

Chapter 4

Foundational Ontology

Living as a Buddhist Monk in the 21st Century

4. 0 It is the focus and purpose of this section of my thesis to bring the reader to a working understanding of the sect of Buddhism in which I am an ordained head priest. I see this as important because my engagement with my faith has shaped many of my experiences and gives me a set of values by which I attempt to live my life and which I seek to bring to my nursing, teaching, and practice. I need to make transparent what these values are and how I use them, as they are pivotal in my judgement claims. I acknowledge openly that the bias of my faith and its teachings may colour my perceptions of reality. This first section, by researching the history and structures of my faith, provides the religious grounding upon which I base my critical analysis skills and scholarship. The universal values of love and compassion I hold for humanity, and the journey of trying to live those values, will unfold osmotically in this and other chapters rather than be presented as “here is my section on compassion, here is my value of love”.

4. 1 Why is Buddhism important to this thesis?

A major stand of this thesis, as discussed earlier, is that of my self-study of my values, praxis and educational growth as they have emerged over time through praxis. These are linked directly with the values that I have accepted from my synergy of the teachings of Japanese Buddhism. When writing about Buddhism, most scholars would separate out

ideology, theology, history and texts. I consciously and mindfully choose to live as an inclusional being, combining all these aspects alongside the filter of “*lived insider knowing*”. That is, I practice my daily disciplines as a Buddhist immersed in actual doing and in rituals of daily living influenced by the social context in which I live and function. I create my living educational theory of Buddhist enlightenment through the analysis of my experiential doing. This emergent theory demonstrates my learning process as I narrate my developing praxis integrating multiple sources of knowing into a new inclusional epistemology. I am using ‘inclusional’ as an answer to Schön’s (1995) call for the *requirement of a new epistemology* in engagement with Boyer’s (1992) *new forms of scholarship*. Inclusional epistemology includes Rayner’s (2003) idea of there being *many forms of knowing*, Wink’s (2005) conception of *moving beyond* and my own belief that to focus on any single epistemology reinforces the fragmentation of knowing rather than its integration to an inclusional wholeness.

Buddhism can seem like a highly complex and dense religion, but everything in Buddhism can be related back to a few basic teachings that really do encapsulate the essence of the teachings. Although simple, they often seem difficult to comprehend because they go against the grain of ordinary hopes and fears.

Buddhism is a non-theistic religion. Its central teachings point out to its followers the cause of and the cure for human suffering, locating both within human attitudes towards life. Buddhism is full of teasing contradictions as the life and teachings of Buddha were not written down until several hundred years after his death. Buddhism is not concerned about the existence of a supreme being, because a supreme being would be unable to stop or relieve suffering, as it is defined by Buddhists. A supreme being cannot cause human

beings to give up the attitudes that cause suffering. Only human beings are capable of that feat.

The foundational, spiritual and religious attitudes of Buddhism are summarized and communicated by the Four Noble Truths. It is the values of these Truths that I used as an ontological framework for my healing curriculum design, both in the internal structure of seeking to formulate learning outcomes and objectives and my internal framework which was modified through conscious reflection. These teachings suggest to me that the cause of misery is located in negative habitual patterns common to all beings. Succinctly put, human beings suffer while still unenlightened; all humans strive with all their energy for unattainable goals. Disliking boredom and discontentment, they strive for perfect and complete bliss. Disliking uncertainty, they strive for perfect complete security. Disliking death and finitude, they strive for perfect permanence in personal immortality. Such attachment brings about the cycle of rebirth.

Non-attachment does not mean non-caring. I care deeply and passionately about people, nursing and my teaching. I want to help relieve suffering and to that end I have made a vow, so I have yet another example of Whitehead's (1989) "living contradiction". On the one hand I seek enlightenment and release, and on the other I seek to care and serve. Such a duality is not as anomalous as it seems at first. I believe I can do both and serve in an enlightened way because, as I study and understand the phenomenon of myself, it is reflected back to me by the mirrors of others. Serving others reveals to me the issues of my own heart, my own suffering and attachments.

4. 2 Engaging in the Four Noble Truths

Through engaging with the concepts of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism and being willing to take risks entering the abyss (McClure 1996), I created my own yoga of participation (Skolimowski 1994) with new insights into myself and my values.

4. 2. 1 The First Noble Truth - Humiliation and Suffering (Jp: Ku-tai)

In the Buddha's teachings about the First Noble Truth there is inevitability about our own humiliation and suffering. We are all subject to decay, old age, death, loss, disappointment or disease from the moment of our conception. As Nyanatiloka (1968) reported:

Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering, to be united with the unpleasant is suffering, not to get what one desires is suffering (pp. 52-53).

From the grounding of my experiences of humiliation and suffering documented in “Warrior to Priest” (Adler-Collins 1996), and from the experience of my 100-day fast where I came to understand the reality of my humanness, its frailty and its strengths, I reflected on the conceptual meanings of the First Noble Truth. I asked myself: *How does self give itself value?* So, for example, my commitment to a loving and compassionate self emerged through the experience of humiliation and suffering. I transcended knowing and not-knowing, not by a theory written in words, but rather from knowing through doing.



Figure 8. Meditation is a basic and fundamental part of Buddhist practice. Our sect uses mountains and long walks without food, money or shelter as meditation practice. The above picture was taken on top of a mountain in Kogoshima, Japan, 1999.

[journal, April 2000: What is this spirituality thing that I seek, I can sense but not touch or taste? Spirituality, I feel, can be compared to the process of making steel; you start with the raw material and melt it down, bash it about, strip out the impurities and through this process the raw material slowly but surely changes into another state. Once again the cycle of melting down and being subjected to fire and force changes it until at the end of the cycle the raw iron ore has become steel. This steel can then be shaped into the sword of service, and it is this analogy that I use to express my understanding of my process. I can clearly identify where in my life I have been subjected to fire and to force; my earliest recollection is indeed that of fire when I was rescued from a house fire at the age of three. Through a series of domestic situations I was placed into care at the age of three and as a result was subjected to

institutionalised abuse in the form of what I now know to be sexual abuse as the unwilling victim of a paedophile ring, In my case the abusers were not men but women and, even in today's age of "enlightened" views, to suggest that women can be abusers of children remains a taboo. The patterning of this experience coloured my perception of women and love, and over the ensuing years caused me to be dysfunctional as a giver and receiver of love; so I have therefore identified a very active, negative filter. Yet even as I reflect back upon my understandings, I can see that to retread an old path is easy. Holding new hopes and consciousness in your heart as you blaze a new path is highly problematic and tiring. Sometimes the effort is too much; I imagine just for a moment giving up my struggle to change and to sink blissfully back into the past undisturbed by thoughts of understanding or improvement. Yet with the very next breath the seduction and illusion of such thinking jolts me back to my path of loving compassion. I have to try not to be so hard on myself and others...not perfect is OK.]

I questioned the Buddha and my faith. When I was a child I suffered when I had committed no crime. My youth and school years were full of violence, abuse and rejection, of anger and humiliation. Time after time I was subjected to situation after situation which was part, I believe now, of my learning process. However, I asked of myself: "Is this suffering essential to being enlightened?"

When I joined the army I found a new home where I had good clothes, good food, and money in my pocket. In reality I had exchanged one institution and form of abuse for another institution and a different form of abuse. I believe that there exists within us a

spark of universal truth and goodness, and despite what the physical reality of our lives can present us with, in my case I was always searching for good, for hope and for love. I can clearly see from my autobiography that perhaps some of the concepts and filters that were active in my understanding were indeed dysfunctional, but I was driven by the one underlying principle that I would succeed.

I became a compulsive over-achiever, driven in life to survive, and nothing I did was ever good enough; my intrinsic values of value and self-worth were practically non-existent. So how then could I change? This process of change, I believed, had to occur through understanding, in the sense that I was wounded and hurting. By avoiding the issues I was adding to the pain and the sense of disassociation that had become my defence coping strategy over the years. I was shocked to realise that I had become completely disconnected from myself and my ego. At times I seemed to be watching myself going about my life and yet not a part of it. I needed to become critical and sustain that critical sense of awareness over time, not in a judgemental, negative sense, but rather one of critical wonder as each layer of ignorance was dissolved with the solvent of loving consciousness. I believe that understanding is indeed transformational. It is where one can move from negative values and experiences by using filters of love, forgiveness and compassion, and in doing so can release oneself from the prison of pain and loneliness to the fullness and richness of true understanding. My transition occurred through several major incidents in my life where concepts and filters, which I had activated and were the fabric of my reality, were challenged to the point of breaking; and at one stage they did, indeed, break. This breaking down was my chance to break through and start to release my attachment to suffering and heal it with nurturing and compassion.

I include below an abstract from my journal of the first 100-day fast I did in the mountains of Japan, and this shows how deep the above issues were and that they were ready to be released. By 'released' I mean that the issues have surfaced to consciousness and can be addressed and let go of (heuristically). No longer being attached to any aspect of self results in the self being released from the influence of the experience.

[Day 33 - Sunday 2 Nov 1997

Good night, strange dreams. The human shadow mind is quite disgusting in some of its thoughts. They can leave an aftershock on the psychic. I am about to paint man's side of the hand in the Taizokai Mandala. It is very hard because it is as though a video is going off in my mind and I cannot turn it off. WHY DO I FEEL SO MUCH DISGUST WITH MY HUMANNESS? It is very easy to be spiritual sitting alone on a mountain. I must try and find a balance between the aesthetic and the carnal, we exist in many forms of need and experiences. I am trying to sort out the issues around sex and sexuality. It seems that I have not processed as much of the anger and pain as I have thought I had. The abuse I received has coloured all my relationships. What I thought was love, perhaps is not Love in its truest sense. More a collection of needs which are placed loosely in the folder called Love. We are sexual beings, it is one of our most primitive and powerful driving forces, yet in another sense it can be the most sacred and complete union of male and female energies of self, as well as the linking with others. Perhaps this is the fifth state of consciousness? What a mess! Where is my joy in the giving and sharing of me with another? Have I lost my ability to really open my heart and Love? Am I that scared?]

There is no greater teacher than personal experience, for it is in the doing that I actually retain learning. Theories, concepts and models are great as structures of thinking but prove

incredibly difficult to implement in the act of doing. I look upon the breakdown of my mind not as a bad experience, but as the removal of a series of dysfunctional philosophies, ideologies and experiences; it actually freed my mind to seek new foundations on which to build a new understanding. Buried deep within my psyche was the unfinished business of pain, grief and trauma that had to be processed for it poisoned my psyche and distorted my vision. On that mountain, at that time and place, I learned to cry, not in a self-pitying way but rather in a wave of release because I was free in that moment to shed all the tears that had been suppressed for years. I cried as I had never cried before in my life, for the hurt, anguish and loneliness of my life and for all the hurt, anguish and pain that I had been instrumental in bringing to others. I cried my soul back into my body. Each tear burnt like acid as it left a trail down my dirty face that led back to a dark place in my soul bringing forgiveness and light. Through the hours of crying alone on that mountain I came to the realisation that there was more to me than pain and a physical body; the spark of goodness that I referred to was, for me, the spark of inner connectedness to a universe of mystery. Yet I also believe that allowing for mystery to be in your life is not an easy process, for if you acknowledge that the mystery represents the potential for inclusionality in mankind, you soon find that you are in a state of conflict with theory and actual living practice. In seeking my living practice I commenced a journey of discovery where, much to my surprise, I found good people, good values and love.

I cannot get away from the word "love", for it is now a fundamental framework on which the whole cosmology of my life is built. Love to me previously meant manipulation and abuse, but through my process of learning and understanding compassion, thus bringing about my passion for compassion, I made a personal vow that I would never violate the

integrity of another human being or my own personal truth. Holding these values meant that I looked at my world through different eyes; I was no longer blinded by my sight and could see beauty and peace whereas before I only saw suffering and pain. I was no longer deaf through hearing, but by not hearing I could feel the vibration that the words carried. My reality consists of beauty, light, colour and love, and the transition was implemented through my finding the love of people. Through this love the angry wounded individual that I had been was no longer a valid or acceptable option; the filters of judgement and judgementalism could no longer be sustained and I learned the valuable lesson of discernment, for I believe that judgement indicates a personal attachment to the outcome. Discernment allows that everything has reason and value and looks at the object in its context to see in both a wholeness as part of an inclusional reality of harmony between inner and outer worlds.

To my understanding, human beings need to find some justification for their being; for me this justification is my very existence. I see myself as a vessel that has been shaped, like the steel, through forces on and in my life, and I live by the belief that it is not the vessel that is important, but the space that it creates. Once the space has been created, the mystery that I referred to above can fill that space with love, and I have also been allowed through my own experiences to heal myself through the gift of healing others. As a teacher I believe that I have a responsibility in service, not just to teach but in my own way to use myself as a living instrument of truth that good, courage and love can transcend. I seek to transfer, through my teaching, some of the understandings and values that I am attached to in a very un-Buddhist way. The army taught me discipline, my religion teaches me faith, and my life allows me to live my values of love and compassion.

The truth I now try to embody came out of answering this question: *How does self give itself value?* as I became conscious of the significance of loving and feeling compassionate towards myself and others, and releasing them and myself from suffering.

4. 2. 2 The Second Noble Truth - Thirst and Craving (Jp: Jit-tai)

The arising of dukkha (pervasive unsatisfactoriness) is a theme explaining that the cause of suffering is thirst and craving, of which the Buddha describes two types. The first is craving for sensual pleasures; the second that of craving for existence and non-existence. Perhaps in modern terms we can equate this latter with narcissistic craving, the thirst for a fixed image of self, either something or nothing. This would suggest that the Buddhist approach tells of a core insecurity that is beyond the content of any individual experience. We wish to know ourselves securely, to be sure of who we are and what we are, but we are frustrated from the beginning by one essential contradiction. We, as the experiencing subject, can never know ourselves satisfactorily as object. We cannot experience ourselves indivisibly but must experience ourselves as either subjective or objective, as a knower or as that which is known.

[The Buddhist method of resolving this dilemma is to encourage states of non-knowing. To me this is somewhat of a contradiction. I have doubts about my self and my "I", for being the centre of my own universe in terms of consciousness I feel that it is essential to discover if the truths and realities of my universe are really mine or am I seeing through the illusory and acquired filters of others, i. e. parents, culture etc? I feel it is essential to go into doubt rather than away from it, almost purposefully disrupting existing structures rather than indulging them. This process was traumatic for me, as the

experiences of my two 100-day fasts were intended to be. A question I asked, with some concern for my sense of identity, was, if I remove the acquired filters of self from my Buddhist beliefs, then what is left?]

When asked the question "What is the nature of self?" the Buddha is said to have replied: "There is neither self nor non-self. The question itself is flawed, for it is being asked from a place that has already assumed that self was a entity". Perhaps more than anything else this one idea represents the basic difference in ontology between East and West.

My reflections about my thirst and craving for self-knowledge led me to the polar opposites of knowing and not-knowing. I needed to learn to surf Bernstein's (2000) discursive gap, to become at home in the primordial space of inclusional emergence (Adler-Collins 2004a). Living in the illusion of reality brought about the fragmentation of my mind. Here is an entry from my journal which indicates the point at which my mind broke:

[I went into catatonic shock and I remember nothing but darkness. It was like someone had turned a switch off inside my head and the fragmented reality of my truth could no longer hold me in any form of framework and I ceased to be.

IT was happy, IT was content; IT was darkness, soft silky, warm but total. IT stirred with a primeval concept that something was interfering with the nothingness. IT was aware that peripheral to ITs existence there was a bright light. This light disturbed ITs silence. The light was invading ITs darkness. IT felt fear

and under no circumstances would IT look at the light. Then suddenly the light became central and the universe of darkness became flooded with the stars and light and colour flashing through the vortexes of time, space and dimension and I woke up and I became (Adler-Collins 1998, p. 45).]

I had been unable for years to revisit the time of my mental breakdown, partly because of the trauma and shock of the event, partly because of the pain, but mainly from a sense of guilt and unworthiness. I had been so strong and finally I was broken. The shock and horror at my treatment instilled in me a burning desire to improve mental health care. What I can see today, with the clarity of the insights I hold now, is that far from it being a dark experience, the breaking down to break through released the chains of conditioning from my mind, freeing me to evolve into who I am now. I transcended the attachment and craving to being, not by a theory or hypothesis but by praxis, and through praxis I evolved a new form of knowing.

[The stigma of mental illness branded me then and still is carried today, for when a senior member of faculty read in my draft writing of this thesis about my hospitalisation she reported to the Dean that I was a schizophrenic and the Dean told the senior professors. From that moment on I was shunned by faculty even more than I had been up to that time. Mental illness in Japan is treated worse than a physical deformity. When I heard this I was saddened and explained that I had had post-traumatic stress syndrome which caused my hospitalisation. I recovered and it was over 17 years ago. It made little difference to faculty, who had their image of me and my instability which made it easier for faculty to place all my actions and ideas under the heading of "mental instability". I cannot express the sadness I felt at the actions of my Dean in talking to others about a member of her staff's medical

history. Such action is a breach of confidentiality at best. To report something in error that is grounded in hearsay without asking the individual involved is an offence against that individual, an abuse of power and position, and demonstrates extremely poor management skills. However, I did not pursue legal redress, which would have damaged our new faculty already troubled with an exodus of staff. Rather I chose to seek the reason why such action was taken. The damage done by my Dean's actions remains with me to this day; however, I understand her reasons and those of her faculty who subscribe to such thinking. It also showed me how I no longer needed or craved the approval of other people. But it still hurt and wounded me so very, very deeply, a tough lesson in compassionate forgiveness.]

4. 2. 3 The Third Noble Truth - Release (Jp. Met-tai)

Goldstein and Kornfield (1987) introduced me to a Buddhist idea about release through a translation of the Dhammapada; a poem of joy which the Buddha was said to have exclaimed on his realisation of enlightenment:

*I wander through the rounds of countless births
seeking but not finding the builder of this house
sorrowful indeed is birth again and again
Oh house builder! You have now been seen.
You shall build the house no longer
all your rafters have been broken,
Your ridgepole shattered.*

My mind has attained to unconditional freedom, achieved is the end of Craving. (p. 83)

[Because of our cravings, the Buddha is saying that we want things to become understandable. We reduce, concretise or substantialise. I cannot accept the strand of Buddhism which stipulates that we are born into humanness through our sin, through the wheel of life. I choose to believe that I create my humanness through my love and service to others. I do, however, recognise that by exposing my cravings and needs and bringing them to my attention I release myself from following their demands unquestioningly.

My thirst for knowledge and understanding can also constrict rather than release me. I want things, including myself, to be understandable, to explain myself to myself and others as a singularity in the way McClure (1996) has characterised the narratives of becoming an action researcher. In the release from this craving for objective knowledge, which emerged from my entry into the abyss of my two 100-day fasts (Adler-Collins, 1996, 2000), I no longer seek to be perfect, and no longer measure myself against standards of perfection, assumed or implied in the external standards of judgements used to test the validity of claims to knowledge.]

In releasing myself from my craving for a particular kind of self-knowledge, I now see myself and my knowledge as part of a continuous process of tension and creation, as part of a process of improvisatory self-realisation (Winter, 2003). As I create my own living theories in the sense that I am creating my descriptions and explanations for my own learning, I improve my understanding and learning of my spirituality and educational practices. I believe my self-knowledge to be created through my fictions, my mirages, my shadows and my dreams. I also believe that I am a vessel of love and compassion, and am in service to the learning and healing of others, where my “I” can transfer and transform into the “We” of a loving collective community.

Eisner (1997), in his paper *The Promises and Perils of Alternative Forms of Data Representation*, gave me greater insights to the process of release, for he stated:

We are, in a sense, looking for new stars. We are also looking for new seas. We are, as I said earlier, exploring the edges. There is, I think, no better place from which to see the stars and no better position from which to discover new seas than the view one gets from the edge (p. 8)

Eisner finished his paper with a poem by Christopher Logue, an English poet (1926-) (a poem often incorrectly attributed to Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918):

"Come to the edge", he said.

They said, "We are afraid."

"Come to the edge", he said.

They came.

He pushed them.

And they flew. (Eisner, 1997, p. 9)

I can truly identify with the sense of release through exploration and can say that I have swum in new seas, explored new stars and I did not need to be pushed. Freely I jumped. Release from craving and attachment is often hard to visualise, let alone achieve in practice. In the context of Japanese Kyudo (archery), I was asked to write about my feelings at a recent 3rd Dan, (April 2007) test for the next level of black belt. I wrote that Kyudo is life and a form of truth. Why truth? In the eight stages of the form of Kyudo, breath is important as it leads up to the release when the shooter, the bow, the arrow and

the target all become one in complete harmony. The release is abandonment as the moment fills with MU (everything and nothing). It is also a mirror, for as the mirror reflects so does the form. If you are in harmony with your breath, focused in your heart and peaceful, the form reflects this as a dance of controlled grace. If you are attached to your form, or your mind wanders, then your form clearly shows it. Perhaps this is the clearest way I have yet found to look at truth. I am presented with the evidence of my form by my form. I hit the target with good form, I hit the target with bad form, I miss the target with good form, I miss the target with bad form. Internally I am not attached to the process. Externally it is clear to those who watch what my process is (Annex A).

4. 2. 4 The Fourth Noble Truth - The Path (Jp: Do-tai)

The Fourth Noble Truth dictates the pathway which one walks. This is based on the eight elements of mindfulness:

1. Right Views (Jp: Sho-ken)
2. Right Aspirations (Jp: Sho-shiyuki)
3. Right Speech (Jp: Sho-gyo)
4. Right Actions (Jp: Sho-go)
5. Right Livelihood (Jp: Sho-myo)
6. Right Effort (Jp: Sho-shoji)
7. Right Mindfulness (Jp: Sho-nen)
8. Right Meditation (Jp: Sho-jo)

In essence the Fourth Noble Truth is the construct of my living educational theory, for in order to walk my path I must continually self-survey, self-correct and self-improve in the stories of my learning. The fundamental truth is that it is the journey of my truth, for the

answers lie within me. It is not a reinvention of me or a making-up of a form of self. I believe it is a discovery of a self which is already there, and my separation from this is causal to my fragmentation. I question and doubt my rationale for I cannot cognitively form an answer to the question that, if I remove all the perceived filters of my "I", then do I cease to exist? Perhaps I do? Perhaps I move beyond the cognitive ability to construct linguistic meanings into accepting another dimension of existence with its mysterious core of being (another risk!). Perhaps this is the true meaning of nothingness and the true abyss?

It is through finding, healing and releasing my own qualities of love and compassion that I have transcended the experience of negative abandonment (Adler-Collins 1996) in seeking to lead a loving productive life, and to fulfil what is expected of me by myself. This journey is a constant framing and re-framing of consciousness (Schön 1995). In Shingon we believe that we can achieve enlightenment in this lifetime, which for me is an ultimate goal. I have concern about use of the word 'right', as attachments and values of right can be inflammatory to others. It poses the question of "Whose truth is it anyway?" and I am mindful that many claim something to be right. In this context I am giving the doctrines as taught. I have already said that I do accept them as is, and I openly challenge and question with all the academic rigour that I can bring to focus. I believe that I cannot learn the essence of my faith from a book, I believe that I have to live and test the very fabric of the texts through my praxis, for not to do so removes the fluidity of the dynamic boundaries of knowing which then solidify and become dogma, and I am once again trapped in suffering.

In my present understanding I hold in tension my belief that there are universal truths in our humanity which are constants in my universe, such as the truths of love, compassion,

tolerance, non-judgementalism and understanding. These go together with belief in my own human truths which are the shifting values and descriptors I use between my state of consciousness now and that of my ultimate enlightenment.

By using the scaffolding of the structures of the Buddhist Four Noble Truths and the framework of Skolimowski's (1994) *Yoga of Transformation*, I have evolved a heuristic living educational theory and union of ideas and concepts that have been integrated into my own consciousness and become part of my new truth through my experiential doing. It is this transition that I make my own, between the theories and models of others and my claim to knowing. It is these understandings that I hold as a framework of values for the development of my curriculum of the healing nurse; for I believe that a prime directive of a nurse is akin to that of Buddha, to relieve suffering and anguish. I consciously do not develop the term 'nurse' into the western concept of 'specialist' or 'expert', rather I hold it in its generic inclusional meaning that my nursing duty is to ease suffering and bring relief of pain, be it physical, mental, emotional or spiritual.

As I believe it, I have made my understanding of the basic beliefs of Buddhism clear, and it is useful here to explore how Buddhism can be perceived through a Western gaze that I bring to Eastern forms of knowing

4. 3 Buddhism West looking East.

Buddhism is remarkable for its adaptability. Wherever it goes, Buddhism picks up a veneer of local cultural and social aspects but, at the same time, the core message does not change. For example, Shingon Buddhism has existed in Japan for nearly 1200 years. During that time it has acquired a large amount of cultural influence from pre-Buddhist

Japanese culture. As a Westerner who was introduced to Shingon and other forms of Buddhism, I think it is important to understand that the core of Buddhism may appear to be, and often is, different in different environments as its teachings are integrated into culturally led practices. I do not believe that this cultural influence detracts from the basic message of Buddhism, which is that of peaceful and compassionate existence within yourself, your environment, and your fellow travellers in this life as we seek to end suffering in this world.

Buddhism had its historic conceptual beginnings in India. There has never been a pure non-culturally based form of Buddhism. From its early conception it was influenced by Indian culture and that influence was strongly Hindu. When Buddhism moved to China, some Indian elements were omitted and many Chinese cultural aspects were included. Such aspects included influences from Taoism and Confucianism. This is reflected in Buddhist art as the form of the Buddha took on a distinctly Chinese look. When Buddhism came to Japan via China, it came as the Chinese version. Because Japan was and is a Confucian culture, most of the Confucian elements found in Chinese Buddhism were retained. Aspects of Japanese folk religion were also included.

[Here again I have my doubts about if it is important or not to use my Western critical mind to analyse cultural growth, as my own understanding is not equipped to understand the cultural nuances. For example, in Chinese, Korean and Japanese Buddhism, ancestor veneration is very important. This is not found in Indian, Tibetan, or other forms of Buddhism. It is a Confucian layer added on to Buddhism. There is nothing wrong with ancestor veneration, that is to say, nothing specifically opposed to Buddhist teachings, but it is not necessary for Buddhism. (Part of me feels deeply connected to my ancestors. I feel no separation from them and often talk with what I imagine

are my Irish roots and my Scottish roots). But it would be counterproductive for people who were not native Easterners, for example Europeans, who lack a tradition of ancestor veneration, to be required to maintain such aspects in a form of Buddhism that they imported from Japan, for example. It would simply seem too alien for the majority of them.]

It is my experience that Japanese lay followers of Buddhism, at the present, are usually only marginally aware of the teachings of Buddhism. They rarely have a concept of conditioned origination, but rather almost universally believe in the existence of individual souls or spirits. This is an influence from the native religion, Shinto. Almost never accepting the idea of rebirth, they believe that upon death a ‘soul’ continues to exist in some plane to watch over its descendants. The spirits of the ancestors must be propitiated by regular offerings made by the descendants, in return for which the descendants are benefited somehow by the spirits of the ancestors.

Shingon means "true word", and is the Japanese translation of the word Sanskrit, or "mantra". Its core belief can be summarized in the sentence "Sokushin-Jobutsu", which means to become Buddha in this life with this body. This is achieved by purifying the heart of parasitic passions, by cultivating modesty, simplicity, purity and concentration, so that it becomes possible to express our Buddha nature naturally.

[The teaching of Shingon refers mainly to two holy texts, Kongotcho-kyo and Dainitchi-kyo, written in about the second century in the monastery of Nalanda in the north of India. This Buddhist school from the yoga of the three mysteries, "Traiguya-yoga", explains that it is possible to become Buddha in this life, contrary to the other schools of this time which consider that it is necessary to accumulate spiritual experience of many reincarnations to reach that point. I find it an inconsistency in Buddhist

teachings that teach that there is no form or permanence yet quite happily refer to reincarnations of the same soul in a different form. This is one of the basic teachings of Tibetan Buddhism.

However, these teachings affirm that the original nature of spirit man is pure, and it is at the heart of compassion, the "bodhi", that the essence is identical to that of the universe. By this reasoning, the belief is that the essence of Dainitchi Nyorai (Creator Buddha) is in everything that has achieved form and not form. Shingon teachings offer hope to those who seek enlightenment in this lifetime.

If we suffer, it is because we stick to what is impermanent in this world of form and desire, and that each of us conceives according to what he/she internally craves. Passions, gathered under the headings of the triple poisons, desire, anger and blindness, correspond to vital forces necessary for the survival and development of any animal organization. Desire and aversion structure the ego and oblige it to improve so as to better arrive at its material ends and ensure its survival. During many past lives, the need to assert ourselves and defend our territory developed a dualistic vision of the world which impregnated the subconscious of all beings. In science it is the principal cause of the loss of a more total perception of life. This is why, in ordinary Buddhism, it is said that "by the extinction of passions can be reached illumination". Such thinking, to my mind, creates tensions of attachment and what would lead to our believing that there are good and bad tendencies in human beings. This in turn would "demonise" sensuality and sexuality. I try to live by not creating barriers of thought that need to be made distinct, and respectfully suggest, rather, that they need to be entered, examined, experienced and transcended.

Therefore, it is not a question of giving up all my needs, but rather of spiritualizing my life; for example, while eating, doing so with a feeling of recognition with respect to the beings from which we feed ourselves. To feed ourselves becomes a spiritual practice, because to absorb food amounts to

taking part in the process of the life of the universe. Sexuality, which is not dealt with well in Buddhist texts, other than as regards avoidance, should I believe be given a greater and more open debate, for sexual energy is the drive for the creation of new life. I find it strange that, in some Buddhist thinking, if they avoided sex and the issues of reproduction, the cycle of rebirth would indeed be broken, not through any spiritual transition but from the fact that there would not be enough biological bodies for the souls to inhabit.

On another matter, albeit from a relative point of view, it is still a fact that passions are causing suffering and leading us away from our spiritual path. Shingon Shu looks at passions from a teaching perspective as absolute truth, as having the same nature as that of the awakening, because it is this same vital force that animates beings towards mundane desires that will be transformed and sublimated by internal alchemy in the spiritual energy of compassion-wisdom, whose essence is the ultimate nature of the universe and of all beings. Those who have experienced in the bottom of their hearts that they are the same as all beings, become one with the whole and dissolve their ego in the universe as a drop of water dissolves in the ocean. However, to really understand something it should also be perceived in its totality beyond details, and focus should not be just on the empirical, otherwise the theory built to explain it can be reducing and false. So it is necessary to increase the sensitivity and the volume of perception, in making an abstraction of one's a priori theory. This means developing an inner opening with respect for the other and life, which is possible only if the heart is humble, soft, without prejudice, and sympathetic; this is known as a bodhi heart. The larger that compassion is, the more perceptions become fine, direct and immediate, because one perceives the other through the heart. It is not only by theory that knowledge can be obtained, but through intuition.]

4. 4 In this chapter, I have offered some insights on my faith and how I use that faith for underpinning some of my values and discernments. I consciously attempt to live my life as compassionately as I can. Yet I am mindful of my living contradictions in the moments when my actions contradict my beliefs. It is at these times that I need to stop, reflect, re-assess and learn. The goal of achieving enlightenment in this lifetime is, I believe, achievable, but more importantly I believe that the journey towards understanding my humanness has already enriched my existence.

[I believe I have presented a clear understanding of my ontological position, one that the reader will be able to recognise in its lived authenticity in the oncoming narrative of my experiences and processes. I also believe that sufficient information has been given to comply with one of the conditions of living action research accounts, in that the transparency of my values and beliefs, which I use as standards of discernment in this thesis, are openly identified for my reader and enable him/her to see the process of my lived values in action as they inform my discernments and judgements. The ontological positioning of my narrative modifies itself in response to my learning. Therefore my pedagogic practice is also modified. In essence I consciously bring to my practice the values of my faith outlined above. In my life as a monk, nurse and educator I am reminded of Paulo Freire, a writer who has influenced and inspired me beyond anything I can place into words. Friere's words of humanity and compassion were reflected in the writings of Wink (2005), "Critical Pedagogy: notes from the real world" where she says: "When I hear his words, I learn and relearn to focus on teaching and learning that is rigorous and joyful" (p.84). Wink encapsulates my embodied values and my heart sings for she articulates values that I hope my reader can see in my narrative as clearly as I can see them in the work of Freire, Wink, Rayner, Whitehead and so many others, namely those of

passion, compassion, rigour and joy. My Buddhism is the fabric of my life world; my scholarship is the threads that are woven to the design of my conscious, joyous enquiry. My mantra echoes the words of Wink: rigorous and joyful, rigorous and joyful.]

It is these values and understandings that I bring to my curriculum design. In the next chapter I analyse the difficult process of: *representing my knowledge through my knowing.*