

PART TWO: LIVED EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERIENCING LOVE

In this Chapter I articulate my experiential knowing, and inquire into the relation of feeling with thought, I write 'through' feeling as I also think about and respond to the ideas of others, whilst holding the sense of divine love as a part of myself.

The reader will find ideas and quotes repeated here that are also part of the propositional framing set out in Part One.

This Chapter was written at the beginning of my inquiry, before I had fully developed my methodology. As my inquiry emerged I began to use this reflective writing to learn more from my accounts of practice.

Many of the themes arising here are reiterated over the course of my inquiry.

The commentary in italics is intended as a signpost for the reader.

STORIES

This section covers some of my history. The stories demonstrate the transformative capacities of love and have informed my understanding of the generative power of love in adult learning and development.

These stories cover periods in my life starting in childhood. I have moved a long way from these narratives, but to ignore them, to push them aside, would be to deaden the seed of something that is also vital and passionate.

These are fictionalised accounts following the themes of equality (left hand column) and the searches for love (right hand column).

In the left-hand column I have described some of my early experiences working in the public sector in the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's. They would be remembered differently by those who shared the same time and the same events with me.

This is contrasted on the right hand column with stories of my developing identity. The first story in the right-hand column is a complete fantasy. The right hand column has taken many rewrites of the personal stories until I felt satisfied that they were neither over sentimental, dramatic, or embarrassingly confessional, and yet told tales that are authentically representative of the psychological and spiritual healing process that I was (and still am) involved in.

The reader may find the columns distracting, but this is a metaphor for the way that I have made meaning in my life. It has been in large part, a fragmented, split and relatively solitary journey. By writing in this way I am reminding myself of the context within which the experience of love has brought me to a new sense of self.

Reflections on ... Equality of Opportunity Myself, a fiction ...

When did I first come across this term? Probably when I began to work for the LB Lambeth in the early 1980's.

Before that - in the 1970's - prior to working in paid employment, I was involved in various community activities that were focussed on increasing neighbourhood facilities for women with children in need and enabling women's voices to be heard within local government.

Between 1964 and 1968 I had three small children and so it was a natural step to become involved with the pre-school playgroup movement. From this experience I learned about the value of pre-school and/or nursery education and got together with other local women to lobby for increased local facilities. We carried out a needs survey on an estate in Kilburn which was (very briefly) reported in the Guardian! In the end the 'Brent Campaign for the Under Fives' achieved funding for a childminders' centre and a toy library which is still in use today.

1970 - 82 was a politically active time for me. I was both a prime mover and supporter of a whole range of new initiatives arising out

Once upon a time there was a big potato and a little potato. They were out on a journey, a big exploration.

However the big potato was faltering, and asked if the smaller one would help. Now the little potato did not know how or what to do, but she tried to do what the big potato wanted, and together they muddled through.

Although the little potato got very tired, and her roots had grown longer and thinner than was good for her, she felt happy because the big potato was happy.

Then one day, the big potato disappeared suddenly in a big turmoil and without saying goodbye. There was nothing left for it but for the little potato to carry on travelling on her own.

Then, just as suddenly, the big potato reappeared with a baby potato. This time, however, the big potato said she did not want to carry on doing what they had always done together. Instead she sent the little one out to find useful and nourishing things to eat. The little potato NEVER let them down, and always brought useful and sustaining food back home.

Little potato did not get any reward for doing this, still this role made her feel important, and she quite liked exploring

of the networking potential of the local women's movement.

I had planned to stop volunteering for the CABx and go out to work part-time as soon as my youngest child started nursery school, but in the event my husband became ill and I went to work full time for the LB Brent while my partner cared for the children.

It was as a receptionist at an advice agency that I started my career in paid employment in 1972. The Seebohm Report had considered the problem of equality of access and had recommended setting up generic advice agencies combining Local Authority social services and housing advice agencies under one roof. The local authority recognised the need to provide accessible services, and I saw my role as an advisor, explaining to potential recipients the services and welfare support that was on offer, advising them about what was possible and acting as an advocate where necessary.

This was a generalised and universal service, which was to be delivered to those people who were not aware of their rights, or who could not read or write, or for whom bureaucracy was - for any reason - impenetrable. Taking this perspective was coherent with my socialist and feminist ideals, and at that time I felt that I was living and working in accordance with those beliefs.

However, it was a paternalistic approach that assumed a degree of hegemony of need which when combined with a requirement for conformity meant that many groups of people were excluded, either because the services were not appropriate or because the access routes to those services were too narrowly defined.

I was appointed to my first management position as Principal Officer in the Housing Advice Centre at Lambeth in 1979. I was

new places. Then she began to realise that while she was out, big potato and baby potato had fun. Sometimes little potato came back quickly to see if she could have some fun too, but every time she tried to join in it stopped. Like the light going off when you close the fridge door.

Little potato got anxious and afraid, but was consoled by knowing that she was very good at hunting and foraging and finding good and interesting things to bring home. Sometimes she thought that they might be pushing her to go out.

As she got bigger, little potato began to get lost when she went out hunting, and when she came home the feeling of 'something missing' became more and more painful. Then one day she realised that they were laughing at her. 'What's the point?' She thought, and wanted to become a mashed potato. But potatoes can't mash themselves - you need a potato masher for that.

So, little potato decided to live outside in the world.

not particularly aware of the anti-race discrimination legislation - Section 71 of the 1976 Race Relations Act - that left-wing Labour local authorities were using to introduce the new policies. Amongst staff, the explanation for the introduction of Equal Opportunities Policies was spoken about in terms of local politics and local Councillors desire for further re-election! The argument went something like this

- Labour Councillors need to be re-elected in marginal wards, and so they are using Equal Opportunities as a device to demonstrate that they are more accountable to their electors who live in social housing.
- These policies show that the Council is an equal opportunity employer, and as such it has a duty to act as a model to other employers and contractors.

These very laudable aims did not contribute to create the conditions that would enable me to either manage staff or deliver services effectively. Equal Opportunities training courses were obligatory for all staff and led to an emphasis on individual rights, and subsequently there were high expectations amongst staff who defined themselves as belonging to minority groups. There was confusion amongst staff members about their right to be treated with fairness and respect, and their responsibilities as staff members to the employer. This also (almost inevitably it seems to me now) led to challenges about how we recruited staff. At one time when the staff vacancy rates were high in the Housing Advice Centre, the Council agreed a strategy of only shortlisting and appointing registered disabled applicants for jobs. It was a difficult time for any

The flagpole...

I used to stay with my Granny in the holidays. She had a flat by the sea overlooking the promenade. One day I was playing up at the other end of the prom. The public conveniences were there. They were situated in a nice old red brick building that was always locked in the winter and surrounded by tough old green and yellow leathery leafed bushes. A few yards away, in the middle, between the bushes and the fence that marked the end of the promenade, there was a flagpole.

On that day there was a group of children playing there, and I wanted to join in.

'Let's play flagpoles' they said. 'Yes, let's,' I said. 'Give us your hands then,' they said, 'OK' I said and gave them my hands. 'Lets do the feet' they said, 'OK' I said and moved my feet together. 'This is jolly fun' I thought to myself.

Then suddenly I was alone. I turned my head to the right, and could see that everyone else was a long way away. Playing beyond the shingle beach, down on the sand where the tide had left puddles by the base of the big breakwater that had a light on the top. Only then did I realise that I had allowed myself to be tied to the flagpole.

It wasn't summer and the day was grey and misty and no one was around. I couldn't move my hands or my feet.

Around the corner of the loos came a boy. 'Where have they all gone?' I asked. 'Shall I set you free?' he said in reply. I nodded and he untied my hands. In my relief I tried to walk, forgetting that my feet were also bound. I fell badly onto my knees and I cannot remember who released my feet. I started to cry, and half-ran the long prom back to the flat, sobbing and shaking.

well - that's when I learned to 'feel' what it was really all about - individual and collective empowerment and organisational transformation!

Race awareness training I found new and interesting. It enabled me to begin to understand how I might work with cultural differences and how this might lead to genuinely new and exciting change. Using Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act, the Council appointed specialist staff to work with particular community groups. As a consequence, I had the privilege of managing staff who set up locally based organisations, a couple of which thrived and developed into what are now, twenty years on, sustainable and growing organisations.

Race Awareness sessions had been designed by the training department as a way of reducing staff expectation, and encouraging a culture of tolerance. I think it came too late to 'save' the quality of the Housing Advice service, which continued to be interrupted by threats of strikes and strike action for a period of several years.

Working in Lambeth, I began to understand-in-practice how politics (with a small p) operates within organisations. I watched in amazement as local authorities like Brent and the GLC obtained legal opinions that enabled them to act in the way that they wished, and how my superiors interpreted and managed - or blocked - Council Members wishes. How the Council operated in practice was not to do with legislation, but to do with individual interpretation of the legislation and the influence exerted by key individuals. And when the Leader of the Council and other key figures in the Labour Party were successfully prosecuted and surcharged, it was clear that the issues were about central government control, rather than compliance with legislation. I was watching my 'theoretical frameworks' crumble at the same

my mouth and no meaning comes out, but s/he responds all the same - how is this happening.

- Am I dying now or later?

The fragility produced by anxiety and depression makes nonsense of socially constructed meanings. The person I understand to be 'me' easily slides away and what is left? I am a bag of bones, a collection of chemistry.

But I have things to do, children to look after, money to earn, food to shop for, meals to cook, a house to clean. If I cannot do these things, the children will go hungry, the house will be repossessed, the children will go into care and I will be living in the gutter. I long to be able to take the ordinary and the mundane for granted, to speak without self-conscious terror sitting on my shoulder.

But noticing myself teetering on the edge has become the focus of my existence. I have become super sensitive to the nuances of my body - am I still breathing? What was that thought, does it mean I am mad NOW? Have I started to fall into my nightmare or can I still clutch at the commonplace and keep pretending that I am here? Now the ground is shaking, everything is vertiginous and the goal posts are moving. I don't recognise anything anymore.

This is madness. They ask questions like,

- Do you sleep OK?
- How long have you had these sensations?
- Have you been to the Doctor's?
- Do you take Primrose Oil?

I am screaming inside and they offer opinions like,

- Well lets look up the symptoms in the medical books.
- You ought to do more yoga / swimming / acupuncture
- You should trust more, give up work, ask your partner to ...
- Its called alienation,

time as I watched the service disintegrate.

Marxists / feminists say it is political ...

Women's issues

I was much involved in the women's movement in the 1980's, particularly around peace issues. I was part of a Women's support group for Greenham Common, and we had consciousness raising and trust-building sessions to prepare for our visits. During the Miners' Strike, we held fundraising evenings to support the Miners' Wives and met regularly as part of our attempt to 'change the world'.

I am not an object, and I am not rational, and I have had all the medical help that is possible. Trust and security make no sense to me. I do my exercises and it makes no difference. If the Doctor takes me seriously it makes me worse, but I must go and see her 'just in case'.

I was an avid reader of Spare Rib, and although I did not recognise or think of the articles at the time as philosophical, but it was through this magazine that I became familiar with the feminist critiques based on post-structuralist and postmodernist theory. I had taken 'the personal is political' on board with a sense of recognition and relief that made a real difference to my life.

It is not surprising that I became addicted to minor tranquillisers. I used, on a daily basis, any combination of Valium, Librium, Ativan, in quantities that far exceeded the medically prescribed 'safe' doses. If I dosed myself into a semi-comatose condition, only then did I feel safe.

At the point when feminists were beginning to realise the importance of recognising differences of class and race between women's experiences, I began to realise the organisational possibilities that could be created through awareness of, and the honouring of, differing perspectives. My belief in the possibility of influencing and building new and better structures in society, and my commitment to bring about change in organisations and local communities remained and were still motivating me to action. However there were other strands in my working life that were running in the opposite direction.

Like an underground stream, these issues ultimately surfaced.

- There was the major discomfort of managing staff who made personal accusations of racism

and discrimination, some of which were probably correct, mostly they were not.

- Being a manager meant all managers became a symbol of oppression and authority, and groups of staff did not look further than the stereotype. Did I believe that this kind of hierarchical organisational structure was a 'good' thing and did I want to fulfil this kind of role?
- Organisational disruption was partly brought about by the implementation of equal opportunities policies, in which I firmly believed, but which seemed to have caused a reduction, not an enhancement, of service. There was an implementation gap between the introduction of a policy and organisational behaviour.
- Giving housing advice was becoming more dangerous. Staff were threatened by members of the public more frequently, and the resources available were being reduced. Watching this, being part of this, being held responsible for this, was personally too painful.

Finding my Self...

I was awakened like Sleeping Beauty by the power of a single kiss, love shattering fear and bringing hope and happiness into my life.

In 1984, by chance, I met someone who practised meditation. I had already started playing relaxation tapes for myself, as a way of recovering from drug withdrawal, and I knew meditation was an even better way of relaxing. I pestered this person asking to be taught meditation, and 7 months later was given a meditation technique.

It was during this teaching that I came awake, just like Sleeping Beauty, touched lightly and softly by love as I meditated. Love broke through my fear and because of this acceptance; forgiveness and hope flowered within me.

The simplicity and directness of this experience of love brought me home to myself. There are many theoretical ways that this experience could be explained. I choose to see it simply as unconditional love. The effect of this love was to create the potential within me for psychological, cognitive and spiritual growth, and enabled me to start an inner search for that 'sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused', which I knew - now - could become a living reality.

Moving on...

It was with an enormous sense of relief that I moved out of local government and into the Housing Association movement. Most of my sense of liberation was about escaping from the inexorable daily

demand from homeless or badly housed people for social housing. But some of it was also about escaping from the Labour Left straitjacket. Yippee, I could leave the school uniform behind!

I feel now as if there is nothing more that I can learn about the meaning or implementation of equal opportunity policies. Is this wrong of me, is my mind closed? I do not think so. When the results of the Macpherson Inquiry into the Stephen Lawrence affair concluded that there was institutional racism within the police force, surely no one was REALLY surprised?

My time at Lambeth Council showed me how anti-discriminatory policies work against powerful and dominant ideologies. It showed me how important such policies are and how it is important to set agendas to combat institutionalised discriminatory practices, and I think that this did make a difference in individual peoples lives. And we set up new community based organisations. But on the other hand, I also learned about the power of political persuasion, about how power and influence can be used unwisely, and the damage that policies - even ones that might be morally justified - can have either if there are hidden agendas or less than altruistic intentions are present.

It seems to me now that equality issues in the public sector are at the tip of the iceberg below which there needs to be a broad range of egalitarian social objectives.

How can I change the world now?

This is a question that I continue to ask. 17 years ago, I answered it by changing my job and spending time and money on self-development.

My attention turned inward, saying to myself, 'I cannot love others if I do not first love myself. There is no reason why I should have a better opinion about how to change the world than anyone else.' And I learned to be quieter, and stopped shouting about inequality and injustice and worked on the meaning of forgiveness instead.

My opinion about love ...

Belief without love is fanaticism

Justice without love is severe

Duty without love is uncaring

Order without love is obsession

Power without love is tyrannical

Life without love makes you ill

Two major themes seem to emerge from these stories, which I now realise have carried (I might say 'driven') me forward from early childhood to the present day. The first theme is a passionate commitment to equality, which arose from being displaced as the only child in the family, and the second is a hunger for love, which emanated from those tremendous feelings of loss when that happened.

These feelings are archetypal; they arise and are played out down the centuries and they are replayed in plays and fairy stories (the stories of Cinderella, the stories of the three sisters in King Lear are examples of this). It took many years for the effect of these feelings to ripen, and for the pain to be felt.

What these reminiscences tell me now, is that the work of bringing together my self-in-connection with my autonomous self started to happen through the medium of divine love experienced through meditation, and that has been at the core of my personal development over the past 21 years. .

THE EXPERIENTIAL MEANING OF LOVE

In this section I explore the relation of the body, feeling and language.

CS Lewis (Lewis, 1960) distinguishes between Gift-love, 'which moves a man to work and plan and save for the future well-being of his family which he will die without sharing or seeing' and Need love 'which sends a lonely or frightened child to its mother's arms' (Lewis 1960 p.1). Both of these loves are 'Natural loves' (Lewis 1960 p.165) and are embedded in the way we live our lives and which arise through relationship with others. CS Lewis defines Divine Love as coming from God, who is not interested in the everyday. This Divine Love transforms Gift love into a capacity for loving the unlovable, and transforms Need Love into a longing for God, and this neediness makes us receptive to Grace and the possibility of transformation.

I think that this is what happened in my meditation teaching, which gave me a different, unconditional acceptance of who I was, unencumbered by place or function or cultural frame. At that time the meditation teacher did not know me; we had no previous connection except for the teaching itself. That is why I am calling this experience 'divine', it was a gift from the unknown, it was unconnected with any previous experiences, and it enabled me to love myself where I had previously considered myself to be unlovable.

What I want to communicate in this chapter is what was made possible through that initial experience of divine love.

How did I come to understand what the word 'love' means?

I begin to explore the relation of embodied knowing and language

From a young age, if I had the idea that something was not 'right' that feeling of 'not rightness' came from my body. If the words 'I love you' or 'I am very angry' were said, I would decide what that meant and whether or not the statement was 'true' from the way I felt physically on hearing them. Then I would make a distinction between what I understood to be the intended meaning of utterance and my feeling response in order to decide the truth of the statement. It was a

way of experiential knowing that identified meaning by aligning the words with bodily responses and it enabled me to make meaning out of confusion.

This 'sounding board' was probably the beginning of the development of my sense of self as a separate person. This method of 'checking in', this feeling of 'rightness' would probably now be called 'being authentic' in the sense that the inner sounding board measures the level of emotional dissonance within (see Fineman, 2000 p. 6).

As a child, I lived in a world where emotions were often dishonestly ascribed and I created coherence by looking for the gap between word and feeling. I had an awareness that meanings and words were constantly changing, and that my words must represent that which had already occurred inside me. Thus much of what I say emerges out of an embodied knowledge which is not always easily 'named'.

'For we have the experience of ourselves, of that consciousness which we are, and it is on the basis of this experience that all linguistic connotations are assessed, and precisely through it that language comes to have any meaning at all for us...It is the office of language to cause essences to exist in a state of separation which is in fact merely apparent, since through language they still rest upon the ante-predictive life of consciousness. In the silence of primary consciousness can be seen not only what words mean, but also what things mean: the core of primary meaning round which the acts of naming and expression take place' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.xv).

Bodily responses, emotion and thoughts, perception and consciousness, and language seem to combine with awareness of emotional dissonance, to inform and enable me in relationships with others. These four aspects of myself increase the awareness of life's meaning by the ways in which they inter-relate in changing circumstances.

'Whether a system of motor or perceptual powers, our body is not an object for an 'I think', it is a group of "lived through" meanings which moves towards its equilibrium. Sometimes a new cluster of meanings is formed: our former movements are integrated into a fresh motor entity, the first visual data into a fresh sensory entity, our natural powers suddenly coming together in richer meaning, which hitherto has been merely foreshadowed in our perceptual or

practical field, and which has made itself felt in our experience by no more than a certain lack, and which by its coming suddenly reshuffles the elements of our equilibrium and fulfils our blind expectation' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.153).

In the paragraphs below I begin to unravel these meanings.

Embodied learning

Here, I explore my embodied experience.

What is the body that receives these signals?

Starting from the physical, body image is clearly created by the food I eat, the exercise that I take and the clothing that I wear.

For the first time the feminism of the 1970's theorised the subjective experience of women. It helped me to understand how I had allowed my identity to be defined by the male gaze. That pressure to conform to an idealised model developed a self-consciousness based on how I imagined others might see me. As a consequence, I lost touch with my own experience by becoming over reliant on the messages received through an external surface of the body.

'My data suggests very strongly that the powerful male gaze which informs girls' imagination regarding their bodies is directly implicated in girls' self-concept... I think that this preoccupation (with appearance) exists because it is in adolescence that girls start to be looked at, and start to internalise the male gaze that enforces their looking at themselves. Not only do they look at themselves, but they always fall short of the ideal of the male gaze. Thus, their preoccupation with appearance can only be understood with reference to the social context in which watching invents preoccupation' (Rossiter, 1994 p.16).

If this way of experiencing the world, by imagining how it might look to an observer and then trying to fit into that imagined image becomes unnoticed and habitual, then life can become untenable. Certainly this is my way of explaining how it was possible for me to be crying out with pain (see stories in the RH column above) and appear to function and work (stories in the LH column above). I was experiencing myself not as a thinking person with an identity, but more as an object with certain functions. Rather than experiencing myself as a

person with "lived through" meanings' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.153) I was living instead through the eyes of many others.

This is seeing my body as an object; a thing that is created by the world which responds to and fits into the world by both its appearance and its action. I treat my body as if it is a 'thing' and nothing else. Here the body is placed within a social structure, within a visual field of perception framed by explicit, normative behaviours and convention, where how to act can be learned by following the rules. This is an acceptance at face value of the pre-given world into which I have been born, where my sense of self is achieved through social acceptance.

The 'gap between word and feeling' that was such a useful childhood sounding board is drowned out by the clamour of people I imagine to be watching me. The inner sense of discriminating between the inner and outer arcs of attention, of deciding what my experience means to me has been given up and replaced by external reference points situated on the surface of my body.

My body brings me into sensuous connection with the natural landscape with a 'more than human world' (Abram, 1996). This is a world that surrounds and is affected by our social reality, but to which we are usually blind and deaf and which we live in unknowingly.

'When we attend to our experience not as tangible minds but as sounding speaking bodies, we begin to sense that we are heard, even listened to, by the numerous other bodies that surround us. Our sensing bodies respond to the eloquence of certain buildings and boulders, to the articulate motions of dragonflies. We find ourselves alive in a listening speaking world' (Abram, 1996 p.86).

David Abram writes about living in a traditional oral culture. By chance he is trapped by the weather to sit in a cave watching the rain, gazing at spiders, and he loses his 'normal' sense of self and comes to understand that his sensuous physical experience of sight and sounds and connection with nature is mediated by language. He becomes the seer, rather than the subject who is seeing.

This sense of unity within the self does not arise through thinking or through the mind, but through the body, through synaesthetic perception.

'Synaesthesia ... the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of a body by stimulation of another sense or part of a body' (Oxford Dictionary 10th Edition.)

'Synaesthetic perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have unlearned how to see, hear and generally speaking, feel...' (Merleau-Ponty 1962 p.229).

'...I surrender a part of my body, even my whole body, to this particular manner of vibrating and filling space...the sensation is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world...acted upon by our body...so that the sensation is literally a form of communion' (Merleau-Ponty 1962 p.212).

My mind prevents sensuous knowing by keeping perception on the surface of the skin. If I bypass the mind I can achieve unity through the senses. This is an example of how I do this from my journal:

Touching the piano

The tips of the fingers brush the ivory; I test the volume of the note by the depth of the distance between the top of the key and the point where the felt hits the sounding board. How far is that? What is the distance between the very most tip of my fingers and my heart, my sounding board? How far is that? How do I turn the sound in my heart into music?

The fingers touch the keys directed by the eyes. The eyes read the music on the page; the eyes instruct the fingers. I do not remember the notes and there is no thought unless I need to stop and learn the correct notes. Then there is no music, just sound of plonkety plonk.

Knowing the notes, reminding myself through my eyes, the music has a shape that was there before, but I do not remember until I get to the phrase itself exactly what that form and shape might be. *F, forte, p, pianissimo, ff, pf, <, >*, I hear it through my nerve ends, moving the body in time, the rhythm, the lilt, watching the rise and fall, making each note count against

every other note, the meaning given to one note makes meaning with the next. There are no sounds and no pauses that are not in relation.

It is not possible to play the same piece the same way every time. That's the beauty of it, never quite knowing how it will turn out. (Journal, July 2003)

I not find it necessary to 'give up' the body, but I want to give up the ingrained movements and habits that link the mind with the body. Provided that the mind is not directly involved in framing the perception then new sensory experiences may bring the opportunity of freshness to the mind.

'...the body, in so far as it has its behaviour patterns...uses its own parts as a general system of symbols for the world, and through which we...understand it and find significance in it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.237.)

As I read Abrams 'The Spell of the Sensuous' I start going out into the garden at night, looking up at the stars, listening to the wind in the trees, feeling chilliness, sinking my feet into the grass, thinking 'Who am I'. My ears have become attuned to the familiar sound of cars, tractors and aeroplanes, how do I learn to listen to the wind?

When I teach yoga, I say to the class, 'Stand in *Tadasana*, the mountain pose. Spread the soles of the feet on the floor; let them be the root of the posture. Get out of your head; pay attention to the soles of the feet. How do the feet feel in contact with the floor?' How can I be a mountain, what does it mean to be a mountain?

Asking the question, 'What is the sound of the wind?' and 'What does it feel like to be a mountain?' means feel and think yourself into a different shape, a different object, and gives the possibility of new sensuous awareness in the body. It broadens experience of what the body is, and creates new meanings.

Yoga postures (*asanas*) mirror the natural landscape and the common tools of everyday living in traditional societies. There is the plough (*Halasana*), the rod or

staff (*Dandasana*), the Serpent (*Urdhva Mukha Savasana*), dog pose (*Adho Mukha Savasana*). Changing the shape of the body so that it looks like a plough, the attention begins with the surface shape and then goes to those parts of the body that will not stretch or open as they need to do to achieve that shape. How do I stretch those parts? I begin a process of internal viewing, of recognising with the inner eye those parts of the body that need to move differently. The body becomes an inner landscape and the outer world is temporarily out of sight.

In giving up social posturing, the inner eye focuses more easily on the inner body. As the senses turn inwards, it becomes possible to use the breath to go to places in the body where the mind cannot go. The body begins to breathe in tune with the asana; the body is learning a new way of moving, the asana moves the body. When the posture is over, my attention turns outwards and the outer world has changed, it is no longer a place 'out there', but is an environment that moves and breathes as I do.

Hinduism denotes five 'bodies' or sheaths, only two of which relate to the material physical body. The skeletal sheath is the anatomical structure of the body and is called the *annamaya kosa* (gross body), and the physiological sheath, which is called the *pranamaya kosa*. In practising the asanas we 'give up' our habitual way of placing ourselves in the landscape, and in so doing become conscious of the breath (*prana*) and its relation to the soft contents of the body.

As I lie in corpse pose (*Savasana*) I let go of my body. I relax, feel at ease, loved and accepted. I am not thinking about love, just being with whatever happens, being quiet. As I watch the breath coming in and going out of the body, inhaling and exhaling within its internal rhythms, I find that there is a way of going beyond the physical body whilst remaining connected with it, which brings with it a coherent sense of who I am. The perception of the self broadens into another sphere of awareness.

Exploring the gaps between emotion and spirituality

In this section I address the relation of the emotional with the spiritual. An underlying theme is my continuing inquiry into the social construction of feeling through language.

During adolescence the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth had fired my imagination with the idea of love diffused but nevertheless present alongside the ordinary and the everyday.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and the mind of man' (Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey in Ricks
1999 p.343).

The poem is enticing and intoxicating. It filled me with excitement and an urge to know more. It was a source of inspiration, a place to go in my mind which helped to put a rosy glow around the ordinary everyday world, linked to those feelings of passion arising in me as I played Chopin and Mendelssohn on the piano. However, by the time I was in my early twenties, it was clear that this ideal could not be lived. I could not extend this feeling of joyous elevation to my life in general, and instead found that boredom, frustration and fear easily extinguished it.

Perhaps this kind of romance leads to a collapse of the rational into an idealised emotional past, which is regressive rather than developmental in its effects. This is what Ken Wilbur calls 'pre-rational', a longing for yesteryear. It is an attempt to mitigate the split between religion, art and science.

'We can see that the Romantics were already trying to ... unify that which modernity had put asunder. For above all else, the Romantics yearned for unity and wholeness ... they were the first to attempt to reweave the fragments, heal the wounds, become at home in the universe, be a humble part of life's wondrous web and not its arrogant master' (Wilbur, 1998 p.95).

Even though I read these poems, aware that Wordsworth was creating images of rural idylls that did not reflect reality, I respond in the here and now in a different way. The verse speaks to me of hope; it brings me to a sense of the eternal and provides a restful interlude from the harsher realities of my life. Nineteenth

century romance in the twenty-first century is more another turn of the wheel, an opportunity for renewal.

Often my life happens through a cloud of emotion, which seems to be regressive rather than generative and which creates sensations in my body of a clouded brain and a blocked heart. So that ignoring the emotional content of thought when those feelings are around could lead me to make decisions and act unwisely when under the influence of fear, anger, sadness. Understanding what I feel and knowing whether or not it might be temporary, and therefore might lead me to a different conclusion at another time, seems very important to me. It means that I now often respond quite slowly when aroused, a habit that has been formed because I want to bring wisdom into the action.

Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as,

‘the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships. ... and includes five emotional and social competencies ... self-awareness ... self-regulation ... motivation ... empathy ... social skills’ (Goleman, 1999 pp.317 - 318).

So as a child, when I strove to achieve emotional honesty by checking in with my own feeling and trying to understand others, I was learning the meaning of authenticity and the skills of self-awareness and empathy. Learning also that thinking and speaking were not necessarily aligned with feeling, or with feeling behaviours. In this way I was educated into a way of seeing the world as split between emotion and reason, where the latter was rational, objective and encouraged and the former was to be controlled and contained.

By learning to respond empathetically, trying to catch the meaning of words by the way they were spoken, I missed learning how to deal with strong and socially unacceptable negative feeling, which has led to this ‘hangover’ of strong emotion that can block my reflective and thinking processes. It means that often my passions ruled me, rather than my head.

To benefit from yogic practices there needs to be sufficient emotional coherence to be able to watch the fluctuations of the mind without causing psychological

breakdown. In Hindu practice this would be called building up the ego, which is the action-orientated part of the self and in psychological terms this would be referred to as building a stronger self identity.

Jack Engler (Wilber, Engler and Brown 1986) tells a story that illustrates this:

'The meditation teacher was visiting the U.S. for the first time and was very interested in the Western psychotherapeutic approaches to mental illness. The clinical psychologist was describing a very difficult case of an anorectic woman who was proving refractory to treatment. The teacher became engrossed in the case and asked many questions about the illness and the treatment. When the psychologist had finished, I asked the teacher why he was so interested. He said a woman had once come to the meditation centre where he was teaching with the same presenting problems. In addition she was suffering from chronic insomnia. ... I asked him if he taught her. To my surprise he said "No". For six weeks he merely let her come each day and pour out her complaints against her husband, her children, her parents and the injustices of life in general. He mostly listened. He also talked with her but he did not describe precisely how. This first part of her treatment then was conducted in effect through the medium of a special kind of interpersonal relationship. He also encourages her to sleep. Within a short time she began to sleep 4,8,12,14,16 and finally 18 hours a night – at which point she came to him and said "I have slept enough. I came here to learn to meditate." "Oh he replied, "you want to learn meditation,. Why didn't you say so.' I interrupted him to ask if he taught her Vipassana, ... "No" he said to my surprise again, "no Vipassana. Too much suffering". What she needed was to experience some happiness, some joy, some tranquillity and relief from so much mental agitation first, before she would be able to tolerate the deeper insight that *all* her psycho-physical states were characterised by change and were associated with suffering, not simply the obvious vicissitudes in her personal life history' (Wilbur et.al. 1986 p.25).

This quote gives an example of the level of psychological care that might need to be taken before teaching a person a meditation technique. These practices do not deal with the superficial; they are not easy quick fixes for unhappiness.

On the other hand, I gained sufficient sense of identity after my meditation teaching, to decide to go into therapy. In fact the effect of meditation also led me to start yoga classes. In Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga, the yoga *asanas* are the

third limb, and meditation the seventh limb. I seem to have been swimming the opposite way for a long time, going backwards to sort out my history.

The relation between thinking and feeling becomes clearer to me as I meditate. In meditation I say the *mantra*. This is a Sanskrit word whose meaning is irrelevant, but whose resonance is chosen by the *guru* to awaken the soul within. It is a sacred word that the student is asked never to repeat to anyone. This is because it is in such close alignment with the soul within. The *mantra* is the anchor around which I watch the action of my mind as it generates thoughts and feelings. I discover that if I repeat the *mantra* with desire, perhaps hunger, then thoughts of food arise. On the other hand if I repeat the *mantra* lovingly then peace may arise.

How I feel is linked with what I think, and is usually focussed on what I plan to do next and on self-preservation.

‘Constantly one thinks, feels and acts as though one had a self to protect and preserve. The slightest encroachment on the self’s territory (a splinter in the finger, a noisy neighbour) arouses fear and anger. The slightest hope for self-enhancement (gain, praise, fame, pleasure) arouses greed and grasping. Any hint that a situation is irrelevant to the self (waiting for a bus, meditating) arouses boredom. Such impulses are instinctual, automatic, pervasive and powerful. They are completely taken for granted in daily life.’ (Varela et.al, 1991 p.62)

Although I have similar experiences whilst meditating to those described in the quote above from Varela, Thompson and Rosch, studying descriptions of fear and anger in the ancient Hindu texts does not resonate sufficiently with my lived experience for me to find enough practical meaning in them to satisfy my continuing search for authenticity.

Like the nineteenth century romantic poets, Hindu philosophy has not yet provided an adequate explanation for my day-to-day experience. I think of these writings as in need of interpretation, not by learning ancient languages and discovering new translations, but by distinguishing between the eastern and western psyche.

I intuitively feel that the expression of emotion is socially constructed, and that if I had been born in, say India or China, then the way those feelings are embodied and expressed would have been different.

There is no reference in Patanjali's philosophy to a student who is 'blocked' by or overwhelmed by emotional feelings, although there are a lot of references to desire and passion creating barriers to knowledge. Instead the aspirant seeks a state of calm and stillness by recognising the mental objects created by the mind that prevent peacefulness occurring.

In the East there seems to be more a sense of the collective to which a person will have strong ties that means controlling strong emotions does not become a denial of one's selfhood so much as a doorway into family and community membership.

'practising emotional restraint on behalf of a larger social network is not considered self sacrificial...the Chinese appear to understand such practices as a necessary part of spiritual development that can only come from displaying their sensitivity and responsiveness to others' (Fineman, 2000 p.85).

In the western world we have an autonomous sense of self which acts within various social, community and organisational contexts. So, the sense of 'I', the way that our affective and cognitive natures are understood to interact within the self, is very different.

This could be taken one step further in comparing the difference in marriage rituals. In India it is traditional to enter into arranged marriages and love is expected to develop as part of the developing relationship. In the West we marry whom we choose, supposedly for love and if the love leaves, then the marriage often ends.

So while the practice of yoga (*asanas*) and meditation have beneficial effects on both the western body and mind, the social expression and understanding of emotion, and probably also, its interplay with intellect, might be experienced radically differently.

Experiencing the 'sense of the sublime' connects me to my Self, other Selves and the world around me, and brings my sense of self into alignment. I do not comprehend a collapse of the emotional into the rational, as Ken Wilbur describes it (see above), but the sense of the sublime that is able to bring together the mental and emotional aspects of the mind into a unity, into coherence. This is not losing my identity but gaining a heightened sense of perception.

The great wonder of spiritual practice is that over time it enables me to distinguish intention and the action of emotion on thought, to notice the effect of desire on perception, and to begin to recognise the difference between desirous egoistic action and authentic altruistic action.

The 'sense of the sublime' is an authentic experience of self, that goes beyond the day-to-day ordinariness of things, and which has no particular call to action. It sees no separation between feeling, thinking and action because there is none. There is nothing to be 'done' it is beyond the usual relationship of feeling and action. So, instead of a competition between the head and the heart, there is recognition of the perceptual field of peacefulness that creates a relation between them.

Consciousness

Here I consider consciousness as it is expressed in Hinduism and Buddhism and begin to think about what might be universal human experience and characteristics.

In the ordinary sense I think of consciousness as 'What I am noticing now', so that it is a word that describes my state of awareness. If I sit and ask myself what I notice, then I notice how I am sitting on the chair, my legs crossed, left toes pressed against the bar of the table, hot water bottle hot against my bad back – and so on. However, if I do not ask myself that question, then I notice nothing but the thoughts in my head and my need to get them up here on the computer screen. So the mode of consciousness is not quite the same as looking at a 'thing' or an object, it also depends on my general intention as well as what I am attending to at any one moment. What I see will vary and will be dependent upon the breadth of my awareness and the modality of my consciousness.

The process of watching and noticing the mode of consciousness is what happens in meditation practice; here I have noticed that there is a seer seeing objects that are created by emotional field in which the thoughts arise.

'the experience that comes from the contact of each sense organ with its object. ... (it) always refers to the dualistic sense of experience in which there is an experiencer, an object experienced, and a relation (or relations) binding them together. ... The combination of mental factors that are present make up the character – the colour and taste – of a particular moment of consciousness' (Varela et al., 1991p. 67-68).

The mental factors that determine consciousness are ... contact, feeling, discernment, intention, and attention.

Intention 'arouses and sustains the activities of consciousness (with its mental factors) from moment to moment. Intention is the manner in which the tendency to volitional action (the second link) manifests in the mind at any given moment. There are no volitional actions without intention. This karma is sometimes said to be the process of intention itself - that which leaves traces on which future habits will be based.'

Attention 'arises in interaction with intention. Intention directs consciousness ... attention holds and focuses consciousness on some object' (Varela et.al., 1991 p.120).

'The point of mindfulness awareness is not to disengage the mind from the phenomenal world; it is to enable the mind to be fully present in the world. The goal is not to avoid action, but to be fully present in one's actions, so that one's behaviour becomes progressively more responsive and aware.' (Varela et.al, 1991 p.122).

Varela, Thompson and Rosch then go on to show how the grasping of the mind towards its objects might lead us to think that there is a coherent self behind consciousness.

If the brain and the ego are kept quiet then the mind (intellect) is able to see a greater range and the differing facets of consciousness.

'Thoughts create disturbances. By analysing them one develops discriminative power, and gains serenity. ... When consciousness is in a serene state, its interior components, intelligence, ego, mind and the feeling of 'I' also experience tranquillity. At that point, there is no room for thought waves to arise either in the mind or in the consciousness. Stillness and silence are experienced, poise and peace set in and one becomes cultured. One's thoughts, words and deeds develop purity, and begin to flow in the divine stream' (Iyengar, 1993 p.12).

The mind referred to here is the mind of the intellect sited in the *vijanamaya kosa*, the intellectual sheath; access to which is achieved when the brain is quiet. It is the same action that is being described by Varela, Thompson and Rosch when they write of 'mindful awareness'. And similarly as in Bhuddism, the cause of unhappiness and suffering is understood to be a lack of discrimination between the seer and the seen, between the inner transcendental and the outer material world.

So developing consciousness in the eastern traditions is an interior practice, where the operation of the mind (brain) and the senses is only related to the external 'life world' in so much as it enables the practitioner to develop discriminating awareness and to purify her soul. In Hindu philosophy there is a belief in the sense of 'I', the self, which changes as it goes through the stages of growth, through the seven sheaths of the body, until the Self ultimately becomes pure consciousness.

'God is the Universal Soul. The individual soul is the seed of the individual self. Soul is therefore distinct from the self. ... Unlike the self, the soul is free from the influence of nature and is thus universal. ... As a well-nurtured seed causes a tree to grow and to blossom with flowers and fruits, so the soul is the seed of man's evolution. From this sprout springs consciousness, Citta. From consciousness, spring ego, intelligence, mind, and the senses of perception and the organs of action' (Iyengar, 1993 p.11).

The appreciation of groundlessness, which in Buddhism leads to an assumption that there is no ultimate coherent Self, is the beginning stage of understanding in Hinduism of the first stage of consciousness. There are other similarities here with another Christian based spiritual work book, where the first daily lessons ask the practitioner to repeat several times a day,

'Lesson 1

"Nothing I see in this room (on this street, from this window, in this place) means anything."

...The statement should be (merely) applied to anything you see. Do not attempt to apply it to everything you see. ... A comfortable sense of leisure is essential.

Lesson 2

"I have given everything I see in this room (on this street, from this window, in this place) all the meaning that it has for me" (A course in miracles, 1975 p. 3-4).

I do not read these lessons as representing a philosophy of nihilism, so much as instructive practice encouraging the mind (brain) to recognise the possibility of changing perception as part of a preparation for changing consciousness. I see it having an effect on the cognitive function of the brain in a very similar way to the changing shape of the body in practising yoga asanas.

In Western philosophy phenomenologists have addressed consciousness from interior perception of the body – and in so doing have distinguished this from the *cognito*, the thinking self – but have maintained their focus of attention outwards from the site of the body. Merleau-Ponty writes:

'All knowledge takes place within horizons opened up by perception' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.207).

The self that speaks here is that which relates to others and to the world that is perceived through the senses, it is not leaving the world on one side and looking inwards beyond the objects created by the emotions and the mind. The internal representations created by the embodied self all relate to 'objects out there'.

Just how much I see of the world and its objects when I meditate, and deciding how much of this experience is socially constructed becomes unimportant, because what concerns me is the quality of consciousness. Have I understood the relation between the seer and the seen, and the nature of my involvement with them? How I might open up my perception in order to grow into awareness

of the next stage of consciousness, which seeks to understand the nature of the subtle matter.

This question is not about 'leaving' the world but about changing my over-attachment to it. If I am involved and concerned with results and outcomes, then the mind grasps and twists and turns, honourable intentions, remain action (ego) based and influenced by my desires. Training the mind in meditation means looking inwards away from the world, understanding the nature of the divine and to desire to know only that. Non-attachment means taking action, but to be unconcerned with outcomes, or plans. It means just allowing the inner nature to come forth, to emerge, whilst the self attends to the divine nature.

Is this divine nature socially constructed? I think that because it is represented through symbols and in words, it might be interpreted as such by those who reject the complex structures of the interior world that have been named by the Eastern mystics. Is spiritual practice a cultural practice, sited in specific locations and historical contexts? Yes, of course it is, we have much evidence of that (see Bocock and Thompson, 1985). How relevant are those ancient practises to Westerners today, and if they are relevant does that mean that we, our individual selves, have been born into a pre-given world in which there may also be universal sublime structures? Must I believe in 'God, the universal soul' to develop my consciousness?

I think that there are essences of truth in all social constructions, so that the superficial surfaces of what we mean by love or fear or death, and how it is symbolised, are contested and change over time. However the relation (and polarisation) between love and fear remains and is part of being human. So that the duality and plurality of values, emotions and intentions come into and out of fashion, but that the relation between the mind (brain) and the body, the relation of mind (intellect) and matter, taken with an awareness of the way that these relate to each other have always remained essentially the same. So, constructions of self and the relationship between self and others may be many and various in the Western world, but there remains an essential underlying structure of humanness.

The universal way that we make meaning through the senses is demonstrated here:

'Taking colour as an example of embodied cognition, the book shows that 'there are at most 11 basic colour categories... and in an examination of over 90 languages ... there are at most 11 basic colour categories encoded in any language, though not all languages encode all 11'(Varela et.al, 1991 p.168)

And that colour categories depend on culture specific cognitive processes, so that English contains the terms for both green and blue, whereas Tarahumara of northern Mexico has a single term that means green or blue. ... So, in answer to the question, which came first, the world or the image? 'Our discussion of colour suggests a middle way between these two extremes. We have seen that colours are not 'out there' independent of our perceptual and cognitive capacities. We have also seen that colours are not 'in here' independent of our cultural and biological world. ... Thus colour as a case study enables us to appreciate the obvious point that chicken and egg, world and perceiver, specify each other' (Varela et.al, 1991pp.171-172).

The way that our desires still focus our attention is echoed down the centuries through the Upanishads:

'As our desire is, so is our will.
As our will is, so are our acts.
As we act, so we become.

We live in accordance with our deep driving desire,
It is this desire at the time of death that determines what our next life is to be.
We will come back to earth to work out the satisfaction of that desire.

But not those who are free from desire; they are free because all their desires have found fulfilment in the Self.
They do not die like the others, but realising Brahman, they merge in Brahman.
So it is said:

When all desires that surge in the heart
Are renounced, the mortal becomes immortal, Here in this very life.

As the skin of a snake is sloughed onto an anthill, so does the mortal body fall:
but the Self, freed from the body, merges into Brahman, infinite life, eternal light'
(Brihadaranyaka Upanishad in Easwaran, 1987 p.48-49).

Leaving aside the issue of reincarnation, this poem shows the relation between desire, the seer and the seen, which can still be experienced by the meditator today.

These are internal representations of consciousness, rather than social constructions, but it does assume that the world and how we come to know it is, at least in part, pre-given.

So I believe that there is a perception, or a horizon, beyond groundlessness where the self sees beyond the 'always in relation' material world, which means that the mind's eye sees itself seeing physical objects, emotions and thoughts. And I act on this presupposition with the intention of carrying out my spiritual practices with a feeling of hopeful lovingness in my heart, at the same time watching and noticing the mental objects that interfere with the creation of more hope and more love.

I believe what I have in part experienced, in part been told, and in part read about, that if I meditate lovingly (the loving seer) with the relatedness of loving consciousness then I will perceive love (the seen). What I imagine this all leads up to is a synaesthesia of lovingness, a coherence of the self where there is only loving, in which the 'I' moves into the *anandamaya kosa*, the bliss sheath, the first stage of what Hindus call 'enlightenment'. These are the higher stages of consciousness

'Conscious spirit and unconscious matter
Both have existed since the dawn of time
With maya appearing to connect them
Misrepresenting joy as outside us...

The Self is hidden in the hearts of all,
As butter lies in cream. Realise
The Self in the depths of meditation –
The Lord of Love, supreme Reality,
Who is the goal of all knowledge' (Shvetashvatara Upanishad in Easwaran, 1987
p.218-219).

LANGUAGE

In this section I continue to think about social construction and the relation of speech and sensuous experience to action.

I intend to write about language as action, as either an utterance or as the written word, action that involves both bodily felt emotion and the cognitive functioning of the brain.

One of the results of Abram's (1996) sensing experience was that after he returned from living in traditional societies, he began to question the development of speech and narrative. He had noticed how his extraordinary sensing contact with the natural world disappeared when he returned to live in urban surroundings. In his literature review of anthropology, Abrams showed how in traditional societies, language echoes the sounds of birds and animals and how by telling stories about the landscape knowledge was passed down the generations.

Through the writings of Merleau-Ponty, he showed how speech is not a disconnected function of the brain but a sensuous experience.

'...Merleau-Ponty's view of language as a thoroughly incarnate medium, of speech as rhythm and expressive gesture, and hence of spoken words and phrases as active sensuous presences afoot in a material landscape (rather than as ideal forms that are present but are not part of the sensuous world) – goes a long way toward helping us understand the primacy of language and word magic in native rituals of transformation, metamorphosis and healing. *Only if words are felt, like bodily presences, like echoes or waterfalls, can we understand the power of the spoken language to influence, alter and transform the perceptual world*' (Abram, 1996 p.89 [*author's italics*]).

Perhaps that is why in Hinduism it is not considered necessary to know the meaning of the mantra, which is the Sanskrit word used in meditation, it is the vibration of the sound, not the meaning of the word that has the effect on the body and mind. It is the sensuous connection with the rhythms of the physical body, which contributes to the altering of consciousness through a process similar to synaesthesia, a forgetting of the body and a letting go of the mind.

Abram then shows how drawing pictures helped tell the stories, from which the Jews created a phonetic alphabet. From there he tells of the Greeks, the move from mythic stories to the use of reason, which he maintains was only possible because the alphabet ceased to be linked to pictured sounds of the landscape, and of the birds and animals. So Socrates and Plato were able to challenge the myths and stories of the ancient Greeks, because of the development of a language that was separated from the sensuous world. Language has become a medium in its own right, which has become separated from the body and the world we live in. However this disconnection is not something that we are generally aware of.

'(W)e live in a world where speech is an institution. For all these commonplace utterances, we possess within ourselves ready made meanings. They arouse in us only second order thoughts; these in turn are translated into other words which demand no effort of expression and will demand from our hearers no effort of comprehension. Thus language and the understanding of language apparently raise no problems. The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.184).

Cognitive reflexivity has become possible because recognising the sensuous way that we use language has now added a new dimension to our understanding of meaning making. And what that reflection enables us to do is to develop new knowledge.

'What then does language express if it does not express thoughts? It presents or rather it is the subject's taking up of a position in the world of meanings. ... The meaning of the gesture (of the body) is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon. The meaning of the word is not contained in the word as a sound. But the human body is defined in terms of its property of appropriating, in an indefinite series of discontinuous acts, significant cores which transcend and transfigure its natural powers. ... We must therefore recognise as an ultimate fact this open and indefinite power of giving significance - that is of both apprehending and conveying a meaning - by which man transcends himself to new forms of behaviour, or towards other people, or towards his own thought, through his body and his speech' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.193-194).

We can create new understandings through the exercise of speaking, and in the act of hearing the spoken words. But it seems to me that language is not the medium, but just plays a part in speech. The utterances are made through a sensuous contact with the body and its relation to the world. The subject is the seer, the sensuous body in all its glory. The object is the 'life-world' the environment, another person, something that is 'out there'. The relationship is fuelled by the significance that is given by the seer to the world outside her. This significance is an imagined relationship which has a value placed on it by the seer.

'If the qualities radiate around them a certain mode of existence, if they have the power to cast a spell and what we called just now, sacramental value, this is because the sentient subject does not posit them as objects, but enters into sympathetic relation with them, makes them his own and finds them in his sacramentary law' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 p.214).

As I write it becomes ever clearer that I find at least a greater significance in the meaning derived from physical presence than in the use of mere words. So, I am beginning to realise that there is even a subtext of thought-language that I do not think to share unless it becomes necessary. This is an entry quoted from my journal:

I buy a chair, and show it to you, 'Yes', you say 'It is a very nice chair.'

I like the colour and shape, but you do not. It is likely that if we talk about it, we will both be able to understand why you do not like it and I do.

We take it in turns to sit on the chair. I do not think it is comfortable, you think it is. It is less likely that we will be able to understand each other to the same degree, because the description of discomfort has become more subjective and this probably makes our respective understandings less easily comparable.

In fact I might feel so uncomfortable sitting on the chair that I think 'This isn't a proper chair, I cannot sit on it' and I cease to think of it as a chair.

But I think it is beautiful, which is actually why I bought it, and so I keep it in the corner of my living room.

Every time I walk past this beautiful object I think 'I do like that', but I do not think of it as a chair.

Then I cease to notice it at all – it has become part of my mental furniture.

Occasionally when visitors come round they point to this beautiful object and say, 'That's nice where did you get that from?' And at other times when visitors come round they sit on it, and I think 'Oh! They think it's a chair!'

Some time later, perhaps years later, I am hoovering around it and I get annoyed with how heavy it is to move, and as I pass by I start thinking that perhaps it does not fit into my colour scheme. And then another thought occurs, that the furniture in my living room would work a lot better if that object wasn't there any more.

So, I ask the people who admired it in the past if they would like it. I do not know if they think of it as I do, as an art object or whether they think of it as a chair. It doesn't matter.

However if no friend wants it, I put an advertisement in the local paper saying, 'Chair for Sale!' (Journal June 2000)

In the language of Saussure, I am choosing between two signifiers (the use of the word 'chair' or 'beautiful object') in relation to the referent (the material object) and what is signified (what comes into my mind when I think of this object). The choice of the signifier depends upon the context, so that when I am thinking internally the referent is a 'beautiful object', but when I am speaking to someone else it could be either a 'beautiful object or a 'chair' depending on how the other person expresses him/ herself, and then when I am offering it for sale to unknown persons, the signifier becomes 'chair'.

In many ways I am still the child that I was, creating my own meaning and translating it into words from a language memory bank!

But this is referring to language as a 'System', a method of communicating that involves just remembering words. I want to use language to share common experiences. Whilst I recognise that to be adult means being able to use language appropriately, I continue to look for the way that words are spoken in order to understand what is being said (in order to understand the 'signs', the

combination of the signifier and the signified). If I do not 'get' the context, then I tend not to speak because I feel unable to take part in the common meaning making that appears to be going on around me.

I notice and absorb what people mean, not just by the words that are spoken, but also by the way they are expressed through the body and in conversations I am using language as a way of responding with my body as well as my mind.

'Thus there is a subtext to our speech, as every utterance constitutes only *an attempt* (which is hardly ever satisfactory) to 'develop' a sensed thought seed into a voiced utterance flower' (Shotter, 1993 p.44).

What is the sounding board that provides indications of what is 'right', how can we tell right from wrong? Shotter (Shotter 1993) writes about a particular ethical sensibility to others that enables adult conversations to take place.

'This sense, these *feelings* (which are not properly called emotions), work as standards against which our more explicit formulations are judged for their adequacy and appropriateness' (Shotter, 1993p.29).

This is a measure of a form of integrity that is constructed out of everyday conversations in which meanings and relationships are developed. 'The process of giving form to feeling' is how Shotter (Shotter, 1993 p.79) refers to the imaginary (half formed) grounding that people act out in their daily lives, and which is given form to the extent that other people 'act back upon that background to give it further form'.

'So that the imaginary becomes imaginary entities and 'exert a *real* influence upon the structure of people's activities' (Shotter, 1993 p.80).

It is from this that Shotter develops the idea of 'root metaphors' that create particular ways of formulating our relationships with the world. That the ways we think and speak, as well as the words that are used, become part of an unacknowledged pattern which is self-perpetuating. This is also referred to as 'the fundamental circularity of conceptual systems' (Varela et.al, 1991 p.12).

Shotter shows how these imagined relations are ingrained, how words carry power that is invisible. He maintains that we need to alter our mindsets from

being 'referential-representational' by which we assume that those who have knowledge over a pre-existent given are in some way superior to us, and move to a rhetorical-responsive mind set which recognises diversity of perception in a participative universe and where we do not have to submit to the other person's truth. The rhetorical-responsive mind set is thus one that is inclusive of experience and of sensuous knowing, and

'we find (the universe) ontologically rather than discover it epistemologically or scientifically' (Shotter, 1993 p.75).

I think I have a midway position between the idea that the universe is not there unless we discover it by participating in it, and the alternative idea that there is a universal cosmic structure out there waiting for us to discover it. I want to continue the ontological theme and develop a thesis in which the universe finds us when we imagine, think, speak and act coherently in tune with spiritual values. After discovering that the world we see is transitory, I suggest that then and only then, are we able to co-create within a participatory universe because we have lost that grasping self-centredness that leads us to believe that we are separated and in competition with each other.

My reaction does not mean that I entirely reject the idea of difference and diversity, or social constructionism and the importance of speech and relationship in the creation of meaning, individual or joint identity. I think of the paradox - of socially constructed meaning and the illusory nature of what we think is reality - and of the unchanging nature of the essence of being human - and use the contrasts to weave the fabric of my own meanings.

Shotter, with Rorty, has already rehearsed the argument for language as a reflection of mental images, which they maintain is a self-deception because it is a representation of our already socially constructed imagery. A tautology I suppose.

'Without the notion of mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself' (Rorty in Shotter, 1993 p.100).

If language deceives, it does so because it emanates from socially constructed internal imagery, and this is only a problem if the world is seen as fixed and pre-given.

However if these imaginary constructions are focussed on living values without looking for specific outcomes, then I would say that this construing of the world would not be circular. This is not equivalent to New Age idealism, which Shotter is scathing about, but a way of creating a new context in which change in the circumstances of the 'real' world might take place. It is not a denial but an attempt to create better ways of speaking, relating and acting by developing a living attachment to spiritual values.

Shotter goes on to suggest that new knowledge is created in the writing of accounts (as opposed to theories) and that in order to do this the emphasis of language needs to be on verbs and doing, rather than describing nouns and things. This does seem like a good way of developing new ways of acting in the world, because it is a way of changing the way language is used which shifts us away from thinking that the world is fixed, and suggests that what we see is not as real as we might think.

GROWTH THROUGH LOVE

The transformatory nature of love

Here I return to love as a generative power, this time considering it in social settings and across cultures.

I have been writing about how I experience love. I am building up a narrative, which shows me how I have changed through this experience.

To make space for these changes, I have been writing about renunciation, giving up my usual way of being in my body, making that physical effort in the yoga *asanas*, giving up strong emotion and the thoughts that go with it, watching how my mind works, and changing my language so that it creates rather than defines. Reaching in this way, beyond my current understanding of myself, is a process of giving up and changing what I know of myself now.

I have been writing about different constructions of the self, referring to consciousness as the medium through which the self is observed. Using the body, emotions, the mind and language as tools by which the self alters its perception of its inner and outer world.

Implicit within this writing is the question, ‘What is this “I am”’, who is this self? How do I widen my perception of love so that I may live more lovingly with others and with my self? How do I change who I am?’

When I was first taught meditation all these questions were furthest from my mind. I just needed to sort myself out, build up my self-esteem and get more ordinary: getting to be more ‘normal’ was actually how I thought of this process. By the time all that had been achieved, I found that I was on some kind of spiritual path, not so much one that I had chosen, but one that had been chosen through the unfolding events of my life! There is no way that I could have planned this, or made it happen.

The goal of the spiritual path is explicitly stated in Hinduism and implied in many of the world’s religions. It is to become aligned with God, to realise the Universal

Soul, and it is through love that both eastern philosophies and Christianity tell us that we eventually come to be that.

'Whether the experience be from the nihilist, middle or eternalist perspective basis-enlightenment is identical across traditions. ... The relationship between awareness and structure is permanently altered. ... Awareness is once-and-for-all freed from mental structures. ... Once, however, awareness is freed from such constructions, the yogi realises these models and concepts are not in themselves accurate statements about reality. ... The shift in the relationship between structure and awareness also has a profound impact on the experience of human suffering. The main claim...is that enlightenment can alleviate human suffering' (Wilbur, Engler and Brown, 1986 pp.269-270).

'In other words, the deep structures of worldspaces ... show cross cultural and largely invariant features at a deep level of abstraction, whereas the surface structures (the actual subjects and objects in the various worldspaces) are naturally and appropriately quite different from culture to culture. Just as the human mind universally grows images and symbols and concepts ... so the human spirit universally grows intuitions of the Divine, and those developmental signifieds unfold in an evolutionary and reconstructible fashion...' (Wilbur, 1995 p.276).

In Hinduism, there are three ways to enlightenment, through devotion (surrender to God), through action and through knowledge. The path through devotion is the easiest way, although that is not easy, and each of the three Paths eventually lead to the Bliss Sheath (*anandamaya kosa*).

'The Lord of Love is above name and form. He is present in all and transcends all. Unborn, without body and without mind, from him comes every body and mind. He is the source of space, air fire, water and the earth that holds us all' (Easwaran, 1987 p.112).

In Buddhism, love is referred to as unconditional compassion,

'As the student goes on, however, his mind relaxes further into awareness, a sense of warmth and inclusiveness dawns. ... The loss of a fixed reference point or ground, either in self, other or a relationship between them, is said to be inseparable from compassion like two sides of a coin or the two wings of a bird. ... It can be known (and can only be known) directly. It is called Buddha nature,

no mind, primordial mind ... that which cannot be fabricated by mind. ...And the natural manifestation, the embodiment, of this state is compassion – unconditional, fearless, ruthless, spontaneous compassion. ...or simply “awakened heart” (Verela et al., 1991p.246).

In Christianity the love of God is described in this way:

‘When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it. He has been party to, has made, sustained and moved moment by moment within, all our earthly experiences of innocent love...By loving Him more than them [*earthly beloved’s*] we shall love them more than we do now’ (Lewis, 1960 p.169 [*my italics*]).

The spiritual path is a process of self-development, which takes place through the medium of love and I intuitively feel that this love is carried on the rhythm of the Cosmic Tides.

‘Two mighty tidal urges rule the worlds, both of them are living spiritual powers. One is the movement of Rakshasas, fleeing as in fear to all the quarters of the universe. This is the great outgoing Creative Breath by which not only is the universe spread forth in space, but all the inner life of thought and feeling flows outwards seeking what it may devour. ... The second movement is symbolised by hosts of Siddhas, is nivritti, the Homeward flowing tide. By this all the treasures of experience, the fruits of the World Tree are gathered in once more to the One Life like mighty rivers flowing homewards to the sea’ (Sri Krishna Prem, 1969 p.108).

Plato (in Wilber, 1995) described these flowing tides as ‘movements’.

‘...we see in Plato one of the first descriptions of two movements related to the unspoken One, or two movements related to the Spirit itself. ... The first movement is the descent of the One into the world of the Many, a movement that actually creates the world of the Many and blesses the Many and confers Goodness on all of it: Spirit immanent in the world. The other is the movement of return or ascent of the Many to the One, a process of remembering or recollecting the Good: Spirit transcendent to the world. ... In Plato the two movements are given equal emphasis and equal importance, because both were grounded in the unspoken One of sudden illumination’ (Wilbur, 1995 p.320).

Wilber goes on to name the inflowing breath or homeward movement as Eros, it is the 'ascending' movement, the love that pulls the love of the Many towards the love of the One, the Universal Soul. In today's cultural terms, Eros is the focussed ascending masculine one-pointed passionate loving. The outflowing breath is its opposite, the descending flow of love, or Agape, from the One to the Many, and might be typified as the feminine, the compassionate, finding of love-in-relationship, embracing love.

Then he goes on to write about the doctrine of the Cambridge Platonists who had 'their roots in the Platonism of the Renaissance'.

'It was a doctrine in which love played a central part; not only the ascending love of the lower for the higher, Plato's Eros, but also a love of the higher which expressed itself in care for the lower, which can easily be identified with Christian Agape. The two together make a vast circle of love throughout the universe' (Wilber, 1995 p.339).

In his footnotes to this page, Wilber (1995) refers to Agape as Grace. He goes on to link the descending tide of love with the compassion of the Buddha, and the ascending tide of Eros with the Universal 'Brahman' of Hinduism. But this 'vast circle of love' is not some kind of cosmic iteration in cosmic soup, it is the soup itself. And with the collapse of the dual aspects of love comes the realisation that the movement of the tides is also love itself.

'In the Great Circle of Descent and Ascent, the Nondual can be represented as the paper on which the entire circle is drawn; or again it can be represented as the centre of the circle itself, which is equidistant to all points on the circumference... Beings can be said to be closer or farther from the Summit or the Source (that is the meaning of the Great Chain of Being) but no being is closer or farther from Suchness; there is no "up" or "down". Each individual being is fully and completely just as it is, precisely just as it is, the One and the All' (Wilber, 1995 p.347).

And if I meditate, think and act with love then these universal qualities of humanity, that are also shared with the Divine, will bring me closer to a conscious awareness of this 'Suchness'. The Absolute, this Suchness, this consciousness,

also called by Wilber (Wilber 1997) 'the One Taste', arises from the fusion of Eros and Agape, the typically masculine and typically feminine ways of loving.

I am putting words now to that experience of love that was passed to me when I was taught my meditation practice, and which gave me a glimpse of this 'Suchness'. Not only is it beyond social constructions and shared cultural understanding, but it is also beyond dualism.

I do not recall this as a 'peak experience' so much as an experience that created a great devotion to the practice and to the teacher. In Sanskrit this is called *bahkti*, devotion, and *bahkti margā*, is the Path of Devotion. It was by striving to give meaning to these feelings of devotion through the practice of meditation that I was unknowingly learning and developing my emotional and cognitive capacities.

What is so exciting about Wilber's work is that he integrates religious beliefs and practises into a universal and historical context without either denying the validity of those particular beliefs and practices or disregarding either Eastern or Western philosophy. Whilst he is not the only writer to have linked early Hinduism and Buddhism with early Christianity, he also brings Plato and the later Greek philosophers into an alignment that enables me to make sense of my cultural heritage.

Here is an example from Plato:

'Up to this level in the Mysteries of Love, Socrates, perhaps you could have initiated yourself ... Whoever wishes to proceed along the right road to this goal must from early youth appreciate beautiful objects and ... he must love one body only and generate in it beautiful discourse; then he must realise that beauty in any body whatsoever is sister to the beauty of another body; and if it is his wish to pursue what is beautiful in its outward form, it would be foolish not to recognise that one only and identical is the beauty of all bodies. And having understood this he must become the lover of all beautiful bodies, calming his ardour for one body only, regarding it as a small thing and trivial. Next he must consider the beauty of souls as being of greater worth than that of bodies, so that, wherever there is beauty of soul, however slight he must be content with it, love it and take care of it, ... And after the institutions let the "guide" lead the disciple up onto a higher plane, to the level of science ... and looking at the ample range of the

beautiful – no longer infatuated, like a slave, by the beauty of any single thing, of a youth or of a man, or of a sole institution, but turned to the vast sea of beauty and contemplating it – produce many beautiful and uplifting thoughts and discourses in a boundless love for knowledge ... As he who has been educated so far in amorous things, contemplating beauty step by step and in the right way, once he has come to the end of the pathway of love he will suddenly witness a beauty by its way stupendous' (Symposium, 210-211 in Raphael, 1999 p.92-93).

A relatively recent example of the integrating and the educating power of love comes from 'Unfolding BodyMind':

'Emotions modulate the operation of intelligence as a concrete aspect of everyday life. Thus envy, fear, ambition, and competition restrict intelligent behaviour because they narrow our attention and vision (in all our senses). These emotions prevent us from seeing the other, or from seeing the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This we know in everyday life; we show this when we say, 'he is blinded by ambition' or 'she is frozen with fear'. If you consider your experiences, you will likely see, as we claim, that the only emotion that broadens our vision is love. In love we accept ourselves and the circumstances in which we live, thus expanding the possibility of intelligent behaviour. In this sense love is visionary' (Bunnell and Forsyth, in Hocking, Haskell and Linds, 2001 p.163).

Stages of growth

In this section, I begin to surface questions about linear models of adult development.

Wilber has brought together the cognitive development theories from Piaget, Kohlberg, and Habermas with the higher stages of spiritual growth delineated by Plato, Christianity, Hinduism and Bhuddism. From this he has created a stage model of development covering the human life span.

He sets out these stages, maintaining that the line of development is an invariant sequence in which each nested stage emerges from a 'fulcrum of development' from within each previous stage. There are lines of regression, examples of getting stuck within a stage, and transitional moves between stages, and whilst it is possible to skip a stage, Wilber maintains that this development is unstable and that later regression is inevitable.

The basic structures of the stage model are cognitive, physical, moral and spiritual, and at each stage there is an integration and stability of the interior and exterior perspectives of the self. Only at the higher levels does Wilber refer to the operation of consciousness.

Is it possible to translate these levels to other contexts and / or to incorporate loving ways of learning into such schema?

If there are already significant differences in how emotions are controlled and expressed between the cultures of the east and the west, there are also likely to be significant differences in how the lived meaning of Eros and Agape are understood. And then this in turn will affect the 'fulcrum of development' and the transition between stages.

However, Wilber does not refer to 'love' in the lower (conventional) stages of development, although he critiques the 'Ascenders' for using Eros for their own ends and the 'Descenders' for misusing Agape. About the Ascenders he writes:

'the violent hand of Phobos lurks always behind the 'love' of the higher that they profess to all and sundry. ... The Ascenders are destroying this world because it

is the one world they are all certain that they thoroughly despise' (Wilber, 1995 p.340).

And about the Descenders

'compassion gone mad; not just embracing the lower but regressing to the lower... At the end of the game of that reductionist drive is death and matter, with no connection to Source. ... It attempts to save the lower by killing the higher' (Wilber, 1995 p.340).

In this way Wilber has a lot to say about Divine Love and the higher realms of consciousness, and a lot to say about how ideas of Divine Love may be misunderstood and misused, but nothing to say about how Divine Love might affect, and be affecting, the everyday world of ordinary people who may not aspire to, or even be aware that these levels of consciousness exist. This, of course, is what this thesis is all about.

The capacity for dissociation of the body and bodily feeling from the 'rational' mind, which has arisen in the last 300 post-Enlightenment years is likely to mean that basing the stage model on cognitive development means that it is privileging a more masculine approach. The different nature of this mind / body split may not be replicable either between genders or across cultures.

To be fair, Wilber does provide an explanation for highly developed individuals that does not rely on cognition. He calls it vision-logic:

'Where rationality gives all possible perspectives, vision-logic adds them up into a totality... vision-logic can hold in mind contradictions, it can unify opposites, it is dialectical and non-linear, and it weaves together what otherwise appear to be incompatible notions' (Wilber, 1995 p.185).

Wilber names the vision-logic of the non-cognitively based higher realms as 'centauric awareness' of the world:

'Centauric-integral awareness integrates the body and mind in a new transparency; the biosphere and noosphere, once finally differentiated can now be integrated in a new embrace. Feuerstein therefore refers to this newly

emerging structure as 'psychosomatic' involving the 'resurrection of the body' evidenced in such movements as holistic medicine and ecological sensitivity. "It is a whole-bodily event" he says, "feeling through the lived body. It does not take flight from bodily existence in any form. Rather it is grounded in unmitigated acceptance of, or primal trust in, corporeality. It is the transparent body-mind."... Where previously the verbal-mental-egoic self used those structures with which to view (and co-create) the world, now those structures themselves increasingly become an object of awareness and investigation by centauric consciousness (it is not just the mind looking objectively and 'representationally' at external objects – the reflection paradigm – but the mind looking at the mind intersubjectively' (Wilber 1995 pp.194-195).

So, whilst Wilber maintains that it is possible to reach these higher states of consciousness whilst living in ancient traditional societies or in non- Western educated communities, he tends to privilege the logical and integrative capacity of cognitive structures.

I guess none of this would matter too much whilst the stage model theory remains an abstraction that has no application. However, Wilber (Wilbur 1995 p.361) refers to stages as hierarchies or rankings, which were translated in the Catholic Church from contemplative awareness to political orders of power. And in Chapter Two I look at Torbert's leadership development profile (Fisher, Rooke and Torbert 2000) and its application in organisation. It is here that the translation and application of a stage model that does not take the experience of gender and cultural differences into account creates the potential for continuing to emphasise the masculine.

Wilber's integrated model makes the spiritual, and the higher realms of consciousness available within a cognitive model of development. With the current fashion for considering and highlighting the spiritual aspects of organisation, this could clearly set the scene for abuse of power by leaders, managers and consultants. It is possible that the stage model if roughly used as a map could then magnify existing power relations within organisations. If we continue with greater emphasis on a cognitive integration of the self, what space can be created alongside this which can also provide the loving contexts within which we can learn well?

The lotus flower

In this section I develop my critical responses to models of linear development.

The thousand petalled lotus flower has its roots in the slimy, thick and vile smelling mud. Its leaves lie on the surface of the lake as its flower bud forms. In the light and in the warmth of the sun's rays, the bud gradually unfolds its petals one by one releasing the intoxicating perfume of the thousand petals, pink and shining in the light. And finally in the centre of the flower is its jewel, the heart of the mystery of life, the unspeakable beauty and radiance of Divine Love. That is the Hindu metaphor for what we are. The yearning for love that we all experience is the sap that causes the plant to grow towards the light. As it grows and the petals open, the lotus flower is both warmed by the sun and fed by the nutrients lying in the mud at the bottom of the lake. The lotus has been given its own natural intelligence to grow and unfold.

Within this context of the lotus flower I am developing the seeds of an idea around constellations of values based on the four spiritual qualities of forgiveness, love, peace and harmony. Now these are not values that are independent of each other. It is not possible to love completely without forgiveness, if you have love then you have peace, and where there is harmony there is love, peace and forgiveness. Take one quality and 'live' it and the other three qualities are present. This is a constellation not an arrangement or a pattern, although when those qualities are active they form their own pattern, and like the petals of a flower they have their own intelligence.

This lives in the imagination as an inspiration which like the lotus flower creates qualities within which to live, or to return to when they have been forgotten.

And the intoxicating nature of the lotus flower mandala is not just a feast for the eyes, an object illuminated by light, it IS the light, not just a bouquet for the nose but the perfume itself. The patterns of light and scent are not separate objects for the delight of the senses, but become vibratory patterns that enable the body and mind to absorb the resonance of the mandala, and enable the mandala to resonate with the mind.

'Whether the mandalas come into being as part of our individual healing process, or whether they have been handed down through the centuries as a healing for us all, each has a uniquely transformative energy which lives on in a person who creates or is touched by it. Even if the mandala is destroyed [as in the Navajo and Tibetan sand mandala traditions], what is destroyed in physical form remains in subtle form, and if we have been touched by it, it lives on in the very structure of our cells and psyches' (Cornell, 1994:xix).

A representation of my meaning is given in the drawing on page 16.

Whilst there are linear developmental models in both Hinduism and Buddhism, there are other ways of denoting spiritual growth, like the mandala, that do not privilege cognition.

'Human inner development is more like the weather than like a train line. One responds to what kind of monsoon season arises... We need to have enormous respect for the defences that we have used to survive, as well as for the possibility of opening. In that sense, the most skilful teachings may be those which melt one open rather than somehow pry open the door, which later only slams shut' (Rothberg, 1996 p.34).

Again this speaks to the power of love, in this case the descending love of compassion, agape.

In this conversation, specifically set up to discuss Wilber's stage model of development, in his interview with Rothberg, Kornfield concludes:

'I think that the models are very important in clarifying the maps and the territory of consciousness and development. I think it is enormously helpful to have these maps of different possibilities of human experience from the ancient spiritual literature. What's often missing is a sense of how one travels through the territory. ... The big danger of using a map is the inclination to impose it unwisely on the natural opening of experience.' (Rothberg, 1996 p.36).

So, the opening of the lotus flower is the metaphor for growth and spiritual awakening that I respond to without reservation. It explains what 'opening' feels like, not just in my mind but in my body also. There is a yoga *asana*, *padmasana*, the lotus pose in which the knees bend and the feet fold into the

opposite front groin, and from there the spine automatically becomes vertical, like the stalk of the lotus flower. And the head is lifted and the gates of consciousness open like the jewel in the crown of the lotus.

But the opportunities for growing strongly come from the smelly mud, from the contradictions in life, and contemplating the picture of the lotus is not enough. The mandala is another vehicle from which I learn.

I have another mandala in front of me now, showing a medieval Christian picture, given to me on retreat 10 years ago. There are six pictures, with Christ's face in the middle, joining the miniatures together. It is intended to show events in the lives of human beings that must be embraced within our own life span. It shows:

- love and adoration of God by the angels,
- betrayal and conflict symbolised by the betrayal of Jesus in the garden at Gethsemane,
- sacrifice is symbolised by the resurrection in which the shadow of death is cast out
- union with God is shown through the celebration of the Eucharist,
- peace is symbolised by healing of body through care and nursing,
- humility is symbolised by the birth of Christ in the stable

And then the pictures are grouped by the way they are joined to the Godhead in the centre of the page. Betrayal and conflict, communion, humility and new birth are joined moving outwards from the centre. Adoration and love, sacrifice and resurrection, with the symbols of peace are joined and moving inwards towards the Godhead.

The point is that the metaphor of the many petalled lotus flower and the symbols of the Christian mandala enable another way of coming to know the self. These are not reliant on the integrative capacity of cognition to develop a wider consciousness. Instead this knowledge arises through experiential knowing, which still enables the physical, emotional and mental aspects of self to come to know themselves but through vision-logic rather than intellect.

This is a perception of multiple development which come together like a mandala to form clusters of values that guide and teach by becoming the reference point for practise.

'There's the development of generosity, ethics (*sila*), renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution or determination, loving-kindness (*metta*) and equanimity. ... What I see as really important is to help people apply wise attention to every aspect of their lives, so that each of the *paramis* get developed' (Rothberg, 1996 p. 43)

I think that this way of thinking about spiritual growth is comparable to the way that 'preservative love' and the maternal work that fosters the growth of children, comes forth (Ruddick, 1989). Approaching spiritual learning tenderly and with gentleness, learning to recognise the strength of the negative forces of resistance when they arise, willing to foster growth with love and compassion.

The degree of abstract thinking that I am involved in depends on the circumstances in which I find myself. Those early adult years caring for children taught me to use a strange mixture of practical thinking and 'reflective feeling' which I think leads me to favour the poetry of metaphor, poetry and symbol as a way of expressing my understanding of the nature of spiritual growth. This is the developmental map that works for me.

LOVING PRACTICES

In this section I begin to address the relation between spiritual practice and action research methods.

There is a rhythm to my day, which when I was working full-time began with meditation in the morning and was taken up again when I came home from work, and ended with a review of the day just before sleeping. Now that I am self-employed on the days when I am at home, I am able to include a period of silence in the middle of the day. It is not enough, but it is what I do. Other people I have known are able to break off from work in the office and go to the loo, or go for a walk outside to meditate, do silent practice or make affirmations, but I could never practise regularly in the office.

I would call meditation a radical practice, because it is aimed at changing my character, to change my awareness of 'Who I am'. This practice actively seeks to alter my consciousness, to broaden awareness as well as to speak to me inwardly of the meaning of what I am doing. Sometimes in meditation the realisation of what I am actually doing comes as a terrible shock. Sometimes if I am very tired, I fall asleep during the evening meditation. Sometimes I daydream and try to notice that is what I am doing. Sometimes I leave my thoughts and feelings and find peace. Radical practice is a willingness for change to happen unconditionally, without control but with awareness, like the metaphor of the lotus flower the mind's natural intelligence is allowed to rise like sap towards the flower bud. It is the willingness to give up the little everyday self (*annamaya kosa*) that allows this growing to happen. It is called renunciation in Hinduism and sacrifice in Christianity.

Disciplining the body, changing its shape in the *asanas*, controlling the breath and controlling appetites also helps let go of *annamaya kosa*, the material world. Ways of doing this are contained in *Astanga*, Patanjali's Eight Limbs of Yoga (Iyengar 1993) and are part of Hinduism's practical philosophy. *Astanga* might be a linear model but as I seem to be have come to it backwards, starting with the seventh limb of meditation practise rather than starting with the first limb and going upwards, I am using the model as a cluster of images, rather than a developmental line.

If I put my work-in-the-world ahead of my commitment to spiritual practice, then the outcome will eventually show me that success-in-the-world is my true intention. In time events will show me the difference between my true desire and what I say to myself. And events might also show me how much effort I need to make in order to reach my goal. If I meditate with sincerity and not sweep things under the carpet, then I will also be shown these things. This is now the level of authenticity that I seek.

Movement of the body in the asanas releases tension and locked in feeling, and the breath is able to move to those places, to link the mind and the body. Loving practices have given me a stronger self-identity (Hindus call it ego) with which to recognise wrong and right action, and to deal with my emotional history. Over these years I have developed my ability to think and to reason, to stand up for myself. However I remain aware that my spiritual practice needs to be in every corner of my life, that whilst

‘Spiritual practice is not separate from driving to work or changing the diapers’
(Rothberg, 1996 p.30).

As yet my experience of Divine Love is separate from those day-to-day activities.

‘We are not only slaves of the culture in which we have been brought up; we are also slaves to the vast cloud of misery and sorrow of all humanity, to the vastness of its confusion, violence and brutality. ... We are concerned rightly with the outward change or reformation of the social structure with its injustice, wars, poverty, but we try to change it either through violence or the slow way of legislation. In the meantime there is poverty, war, hunger and the mischief that exists between man and man. We seem totally to neglect paying attention to the vast accumulated clouds which man has been gathering for centuries upon centuries – sorrow, violence, hatred and the artificial differences of religion and race. We neglect these hidden accumulations and concentrate on outward reformation. This division is perhaps the greatest cause of our decline.

What is important is to consider life not as inner and outer, but as a whole, as a total undivided movement. Then action has quite a different meaning, for then it is not partial. ... The perception or the understanding of this is intelligence. It is this intelligence that puts away all the combinations of sorrow, violence and strife. It is like seeing a danger. Then there is instant action – not the action of will

which is the product of thought. Thought is not intelligence. Intelligence can use thought, but when thought tries to capture intelligence for its own uses, then it becomes cunning, mischievous and destructive' (Krishnamurti, 1991 p.18-19).

Comparing upstream first person research with downstream first person research, the work that I do in organisations has not been integrated with this new form of knowledge.

I think that my response to the question, 'Who am I?' can be compared to the active patterning of fractals, causing the knot to become smaller and subtler as fractals emanating from the knot are magnified by the 'I' of consciousness.

'Iteration launches a system on a journey that visits both chaos and order. The most beautiful consequences of iteration are found in the artistry of fractals. ... Fractals are everywhere around us, in the patterns by which nature organises clouds, rivers, mountains, many plants, tribal villages, our brains, lungs, circulatory systems. All of these (and millions more) are fractal, replicating a dominant pattern at several smaller levels of scale. We live in a universe of fractal forms...' (Wheatley, 1999 pp.123-124).

Each time I interrupt the same pattern of behaviour, the interruption imperceptibly alters my consciousness and my relation with the world. With each replication of the change in patterning comes the new possibility of a shift in perception. With each shift in perception comes the possibility of a change in behaviour. The fluctuations of consciousness become less chaotic and more discernible.

Action research shares with spiritual practice the question, 'Who am I?' In Hinduism that inquiry is made in order to bring into focus the actions, speech, intentions and qualities that the student brings to the world. It is a way of seeing (standing aside from) unthinking unconscious behaviours and attitudes.

In action research the researcher asks the question, 'Who am I?' in order to know who is carrying out the research, to bring to awareness the values, mental frames, modes of behaviour that s/he brings to the research.

Action research starts from the premise that we know more than we think we know, and as a way of delving deeper the question is often asked, 'Who or what inspires you?' In Hinduism that question is similar, but phrased differently within

a mental frame that assumes inspiration emanates from a loving divinity (as a pre-existent form) and inspiration arises as part of the process of loving that begins with the teacher (guru) and becomes complete in the divine. So the meaning of the Hindu question 'Who am I?' shows me my level of consciousness and what I need to change, and my action research question shows me the differences between my espoused values and how I put them into action. (Schon, 1995)