospital) to get some rest. But it took me ages to settle down. Instead, I found myself crying, raging and spewing critical analyses in my journal.

(Journal entries, April 1st)

Western medicine is superb at acute intervention, and very good at diagnosing the physical symptoms/manifestations of illness... (but is) unable to notice the subtler causal roots of manifestation, and is oblivious to the energetic dimensions of reality.

Western medical diagnostics have the capacity to detect milk but not love. This epistemic myopia seems predicated upon faith in crude instruments which are only able to detect physical manifestations. Thus, with the best healing intentions, they will try to evoke optimal conditions for the mechanical delivery of a mother's milk into her baby's body. And yet, they otherwise ascribe minimal value to her empathic nourishing capacities.

Separate; isolate; incubate; eradicate; maintain perpetual control.

And on I festered, alone in my hotel room. Raging with resentment and growing further and further incapacitated. I began hatching a plan to sit in silent protest in the main entrance-way of the hospital, handing out a sheet of paper explaining how my baby was being held

captive by a myopic medical authority. I envisioned the field-day the mainstream media would have with this demonstration. I wondered how I would tactically respond. I would burn with zealous fervor. I would die for this.

Fortunately, throughout this angry haze of fearful despair, I felt glimpses of realization that this energy of blaming was of no use. If I was to be in any way helpful to my son, I had to shift my mind from the inside out. I had to feel the depth of my terror but not act from it. I needed to access and act from a deeper place of love. This proved an immense challenge, but I had no other choice.

Later that afternoon, I managed to contact an old Haida medicine man (I will call him Nick) I knew who lived in the city. It turned out he had received my message (the night before) and was now on his way to the hospital. Wow! A ray of hope! I raced over to the hospital and met him in the lobby. As we walked up the stairs and through the halls I explained all that had happened so far. I explained how the sucking medicine had come to me and how I was now struggling to release the toxins, "Taking it out of Isaiah has been easy, very clear. But letting it out of myself has been more cloudy."

Nick was very adept at sensing energy bodies and drawing out worms and snakes. He could see the shape I was in, and in his calm husky voice explained, "That's okay. As you are breathing it out, don't think. It will get caught there (in your head). Just breathe from your heart. We can take care of you later. Where is your son?"

As we opened the doors to the special care nursery, and I walked in with this amazing teacher, all of the nurses looked at me with big smiles of recognition. The nurse whom I had barked at earlier that morning happily told me that Sadie and Isaiah had been moved to their own room together. I was so relieved. Another nurse led Nick and me to the back storage room of another nursery where Sadie and her mom were now residing with Isaiah. Space had been cleared, and a bed laid out on the floor. Our friends and allies were free to come and go. The doctor to whom I had written the letter was there when we arrived. He was a tired beautiful man. He explained that he could not legally allow us to leave the hospital because off Isaiah's dangerously low blood sodium levels (which could cause seizures), but he was willing to accommodate our wishes as best he could.

(Wow! Recognition).

After the doctor left, Nick checked Isaiah's energy body. He noted a small dip above his left kidney, but said it would be too dangerous to remove it (the worm) now. Better to wait a few months until he is stronger. We explained that the doctors were very concerned that he was not peeing frequently enough. Nick instructed us to gather round. We all stood holding hands around the incubator, with Sadie touching Isaiah's kidney and Nick tugging on my left fingers with his right hand, whilst placing his left hand over Isaiah's abdomen. A few moments later he peed!

Nick went on to explain many things, "Babies who struggle to be born are old souls who know what is coming. Life is so full of suffering, and they know it. So they hesitate in their commitment as the time comes near to enter this place." Sadie mentioned how Isaiah had arrived, then left, and then came back "Yes, this is because he was aware of what he is getting into. Once he saw how much you loved him, he decided to stay."

Later that evening Nick and I were sitting downstairs in the hospital cafeteria when I asked him about these bizarre jolting and lurching motions I was experiencing. He explained that they were a good sign, "Let it happen. It's just gunk coming out of you." Just then, my body began lurching uncontrollably, and Nick abruptly ordered me to hold out my left hand. He then grabbed my third and fourth fingers and brusquely tugged something out of them. With this, the flood gates of my heart opened, and I collapsed sobbing on the table. "Just let it go. Don't think about it or you will invite it back. Just let all that crap go."

On Nick's orders, I went back to the hotel that Friday night and slept a long time. The next morning he came by with his assistant, and they put me in a bath with cleansing plant medicines. We then engaged an old familiar practice in which they supervised whilst I attuned to felt-sense and released stuckness into motion. As usual, Nick sat along my right side, noticing the shifts in my pranic body and drew out worms and tufts of trouble from my right shoulder, right hand, or wherever else they were getting stuck in my body.

On Saturday evening, the fifth night of my son's life, after much cleansing and grounding (drinking lots of water), meditation, yoga asana, and rest, I was able to return to the hospital and spend the night lying down with my partner and son. Up until now Isaiah had often slept in my arms, but I had been under the vigilance of nurses who had kept me from lying horizontal with him. Many of these nurses were paranoid about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, and the latest publicity poster campaign tacked all over the maternity ward walls

cited suffocation as a result of co-bedding with parents as the new boogymen cause of SIDS. Some of the nurses had lost babies on their shift when exhausted and/or drugged and/or traumatized mothers had passed out on top of their newborn whilst sleeping in a single bed high off the ground. Not surprisingly, some of these nurses were still expressing signs of Post-traumatic stress over the matter.

Nevertheless, despite their admonishments, Sadie and I pulled Isaiah from his plastic bassonette, and took turns holding him in our arms as we all lay on the ground together. *(Journal notes, April 2nd, 2005)*

Last night was the first night I was able to enter dreamtime with my little teacher. Earlier in the evening Nick and ___ came by again. This time performing/facilitating a deeper cleansing of Isaiah and then Sadie. Left kidney. Same as his mother's struggle. Kidneys, second chakra... similar to the demon his father confronted in a cabin 4 years earlier.

Although I had surrendered into fire, it seemed now the matter was not entirely resolved. Indeed, I have struggled to fully accept and love the perpetrator of Tara's trauma (Tara was the woman I was helping in the 'into the fire' the process of which catalyzed my subsequent kidney infection)

Last night I asked Nick: "When a person consciously commits their whole being to the salvation of another, are they offering everything including their karmic gaps (unresolved pain)?" "Yes, No doubt about it."

And so ring Sequoyah's oft spoken words: "We are here to heal the unresolved wounds of our ancestors."

Later on that night, Isaiah and I finally had the opportunity to sleep with Isaiah on my arm. I delved into a potent dream in which I found myself walking an archaic land, moving along what seemed like a temple grounds. Various archetypal figures cast in stone were appearing in turn before my eyes as I walked, dieties and demons, depending, perhaps, on what issue one's soul has avoided until now. Mostly they felt benign until one appeared that terrified me! It was a deathly face of stone with round hollow eyes, round hollow mouth. As I felt a familiar echo of alarm I turned away to my right – but here was my son at my side! In an instant of dream time I turned back to face the entity and dive into him with arms wide open. I felt so much love for this soul at my side, so much gratitude for him having accepted

me as a parent, so much joy that he decided to rejoin us, so much humility that he was offering his teachings. As I felt this love I knew that my son was beside me in my dream. It was our dream. I knew that it was time to change the manner in which I reacted to this mask of death. With all the love that now permeated through me, I sank my heart into the stony mask in the temple grounds. All in an instant the mask dissolved!

And just as the age-old resonance shifted, Isaiah (back in this normal realm, in the hospital) simultaneously let out a *piercing* shriek. Waking abruptly from our dream, we gazed intensely into each others eyes. I brushed the air above him, touched his arm and rumbled a deep toned assurance. He fell immediately back to sleep. And I thanked him for encouraging me to release us from our suffering.

This was the magical moment when I knew we had turned the corner.

During his blood test the next morning, Isaiah didn't flinch.

An hour later the blood tests came back. Isaiah's sodium level had climbed back up to 128. The next day it was in the high 130s (which is normal), and remained there until they finally let us go a few days later. On the morning before our departure, the doctor (whom I had verbally attacked days earlier) kindly offered, "I don't know what you did. But it worked."

CLOSURE

In this thesis I have written about a wide range of topics from environmental despair to meditative disciplines, narrative process, indigenous mind, and paranormal experiences of insight and healing. I have attempted to illuminate connections between these topics within the context of becoming compassionate. In this chapter I will draw these connections together in light of the compassionate relationship between a mother and her newborn. From here, I will move on to consider ways by which we might remedy breaches in our relationship with self and other.

In recent studies comparing the health of newborns placed in incubators versus infants placed in kangaroo pouches – a special sack attached to the mother's body allowing skin-to-skin contact whilst also enabling the newborn to be connected to monitors, oxygen and Intravenous tubes, the infants in kangaroo pouches fared much better. Although otherwise receiving the same post-partum intensive care, the newborns able to maintain close contact with their mother via the pouch strategy had a dramatically higher rate of recovery from difficult birth (Bergman, 2000; Ludington-Hoe, Thompson, Swinth, Hadeed, & Anderson, 1994).

'Kangaroo Care' was first implemented as a preferred strategy in 1983 by Drs Neos Edgar Rey and Hector Martinez in Bogota Columbia. In an effort to decrease the high mortality rate among premature newborns (and with relatively few medical resources, making the cost of high-tech incubators prohibitive) they had moms carry their preterm babies in slings all day, every day. With this practice the mortality rate fell from 70% to 30% (Tessier, Cristo, Velez, Giron, Figueroa de Calume, Ruiz-Palaez, Charpak, Charpak, 1998).

Inferring from mammalian animal behavior, Bergman (2000) believes that there is much wrong with our present way of treating the newborn. Based on recent findings in neuro-endocrinology, Bergman explains that it is the newborn infant itself which begins and directs the attachment process that is aided by skin contact with the mother. If the newborn is placed on the mother's chest, within one hour, the baby will pull itself to the breast, find the nipple and begin nursing. The mother responds to her infant's "attachment program" and mother and infant set up a mutually stimulating system to which both respond by altering hormonal outputs.

One of the problems with unnecessarily separating mother from infant is that the newborn exhibits the protest-despair response as soon as it is removed from her. This sorrowful and despairing wailing is the survival mechanism of an infant in pain trying to bring its mother back. Sadly, if this doesn't work, and the mother doesn't appear, the baby becomes too tired to cry any more. The newborn gives up in despair, and in order to conserve energy for survival it secretes stress hormones which have the effect of disrupting autonomic functions such as heart rate, respiratory rate, renal and digestive activity (Bergman, 2000).

Bergman presents a vivid contrast between the breathing patterns of newborns in the incubator and newborns on their mother's chest. Both the heart rate and the breathing pattern soon stabilize when the baby is taken from the incubator and placed with the mother. On the mother's chest the baby's temperature is controlled in a very narrow range unlike the range in the incubator. When the baby is separated from its mother, levels of cortisol (a stress hormone) in the baby double. The skin-to-skin contact of the mother and child allows for a needed emotional closeness of both as well as allowing the production of essential bonding hormones. The chemistry of love.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I feel as though there is something wrong with our modern society, something that has caused us to act in an insensitive manner towards many of our human and more than human relations. By reflecting upon my family's birthing experience in relation to the evidence I have cited above, I believe I have happened upon one of the key factors contributing to our patterns of ecological alienation. Traditional models of human development in western psychology assert that the effects of trauma do not register until basic cognitive functions have been developed (Grof, 1988). However, when we consider Bergman's discoveries in light the neuro-physiological process of trauma, we must realize that the felt sense is functioning in-utero (Levine, 1995) and peri-natal trauma can result in genuine post traumatic stress. As discussed in the chapter 'Fasting in despair', until we are able to effect a resolution of this traumatic charge through an effective felt sense completion, we will be constrained to compulsively put ourselves in situations strangely reminiscent of our original trauma. Could it be that the unresolved trauma of post-partum separation is at the root of our collective modern malady of pandemic disconnection from mother nature?

I believe that our society's lack of a healthy deep-ecological identity has much to do with this standard paediatric practice of separating mothers and newborns shortly after birth. In considering the dynamics of Isaiah's post-partum hospital treatment, much becomes evident about the prevailing paediatric mindset when Post Traumatic Stress is identified as the mechanistic cause of a 3-day old baby's hormonal irregularity, but then, this mindset opts to treat 'the symptom' of PTS by isolating 'the baby' in an incubator box. Governed (seemingly) by suppositions of individuation at birth, this paediatric philosophy prevailing in 'modernized' countries (and considered 'progressive' in many 'developing' countries) places more faith in technological solutions and readily sees fit to take a newborn baby from his mother and place him in his own special high-tech incubator box. So far as I can tell, the societies in which this paediatric mindset prevails are the same societies that presently see fit to wreak ecological havoc on our great mother earth; all for the sake of realizing a few first-world dreams of the good life – for example, owning our own personal vehicle, television, stereo, computer, cell phone, etc. all of which we park in our very own isolated sectors of a nuclear family monster house. The common theme is one of separation, isolation and control. The parallel is eerie.

For the first month of my son's life, I watched him struggle to latch onto his mother's nipple. When she pulled him off to re-latch more comfortably I watched him grow threatened, agitated, and sometimes hostile towards her. I could not help but notice the metaphoric parallel of our current planetary crisis. As mother and child teetered in the throes of primal miscommunication, I was desperately afraid that Isaiah might never fully recover from his post-birth traumas. At times, I am still quite scared. Who knows how deep an insecure attachment has been etched? How permanent are the scars of this most profound alienation? In the first few months after Isaiah's birth he often woke in the night screaming in terror. Given our decision to co-bed with him, we have been able to quickly assuage his fear and soothe him back to sleep. This has proven invaluable, and the frequency of such incidents has decreased markedly. However, on the now rare occasion when he wakes from a nightmare and his mother is away (out for a few hours) he wails and shudders in stark terror of abandonment. Much as I do what I can to bear witness to his experience, every time this happens, and/or every time Sadie feels a profound despair over the way they were separated in their first few days post-partum, I cannot help but notice how the most nurturing of

maternal instincts have been devalued and thereby demeaned by a patriarchal medical authority that simply cannot fathom the agonizing wails of newborns alone and terrified in nursery ward incubators.

If this discourse seems reactively combative, let me reiterate that I carry the deepest of gratitude for the doctors and nurses and all the technology that helped to save Isaiah's life. Without such support, he might not have survived his vulnerable beginning. I fully fathom the gift that modern medicine has bestowed upon us. At the same time, I cannot help but notice a flaw in prevailing paediatric philosophy which informs a strategy that perpetuates much unnecessary suffering of newborns and mothers. I share my perspective in the hope that it can be gently received and effect some measure of improvement. Since its inception in the early 1980s, over two hundred scientific studies have shown the advantages of Kangaroo Baby Care. Not one of these studies have reported any adverse effects. With the potentially major implications of post-partum trauma, and with such a simple inexpensive remedy readily available, Kangaroo Baby Care, with its axiom of never separating the newborn from its mother, may be a crucial remedy to many of our societal woes.

In terms of my research narrative, I write in the spirit of redressing my impetus (as discussed in the introductory chapter) for coming to this academic inquiry. When I first encountered research information about Kangaroo Care many months after Isaiah's birth I burst into tears. I felt a massive gestalt as my intuitive sense of Isaiah's post-partum needs was finally corroborated by the findings of conventional academic research. These findings helped to illuminate and honour my core motive for engaging academia, and this process of finding effectively disarmed my long-standing sense of struggle in navigating between rational and trans-rational domains.

From Betrayal to Trust

I believe that if we are to remedy the ills our society now faces we must be willing to consciously engage to the primacy of our direct experience, much of which is paranormal. As I have attempted to demonstrate through my own example in the previous chapter, my capacity to help Isaiah resolve his birthing trauma had everything to do with my willingness to surrender into paranormal experiences. As I began to spontaneously open to the gift of sucking medicine shortly after his birth, I felt a direct communication with him and I

understood clearly what he was feeling and needing. This ability had much to do with my capacity to compassionately empathize with him. My understanding of Isaiah's condition was based in my practices of having consciously rediscovered my own peri-natal experiences. I felt it in my bones.

By engaging the primacy of our experience we may not only return/regress to our own peri-natal experience, but may also open up to a variety of paranormal synchronistic possibilities. For example, my experience of co-dreaming with Isaiah toward the end of our stay in the hospital was a paranormal phenomenon that emerged spontaneously. This was an archetypal dream of a "psychoid" nature (Grof, 1990, p. 174), a type of synchronicity in which the dream coincides with events in the external world in ways that are coherent. Archetypal dreams belong neither to the realm of the psyche nor to the realm of material reality. Instead, they somehow exist on a threshold between consciousness and matter, having a consciousness quite able to think and act on their own. When an archetype is activated by an emotionally charged event (such as, birth, illness, death, or spiritual practice) other related events tend to draw near. In this way, the archetypes become a doorway that provides us access to the experience of meaningful and often insightful coincidence (Grof, 1988).

Following from my profound paranormal experiences with Isaiah, I have in recent months been exploring the connection between lucid dreaming and shamanic dream work as I sleep beside him at night. This is a process of consciously entering a dream-like state with the purpose of discovering an insight, such as the source or nature of an illness (Metzner, 1995; Mindell, 2000). On one occasion I purposefully entered this realm to encounter the illness that had been troubling Isaiah's lungs for a few weeks. In an open receptive state of direct awareness I soon contacted these entities with my dream body. Within moments my physical body was curled up in seizure and I could barely breathe. I rode this intensity for some time, just accepting the felt sense experience, but the intensity soon pulled me into a waking state. I lay awake for the remainder of the night, meditating to remain present and detach from the strong sankhara this experience had evoked.

When Isaiah awoke the next morning his lungs were clear. However, for the entire next week I was exhausted, as if on the edge of catching influenza. Not sure how best to deal with this, I called my friend Bboy in Saskatchewan (Mishum's son), a man well versed in this

kind of work. He told me I have to be careful. Little babies are so clean and good at self-healing. We adults are much less clear. It is easy for us to get caught up in trouble. As Haida Elder Nick once stated, "Don't bother looking for the free ride at the end of the tunnel. The more light you are, the more you attract darkness into your gaps. As you get exposed to more power and awareness, the bigger the things that can move through your body."

A while back I mentioned to Sequoyah that I carry much fear for Isaiah's well being, knowing the world we are bringing him into, anticipating probable futures rife with major ecological (and therefore) socio-economic disruptions. And I wondered how best to protect and prepare him. Sequoyah's response was simple,

The best way to protect Isaiah – the only way to protect him – is by being in a place of clarity yourself. A place of gratitude, peace and love. That's the only thing that can protect him from harmful entities and energies. All that darkness disappears when we love it (S. Trublood, personal communication, May 5, 2005).

Bill White explains this with a metaphor of crossing from the secular to the sacred shore of a river,

When swimming across this river we must be as free of baggage as possible. Otherwise we will be dragged down by the current, as if a stone were tied around our ankle. When we carry baggage, the journey becomes more difficult and more dangerous . . . To cross this river and successfully reach the sacred shore we must strengthen our selves with feelings of love. Love for the old people. Love for the teachings. Love for the songs. (W. White, personal communication, March, 2004).

And so my work is cut out for me. To help my son become healthy, I must first become health myself.

As I journey along this threshold path I come to realize ever more resoundingly that the answer always lies in moving towards what scares me (Chodron, 2001). Breathing deeply into my most painful memories and feeling them fully, letting them be, and be way-marks, on a "journey from betrayal to trust" (Hedva, 2002). By accepting my wounds, traumas and betrayals as sacred events in my life, I find the power to initiate a process of spiritual awakening. I begin to realize that my personal stories are but archetypal reflections of profound universal forces. "As we experience our personal stories in terms of universal

spiritual teachings, we connect more consciously with the greater transformative power within our experience.” (Hedva, 2002, para 4).

Betrayal is shattering. Yet deception, broken promises, unkept agreements, disappointments, and unfulfilled expectations in every arena of life are fertile ground for personal growth and an increased capacity for trust. This trust is not trust in your betrayer or anyone outside yourself. This is a profound sense of trust in your Self, your inner source of wisdom, healing, and love – a higher power within the psyche that brings each of us through every experience in life, including betrayal (para 2).

As time passes, I am increasingly grateful for the difficulty of Isaiah’s birthing experience, largely because I have become increasingly cognizant of the gifts this experience has wrought. My endeavour to help Isaiah recover from his birth and post-partum traumas has not only opened me to new realms of shamanic medicine, but also to my own deeper nature. Through these experiences I am very fortunate to have received wonderful new insights into the connections between trauma resolution, shamanism, depth psychology, meditations, yogas, and primal regression therapies. These linkages further inform my understanding of the problems and solution we moderns are now confronted with. None of this would have been possible without experiencing Isaiah’s birth as I did. For this I have become grateful beyond words.

To close this chapter, I will share a story about a recent powerful paranormal experience that relates to our above discussion and offers much insight into the value of surrendering into paranormal possibilities. On the eve of my fortieth birthday, in November of 2005 I submitted to a Yopo (a South American plant medicine) ceremony with a very adept Iroquois medicine man. I sensed that the setting was right, and for my set (intention), I began with asking for the removal of what does not belong (this has become a standard for me) and I then asked to be shown my sacred wound and to better understand my sacred dance.

Upon ingesting the medicine I purged (threw up) for some time whilst feeling bear energy move through me. Then the medicine man commenced the most excruciating bodywork as he drew massive worms from my right shoulder and arm. The pain was so intense that I struggled to breathe. After some time, and much removal of deeply repressed anger, I arrived into a state of desperate loneliness in which I felt disconnected from

everything I loved. I wailed in sorrow “Why this suffering?” “Why did you leave me here?” And then, with the humblest feeling of hopeless I have ever felt, I said: “I love you”

This marked a transition in the ceremony as the medicine man ceased his excruciating removal. He then held my arms out in the crucifix position and placed pitch on my temples, third eye, heart and wrists. As he let me be I fell forward in tears and again begged my questions: “Why this pain of duality?” “Why this suffering of separation?” “Why did you leave me here?”

With my left ear to the ground I heard the pulse of creation as underworld wolves gave voice to the songs of life and death. With my right ear to the sky I felt the presence of nothingness witnessing everything. And then, through the sounds of creation reaching for the abyss I heard the gentlest loving answer: “For you to feel . . . (everything . . .) and for you to sing.”

And thus I began to experience a novelty of the first sound, the first word, an eternal moment of life birthing over and over again from the void of shunyata. And from the primacy of this conception, I felt the emergent gasp of a first breath.

The process of returning, regressing, rebirthing to our beginnings is truly harrowing, and yet, ultimately, completely rewarding.

PANNING OUT

In this thesis I have attempted to weave a fragile web linking stories of lucid dreaming and visioning, shamanic journeys, meditative transcendence, and radical healing experiences with a variety of paranormal perspectives. Although diverse in phenomenological strands, this web is essentially a vehicle for discussing the spiritual nature of life. For the indigenous Elders and medicine people from whom I am learning, spirituality is a necessary aspect of medicinal treatments. This fact has long been known by anthropologists, who for over a century have been equating the indigenous meanings of the word "medicine" with "mystery," "holy," and "sacred." I believe the word "synchronicity" is an appropriate synonym here, in that it can have a medicinal effect, is mysterious in nature, connects parts in a larger (w)hole, and leaves us in humble awe of powers beyond our small-self.

This was made particularly evident to me through an experience that occurred two weeks after Isaiah's birth, when I was back home and back to work on developing some College course material. Whilst looking for an old information flyer from the Guiding Spirit Leadership Development Program I found myself sifting through boxes of books that I had not opened for years. After hours of frustration I was just short of giving up my quest when I happened upon 'The Encyclopedia of Native American Healing' by anthropologist William S. Lyon. And there was the flyer tucked as a bookmark on page 265. I started reading,

Sucking Shaman – A general anthropological term for those shamans who cure by sucking on the patient to remove an intruded object that is the cause of the illness. Most often, they place their mouths directly on the patient. Others use hollow bones, reeds, horns, or other such tubes. Such healers are usually found in those societies where curing is performed by a single shaman rather than by a group effort, although there are exceptions. Sucking shamans are considered to be an ancient institution among hunting and gathering societies, as opposed to agricultural societies. The concept of object intrusion is probably of Old World Paleolithic origin and seems to be the oldest of all disease theories. It is most prevalent in western North America, particularly among the nations of the Great Basin and the Plateau of California (Lyon, 1996, p. 265).

Reading an authoritative book, written by one of the world's foremost researchers of indigenous healing practices and processes, was a most beneficial experience; one that quite possibly saved my sanity! With this serendipitous literary correlation, I began to relax somewhat. Although many of the people around me could not fathom this medicine, nor acknowledge my frustration in sharing my experience of it, my feeling of being led into an attunement with this author and this specific piece of writing offered me a profound sense of communal support.

I have shared numerous personal stories of synchronicity to demonstrate the efficacy of paranormal consciousness as a vehicle for enhancing personal and collective well-being. In so doing, I am hopeful that I have also effectively advocated for the inclusion of paranormal consciousness as field of inquiry worthy of serious consideration. Inclusion of paranormal realms, be they in the guise of shamanic, transpersonal, ecopsychological or deep ecological paradigms, may help to facilitate an epochal shift in consciousness that could resolve our predominantly violent relationships with many of our human and more-than-human community.

Although I cannot adequately prove the efficacy of shamanic medicine by standard means of assessment, I know that this practice has proven effective in enhancing my health and the health those I care for. As Lyons (1998) asserts, even indigenous healers themselves do not understand these mystery powers, they simply know how to wield them. "They do what they do because it works for them. At the same time, they experience no anxiety whatsoever in knowing that fundamentally their healing treatments are a mystery even unto themselves" (p xiv). Likewise, when I first explained to Sequoyah how my ability to notice and suck out toxins had arrived spontaneously, he responded, "Well ya, of course. That medicine only ever comes directly from spirit. It is not something you can learn in a book or from other people" (S. Trublood, personal communication, April, 2005).

Including paranormal phenomena requires that we expand our existing framework for empirical inquiry. Wilbur (1993), in advocating for the validation of transcendent meditations, suggests that all knowledge is essentially similar in structure, in that it consists of three basic components:

1. An *instrumental or injunctive wing*: This is a set of instructions, simple or complex, internal or external. All have the form: 'If you want to see this, do this.'

2. An *illuminative wing*: This is an illuminative seeing by the particular eye of knowledge evoked by the injunctive wing. Besides being self-illuminative, it leads to the possibility of:

3. A *communal wing*: This is the actual sharing of the illuminative seeing with others who are using the same eye. If the shared vision is agreed upon by others, this constitutes a communal proof of true seeing.

Whether we are using the eye of the flesh to scientifically gather adjunct data, the 'rational' eye of the mind to coordinate, clarify, criticize, and synthesize, or the contemplative eye to experience the paranormal, these are the basic wings of any type of true knowledge. Knowledge does become more complicated when one eye tries to match its knowledge with a higher or lower eye, but these basic wings underlie even that complication. "In other words, the injunctive strand demands that, for whatever type of knowledge, *the appropriate eye must be trained until it can be adequate to its illumination*. This is true in art, in science, in philosophy, in contemplation. It is true, in fact, for any valid forms of knowledge (Wilber, 1993, p. 188).

With regard to issues of verifiability, Wilber adds,

Now, if a person refuses to train a particular eye (flesh, mental, contemplative), then it is equivalent to refusing to look, and we are justified in disregarding this person's opinions and excluding him from our vote as to communal proof. Someone who refuses to learn geometry cannot be allowed to vote on the truth of Pythagorean theorem; someone who refuses to learn contemplation cannot be allowed to vote on the truth of Buddha-nature When someone asks, 'Where is your empirical proof of transcendence?' we need not panic. We explain the instrumental methods for our knowledge and invite him or her to check it out personally. Should that person accept, and complete the injunctive wing, then that person is capable of becoming part of the community of those whose eye is adequate to the transcendent realm. Prior to that time, that person is inadequate to form an opinion about transpersonal concerns. We are then no more obliged to account to that person than is a physicist to one who refuses to learn mathematics. (Wilbur, 1993, p. 188)

At the same time, Wilbur cautions transpersonal researchers to avoid categorical mistakes, "Especially the eyes of flesh and reason should not think they have 'proven' the Transcendent, circumscribed the transcendent, or even adequately described the

Transcendent” (p. 189). For researchers of the paranormal (such as myself) these discernments are crucial. To the extent that we commit those errors, “then the more the entire field faces the fate of the medieval theologian: it becomes pseudo-science and pseudo-philosophy, and is thereby destroyed by real scientists and real philosophers – and rightly so” (p.189).

Although the transcendent (paranormal) is not to be confused with the rational, this does not imply a devaluation of rational meaning-making. On the contrary, interpretation through the eye of our rational mind is a crucial ingredient to successfully navigating our paranormal experience, particularly with regard to ethical and moral development. Much as I will vouch for the efficacy of liminal/paranormal consciousness as a vehicle for healing/growth/transformation, the engagement of practices that lead us into these states are not without dangers and potential pitfalls. Most any multi-state discipline, such as yoga, prayer, meditation, can help practitioners open to powerful direct experiences of transcendence, but so too can most any initiatory process that includes a stage of genuine liminality. While interpretations of paranormal experience can be varied – some focusing on specifically human interconnection, others global, and still others universal – there is no guarantee that the experience alone will lead practitioners to higher truths.

Many people have ‘lost their mind’ in the unregulated pursuit of altered states. The unconscious archetypal energies at play are so powerful that when they are not channeled and accessed at just the right moment and in just the right dose, they can do great harm. To use an electrical analogy, too much power without proper ‘transformers’ and the right amount of ‘insulation’ to contain it will overload the practitioner’s circuits and destroy them. Having achieved liminal states, many practitioners have been unable to reintegrate their experience and sense of self back into ‘normal’ reality. Others have been attacked and debilitated by powerful archetypal energies that they were not equipped to handle. And without access to the restorative capacities and teachings of elders and guides they have remained debilitated. There are good reasons why many spiritual practices are steeped in discipline and carefully guided by adepts.

One of the greatest dangers of paranormal realms of consciousness is the potential for abuse by informed authorities. This is particularly evident in the use of initiatory processes involving symbolic mythic imagery and archetypal activation such as were used by the Nazis

to catalyze the collective psyche of nationalism in preparation for war. Similar examples can be found in the authoritarian brutality of Stalinist Communism, the Holy Crusades, the radical interpretations of Islamic Jihad, the murder of Gandhi by Hindu extremists, and, (arguably – if only in the west), the strong arm ‘war on terror’ now being manufactured in the US. Whether the intention is to induct a person into a cult, a sorority, an army, or merely to nurture their acquiescence to a macabre plan (for example, the political legitimization of torture), transpersonal strategies of collusion have been a time-honoured means of enhancing the loyalty of a populace. History is replete with systemic examples of initiatory processes being utilized in a far from holistic manner.

If we are to engage practices that evoke paranormal experience, we must do so with the kindest intentions towards all beings. As Hull (2001) implores,

I believe that we stand on the precipice of great possibility. Public willingness to consider alternative ways of building loving healthy communities and relationships is growing – and the need has never been greater. We who are responsible for the gifts of the spirit have an opportunity to help create a passionate world filled with relatives who are kind and good mannered – a world that is divine centered, love based, and compassion driven. Failure of personal integrity is the fastest way to waste the opportunity. Let’s not screw it up (p. 57).

Michael Hull was the first white man to have been gifted the sacred Lakota medicine bundle, and with it, the authority to lead a Lakota Sundance. His journey into these spiritual realms began (so to speak) as his body lay on an operating table after an automobile ‘accident’ and he watched it all whilst hovering above in the room. Upon deciding to return to this life he embarked upon a long and painful journey of accepting his wounds and resolving the pattern of aggressive living that had led to his crash. Hull is aware from personal experience of the damage that can result from a lack of integrity.

Becoming the Path

Bill White explains that the journey of becoming requires the development of three crucial elements: “Capacity, great Love, and balance”. When he first told me this (actually, he has mentioned it a number of times over the years, but when I first *noticed* the importance of this teaching) I had to laugh at the interdependence of it all. Deepening of capacity

requires deepening of great love requires deepening of balance requires deepening of great love requires deepening of capacity: *essential interdependence*. The more we are willing to engage this threshold path, the more our volition/capacity to notice will evoke disturbing dimensions of reality/self. And yet, the bigger the monsters and ghosts we (are bound to) encounter, the more we are enveloped by teachings of love. Through gentle fierceness and fierce gentleness, this journey challenges us to find the sacred in everything.

Having been caressed by the void and bolstered by the Ancestors more and more frequently in the past few years, clarity has dawned that the most terrible monsters of my life (and there have been a few) can also be beautiful transformers, in that they *de-monstr-ate* some aspect of self. All of this can transpire in a moment's choice between rejection or embrace. The deeper I am able to be aware and accepting of the threshold of any experience, the deeper I am able to access and live with love. The more we are able to face and embrace our direct experience of fear, the more we are enabled to love. The more we are able to love, the more we are enabled to face and embrace our fear. The deeper the pit we will explore, the greater the height we will be gifted. The chicken *and* the egg. *One in the same*.

"Whatever you accept completely will take you to peace, including the acceptance that you cannot accept; that you are in resistance" (Tolle, 2003, p. 73). Sequoyah saw this quote on our kitchen wall during his visit in May 2005 and smiled, "That's it right there. That's all you need to remember." Much as I know this in my head, I sometimes feel myself struggling with feelings of anger over the present state of our world. So I asked him how best to resolve this dis-ease. Sequoyah suggested the following simple prayer, "Just say 'Thank you for this feeling. And thank you for the awareness of how to change my mind, so I can come to a place of peace,'" thus leading me again into the triangle of great prayer: *Great thanks, Great peace, Great love*, and reaffirming the value of mindful direct awareness and acceptance, the value of growth disciplines and health practices, and the gist of Jack Engler's (2000) conclusive admonition: "*Do more practice!*"(para.8).

I wondered whether we are bound to include our unconscious doubts when we pray. I had long perceived this to be the central foible of assertion training, and the subtle means by which I unconsciously self-sabotage my intention. When I put this question to Sequoyah his answer was striking, "Any moment we focus our self into honest prayer is a pure moment of possibility. In that moment, the negativity is not who you are. Any moment of complete

trust, any moment of complete love, can shift the structure of *anything*.” And so it dawned on me once again that perhaps none of us is so consistent a structure as we have assumed. Rather, we are amalgams of moments of consciousness, perpetually re-creating what we choose to focus on.

We went on to discuss the ground-breaking scientific research of Masaru Emoto, who showed the effects of prayer and thoughtful intent upon the molecular structure of water crystals. Sequoyah explained that the element of water is the clearest teacher because it is the most receptive without judgment. “The reason prayer doesn’t always work on us humans is because we doubt. When we doubt, we block the prayer. It has a harder time getting through all that fear.”

When we are able to truly, deeply, be-come aware and accepting of any sensation, we therein transcend the root of our suffering. Surrendering into the unknown is, so far as I can tell, the only way to deepen our wisdom: Not by fortifying our beliefs, but by questioning them, by repeatedly submitting them to the scrutiny of lived-experience, and welcoming whatever may emerge. This is the crucible of awakening. In deepening our faith to the point of surrender into *any* experience, we thereby open to a greater consciousness, through which we become more aware of the myriad causal relationships at play. In so doing we realize the gift of expansion into realms of synchronistic possibility, and our consciousness opens that much further into harmonious attunement with broader experiences of Self inclusive of other.

In my research for this thesis, as in my spiritual practices and my engagement of ordeals, I have endeavoured to abide by this methodology. Over the past few years, beginning with my experience of transcending hip-pain on the meditation cushion, I have nurtured a deepening faith in the value of awareness and acceptance as a means of transforming towards a healthier, kinder, more compassionate way of being. This faith has led me into spiritual practice, enabling me to engage archetypal energies and entities beyond my ordinary sense of self, and to feel the experience as fully as possible, notice the connections, and accept the results. Whether I do this through highly intense practices such as Pranayama breath retentions, sweat lodges, cold water immersions, moderately intense practices such as fasting, accelerated breathing, and dynamic physical yoga, or variably intense practices such as Vipassana, ceremonial use of plant medicines, or lucid dream journey, the intentions is the

same: to deepen my awareness and acceptance of direct experience, and live compassionately with what is.

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