

'Presencing' through the Life Processes

In an article called 'The Power of Forgetting' (*Guardian Weekly* 25-31 August 2006), Karen Armstrong reflects on the reactions to 9/11, repeating the suggestion by an American rabbi that the ideal response would have been to declare forty days of mourning and silence, and then out of that reflection people might have discovered what best to do. We could imagine that the subsequent course of events would have been very different.

With this view as her context, Armstrong considers the wonderful spiritual movement from China of Daoism — or Taoism — first quoting Chuang Tzu: 'The Way is found in emptiness. The Way is the mind's fast.' Reading this put me in mind of what Rudolf Steiner once said about fasting. In fasting, we break — these are my words for it — the longings of the desire body, and we break the habits of the pattern body; and this then allows the inherent wisdom of the physical body to assert itself. So the suggestion of the Way being the 'mind's fast' is very interesting to contemplate...

In what I present today I want to consider the art of *wu wei*, the Taoist principle of doing nothing, as a beginning place — or maybe it's a middle place... It's a 'doing nothing' that is really something. And I also want to bring this together with words by John Keats, one of my favourite poets who, if he'd lived past the age of 26, might have astonished us further with the power of his mind to articulate insight into spiritual mysteries. His letters to his brothers are marvellous documents — I will refer here to just one example.

Keats, talking about Shakespeare, but referring to anyone engaged in artistic activity — and by that I would also include the art of parenting and the art of teaching and indeed the art of being — says we must develop *Negative Capability*. He does not mean being negative, or just coping with negative attitudes, but 'that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.' That seems pertinent to our present human — and world — situation.

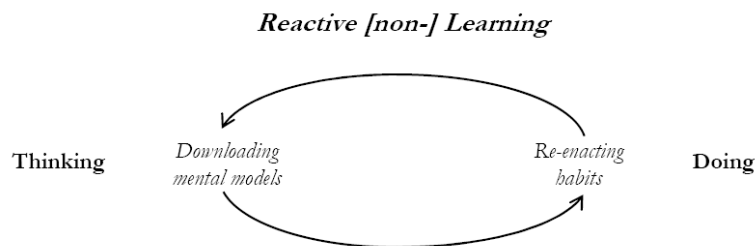
Now, Karen Armstrong goes on in her article to state that 'in our restlessly talkative culture, we find silence difficult' ... 'We find it hard to sit quietly and take time to look at these complex matters impartially and in depth, admitting that we may not fully understand what we are talking about' ... 'We have to be ready to "forget" — to start from scratch, and experience the frightening void of unknowing' ... 'If we are to break the deadly cycle of escalating violence, we must listen intently to what everybody, even our enemy, is saying, and be sincerely ready to let it change us...'

It seems to me that she is talking about searching out what Rudolf Steiner called — in his *Philosophy of Freedom* — *moral intuitions*, *moral imagination*, and *moral technique*. With all these comments as background, let us proceed...

This presentation will be in two distinct parts. In this first part I will develop a viewpoint derived from the work of Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers in their recently published book *Presence: an exploration of profound change in people*,

organisations, and society — to recognise particular elements in our way of being, and with a few diagrams consider what I think is one of our central problems in life, and then look at a ‘process-solution’. Then I will introduce the seven life processes, which Rudolf Steiner first wrote about in 1910; and finally I want to bring all these reflections together.

One challenge we experience in contemporary life is found exactly in what we know so well (the polarities of thought and action), which I’ll present initially as a problem: that in this restlessly busy contemporary culture, we swing constantly between two poles. We can call one of them *thinking*, while the other is the *doing* pole of the will — and all too often we seem to be ‘toggle-switching’ between them, without sufficient time or opportunity to reflect on what is happening:



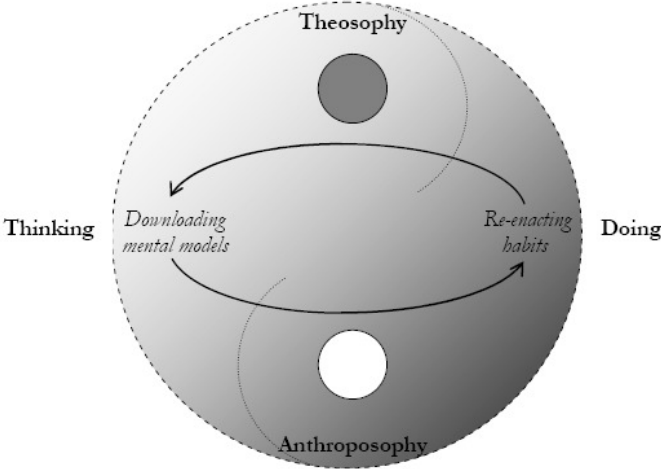
On the one hand, here is something we tend to do if we don’t learn to enquire in the way real thinkers do — we simply *download existing mental models*, as Scharmer puts it. There are many mental models (the atom is one). On the whole, we don’t think rigorously enough; thoughts are impressed upon us by others — politicians, religious people, media people, friends, even colleagues... These thoughts are already formed and they come at us quite forcefully. For instance, when working with parents, I hear they often feel burdened by our mental models, which seem to be telling them they’ve got it wrong. So they become acutely aware of what they aren’t yet doing. They have strong feelings of guilt and inadequacy, reinforced by these incessant demands to do this, to do that, to react... Consequently, at the other pole we find occurring, under all this pressure (and this is what Karen Armstrong is talking about in her article), the *re-enacting of old habits*.

When we are stressed we tend to revert to a rather primitive self, often an adolescent self. Here, in the middle of this diagram, which represents the middle of the Self — there is a gap. That middle area presents a challenge, and if only we would glance in there, we would find some powerful experiences: a parent for instance might call it guilt and inadequacy — others will call it anxiety, fear, frustration, hatred, anger. They can feel a real sense of failure. And they wince when we teachers tell them so wisely what parenting is about. Professor Michael Ray, of the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University, says that ‘fear, judgement and the chattering of the mind’ produce in us a *voice of judgement*. We have this voice in us that negates — not in the sense John Keats means, that is, a ‘negative capability’ to live in the nothingness — but a voice that negates everything. Otto Scharmer, of the Sloan School of Business Management at MIT, calls it *doubt, cynicism and fear*.

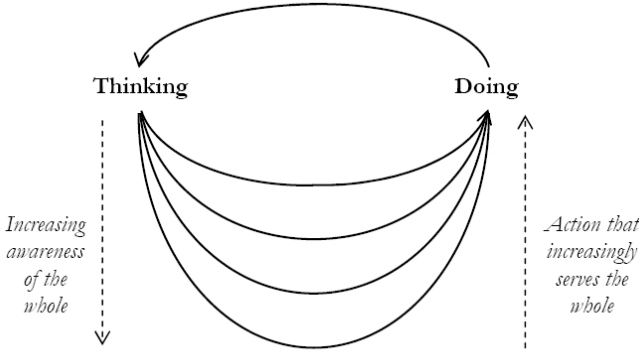
Rudolf Steiner summed it up in referring to the ‘three beasts of the abyss’, engendered by *doubt, hatred and fear*. Doubt is very much a threat in our intellect; whereas hatred is a force in our feeling life, in our social being (which always begins with self-hatred — there is an old

saying, ‘the sword I wish to stab through my enemy’s heart, I’ve already stabbed through my own’). And fear, that dread deep down in the belly — often resulting from guilt, when as parents for instance we feel constantly that we are getting it all wrong — cripples the will to effect change. We can feel really assailed by these ‘beasts’. They feel bestial.

There is one particular approach to this abyss — and this is my picture — which has been traditionally characterised as Theosophy. Up here is a realm of revelation, of *divine wisdom* which, if only we could access it, would be wonderful to experience. Not only Theosophy but many ancient paths gave humanity access to cosmic visions — to spiritual guidance. But generally that eye of vision is now darkened — the gods don’t appear to us in that way any more. And so we can feel abandoned — as existentialism puts it, we become alienated beings in a hostile universe. Consider it in relation to this ‘Tao diagram’:



What arises as our challenge today, as teachers in Steiner schools, in terms of our body-based experience, is to deepen our understanding into this *human-centred wisdom* of anthroposophy. How do we find a way down into this, rather as the human being ‘grows down’ through those stages of successive births into this world? Where we might find, in the depths of embodiment, this ‘eye experience’ again, but now arising *within* life. We enter life, to find deeper levels of learning, and here we can find a new eye — a bright eye within the darker being of humanity through which we gain access to spiritual intuitions. This deepening into the wisdom of the body’s learning can be represented thus:



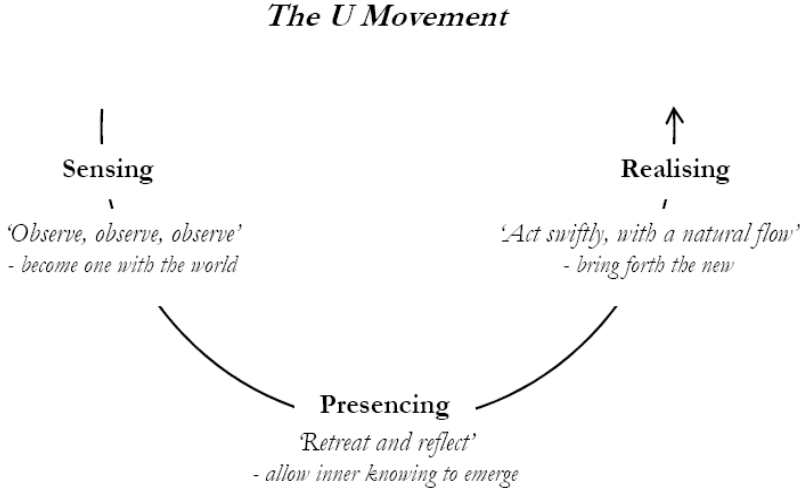
This is how Otto Scharmer and his associates present it: to access these levels of learning, through deepening, taking our observing and our thinking down into that area, where we start to find an *increasing awareness of the whole* — where we start to ‘see it’, to ‘get it’... And then coming up out of our will we find *action that increasingly serves the whole*. So we think not only of what do we want to do, but what is there to be done? What is wanted? What is needed? What is this future that is emerging?

In considering this further, I first want to note that back in the 1970s Friedrich Glasl and Dirk Lemson (associates of Bernard Lievegoed in the NPI Institute for Organisation Development in Rotterdam) developed a U Procedure for process work in business. Scharmer has taken this U movement as the basis for his research, and in developing it he uses the words *sensing*, *presencing*, and *realising* to name the three distinct stages; but the key phrases in the following diagram are borrowed from the Taoist and economist, Brian Arthur, who has said our first challenge is to ‘observe, observe, observe’ — in order to live into the whole picture, to *become one with the world*...

At the second stage he says we need to ‘retreat and reflect.’ Reflective practice is something we often talk about. But I think reflection and learning are two different things, so there’s actually something else that has to go on down there... To *allow inner knowing to emerge* — and this often happens in conjunction with other people; for instance in considering what a college of teachers can do, what a group can accomplish, what two people in dialogue can accomplish... Then something may arise that is more than their own personal development. ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name’, we might say, then it’s possible to come to something which is more than just a sum of insight that those two or three might have.

Finally, for the third stage Brian Arthur uses an evocatively Taoist-sounding phrase, ‘act swiftly, with a natural flow.’ Imagine — being in a main lesson, standing with the children, and you say the morning verse together, and suddenly the lesson crystallises... Or else when you are working hard with your children and there’s an incident, imagine being able to precipitate an effective response and enact it right in that moment. Well, it is possible, and most of us will have had such moments. The task is to make this into an active pathway:

‘Observe, observe, observe’ — ‘Retreat and reflect’ — ‘Act swiftly, with a natural flow’

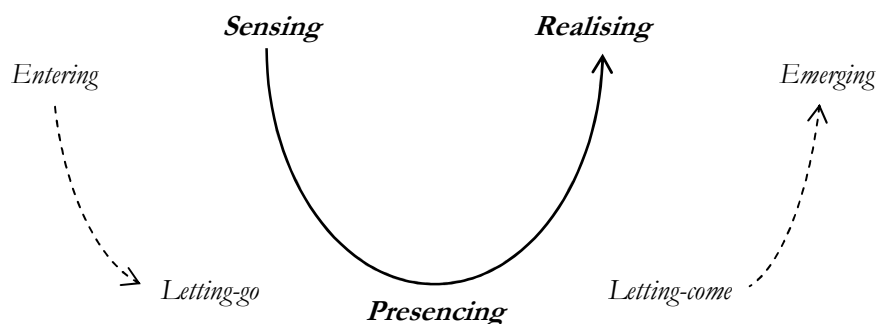


Ultimately, to *bring forth the new*... Now, Scharmer's terms for the three stages are: *sensing*, *presencing* and *realising*. Of these, 'sensing' seems understandable, so long as we recognise that it becomes 'deep sensing'. We need to note, however, that what is meant by 'realising' is not just an event in thinking — it's what a creative arts director does when he or she brings a project to fruition, it's what a film director does. Their realisation is actually the exhibition, the performance, the film... It's not something they have in their head — we need to see that this realisation is a will activity, not merely some thought or visualisation.

Between these two activities of sensing and realising, what is really interesting is everything implied by this word, 'presencing'. To be present, sensing, pre-sensing... Steiner talks about 'presence' in the School of Spiritual Science, referring to those originating powers that give us 'presence ground'. We are granted the ground on which we may be present, and then the experience of presence on that ground is given to us by even higher powers. Steiner calls this experience 'world presence' in the 'feeling's field'.

Those of you who are Buddhists will know that in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche we find a clear reference to the *ground (or mother) luminosity* as the cosmic foundation of existence; and then the *path (or child) luminosity* is described as that personal realisation of presence upon this ground. In other words, you have to be granted the ground to stand on, before the creative being of the child in you — the degree to which the cosmos lights up in you as an individual — can have a standing place and then make a path. You can only have a path across a ground. And the astonishing reality is that through development you in fact become that path: 'You cannot travel on the Path until you have become the Path itself', said the Buddha near the end of his life.

There are two further phrases to add in here — first, on the path from sensing to presencing there has to be an activity we call *letting-go*. That's what Karen Armstrong is talking about in reference to 9/11 and all that grief and rage — the need to let go and to be able to stabilise one's being in this terrifying space, when the ground of the familiar is eroding away into an abyss, and when the pressure-hose of our mental downloading can no longer simply super-saturate and overwhelm this reality confronting us — when 'the blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold and overcome the order of the soul', as Leonard Cohen sings in 'The Future'. So 'presencing' means therefore to stand in *negative capability* 'without any irritable reaching after fact or reason' — in order to 'let come'. For that's the other wonderful phrase — *letting-come*. To learn to live in a new atmosphere, breathing the spirit, enkindled by the spirit... The spiritual does want to come to us in a new way — realisation comes to us when we practise this form of presence. We need to recognise this here in the U process:



So, we practice seeing what is happening, how it happens, why it happens; then, letting go of all suppositions, we stand in an open, honest — often initially helpless— relationship to the situation; and, letting insight come, we forge, shape, and ultimately enact the way forward.

In organisation development we generally see this U process as involving seven steps. This way of considering it as a developmental tool has been documented by Glasl, Scharmer *et al* — I want to now look at it a little differently. First, however, we can reflect that in the three stages of the Morning Verses we speak each day with our older children, there is sensing, presencing, and realising. Let's just consider this for a few moments...

When we wake up each morning, we take so much for granted. But the Morning Verse tells us exactly what's happening: *Sensing* — 'I look into the world...' Oh, it's still there, I didn't even notice it when I was asleep. And then I look inward — *presencing*... Oh, my soul, it's still here also. So 'I look into the soul...' — I re-collect, I re-gather, I re-member.

The marvel of this Morning Verse (and this is so of the verse we say with younger children also) is that it recognises the breathing process of sleeping and waking — and the miracle is that the world is there when we wake up, and so are we, *sensing*... Then, in *presencing*, we are 'inspired' (we breathe in this awareness of world and self). And now something is to happen — we are engaged in *realising*. The Morning Verse for the older children concludes by asking that 'strength, grace and skill for learning and for work in me may live and grow...'

In this second part of my lecture I will discuss the seven life processes. Rudolf Steiner first characterised these life processes in 1910, in that unfinished book now published as *Anthroposophy — a fragment*. It's one of the most intriguing books he ever wrote, because its incomplete form allows us to see a process, of Steiner struggling with getting his insight into words, into phrases — and then he has another go, and finally he gives up. He just couldn't complete it in written form... But the fragments have been published, and there he names the following life processes:

Breathing

Warming

Nourishing

Secreting

Maintaining

Growing

Generating

He refers first of all to *breathing*. In each being that lives we find a breathing process. Then there's *warming*. All life is supported by a warming process, which is internalised in warm-blooded creatures, or is directly dependent on the sun's warmth in the case of cold-blooded creatures and plants. And there is *nourishing* — every being that has life also has some process of taking in what is required to build its existence.

Secreting is something we're all busily doing at this moment — we secrete what we need, and excrete whatever is superfluous, or even poisonous, to us. This is the central stage in a series of transactions between self and world.

Rudolf Steiner then refers to *maintaining*. For instance, there is a process going on through which every single cell is being constantly bathed and cleansed — otherwise we would rot away on the inside. So something is maintaining our lives. But we not only remain the same, being maintained, there's also a process of *growing*. Think of the rate of growth in the small child. This is a process by which development takes place, so that in any organism things change, things develop. The final process is about *generating*. We have in us the forces of reproduction, for instance — we generate new forms. Cells replicate themselves, and beings reproduce. We can also conceive a thought, and then we have a concept. So that too is a process of generating — and this leads us now to consider these processes in consciousness.

Here I need to note that in the first place the life processes are entirely unconscious processes within us — as soon as we begin thinking about breathing we no longer breathe normally. As soon as we start to be aware of our digestion — if for instance we become aware of what's going on below the diaphragm where there's some real violence happening, with acid being poured on to the cake we had for morning tea — then, for normal consciousness something's wrong. These are unconscious life processes which we do not notice — and if we do, then something is disturbed. Thus, secretions also occur in us; as there are a few characteristic ones that exude, we notice some of them, but we don't have much of an intimate relationship to their functioning, as they are submerged in the unconscious. But — as we shall see — they each form a basis for consciousness.

The fascinating thing about these life processes is that they are all proceeding within us simultaneously — they are happening constantly in us, but they also can be seen in a kind of procession. We can think of them being progressive and when we start to look to see how it is, we can consider them as differentiated streams of the rivers of life in us. We have these wonderful braided rivers here in Canterbury which divide and join, and continually flow and interact with one another — we can think of the life processes as being just like that, and then we can think about how we might make our way along that flowing river using those processes, and that's called consciousness.

What can we understand about the little canoes of consciousness that can float upon these entwined streams? In what we call the life body, on the boundaries between this and the soul body there are these wonderful life processes, of which we only become aware when we are ill. Or we actually take on a developmental path and learn to observe them. Now, if we set out on a developmental path we might start to notice that these are, in the first place, metaphors — and later we might discover their exact correspondences to the experiences in our consciousness.

Let's look at our work as teachers in the classroom. We'll first talk about *breathing*. We can, for instance, quite readily see that if we're working in a classroom we need to sense into and open up the space for something to happen. Breathing is therefore about opening up the space, in a differentiation between the inner and outer, between expansion and contraction:

'Form is the envelope of pulsation', a Tantric saying tells us. Sensing, we form the space, breathing in its possibilities.

The second step then is to inhabit that space. We teachers first have to open up the space, to create the environment in which this is going to happen... And then we have to permeate this space with warmth — with our enthusiasm, with our meeting the child at the door, welcoming them, *warming* them into the task of learning... Think about the permeating, warming mood that radiates from a particular personality, and then of the atmosphere in a classroom where such a person works. Think about what interest is, about warming to the topic, about not getting too heated — if I were to get really heated now, you probably wouldn't enjoy it, and if you get heated with a teenager, they'll tell you to 'chill'. Is the classroom too hot, or too cold? Is it in fact a hot-house? Are you overheating them? You'll see it in their faces. Or is it icy, frigid? Knowledge leaves us cold if we're not ready to take it — so it's not just a metaphor, it's a reality.

We can look at each one of these processes in this way, developing increasing insight. For instance, in our main lesson we might put a lot of effort towards *nourishing* the children, and we might even have to ask, do we force-feed them? Can we force-feed the child? Can we under-nourish the child? Can children be malnourished in a classroom? And, of course, the sad answer is, yes. There are situations where teachers have been ramming it down their throats, maybe even in the name of rich, imaginative lessons. Do we offer a balanced diet in our lessons? Do we cater for all tastes? Everybody has a different process in learning, just as they do in their digestion — some of us will devour food like carnivores, others nibble or browse, and learning is like that, consciousness is like that — each one of us has a slightly different pace of assimilating things.

We can similarly consider *secreting*. We've all had some food for thought from the previous lecture, and some stuff from other conversations over morning tea, and now we're already sorting out what we're going to keep. That's called secretion. And what we're going to chuck out is called excretion. We excrete what we don't need, and we keep and continue to work with what is important to us. If we don't do this, we get indigestion. Rudolf Steiner gives us an exercise: to learn to differentiate the essential from the non-essential. That's a secretion / excretion process.

This is the final step in the process inward. Having opened up the breathing space and its rhythmic relationships, then permeating this space with our warmth, permeating the subject, permeating everything with our interest, then through the nourishing, digesting process beginning to chew it over — recognising that children really are ruminants, that they need a lot of time to chew things over, to think about it, to reflect on it — we come to this wonderful secretion process. And it's a secret process.

We don't see secretion in learning so easily. If you are lucky you might have a child like Sarah in my Class 8 who would say when I taught a new maths concept, 'I don't get it,' and I would say, 'Fine, don't worry, tomorrow we will look at it again.' The next day she would say, 'John, I still don't get it — Well, I almost... no, I still don't get it.' Then, on the third morning the penny would drop and she'd say, 'I get it, how come I didn't see it on the first day?' So here is one example of this secreting process that happens so imperceptibly.

It is such a secret process, isn't it? I could feel what we call the cogs whirring — Sarah was really trying, there was real pain there... But the penny dropping — that process through which a child suddenly 'cracks the code' of reading or a maths equation and then secretes a faculty — and fortunately, hopefully, excretes the pain of the experience that preceded the realisation — this is a very secret process. Think about your own realisations. This is a quiet, discreet process. It is quite invisible in many ways. As the poet Rilke says, 'Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. The point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live some distant day into the answer.' And you suddenly realise you *know*.

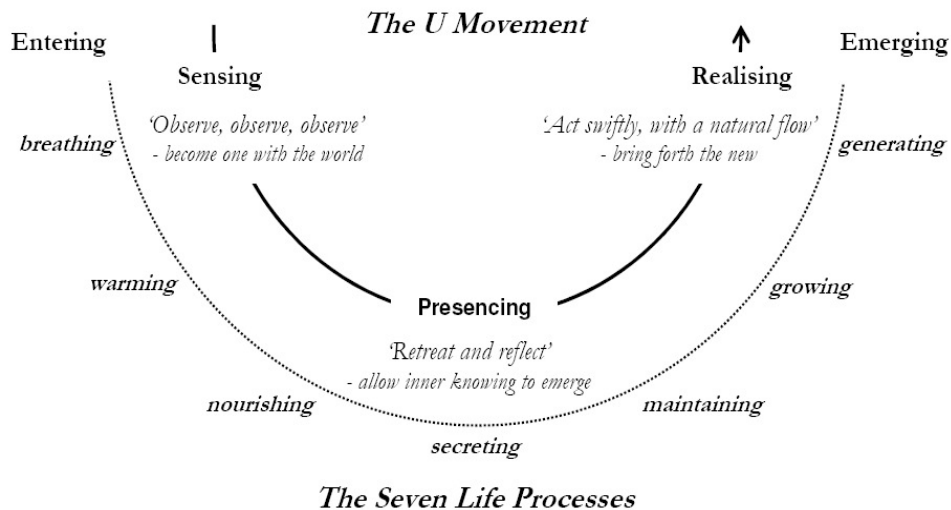
The next step in learning, for the students, has to do with *maintaining* what they now have started to secrete. That happens through what we call the practice lessons; and that's the real meaning of any homework, those are the recapitulations, that's having the children retell the story before continuing, that's memory work... And some are good at that, and some are not so good. So that is an ongoing need for maintenance.

A *growing* process occurs when a faculty or new skill begins to develop out of all this work. When something starts to develop, we have growth. It also has to do with forgetting — growth in plants goes through metamorphic phases, in which there is a diminution and then a new form suddenly appears... How does that reveal itself in children's lives? We do see it when they have a typical childhood illness, a contraction and then a new stage... Is learning like that too? Is there a 'growing stupid' before 'growing wise'? That's how it is, for instance, for Winnie-the-Pooh, who has to conclude he is a 'bear of little brain' before the answer will come. Read 'The Tao of Pooh' — it's a delightful book, and it gives a true picture of insight. Forgetting is a letting go, in order to let come... Karen Armstrong called her article 'The Power of Forgetting'. If this is so, how do we enable it?

Completing this learning picture, we can see *generating* as an activity in the young child in their spontaneous play, in what arises out of the moment. And ultimately we could imagine a child in school doing a project, and thus involved in generating.

I'm not suggesting these are processes of consciousness in the child. I *am* suggesting they can be processes of consciousness in us — a way of proceeding that is in accord with the nature of life itself. They remain unconscious in the child; but they are the processes upon which learning is carried along. Therefore, for us to monitor a main lesson, for instance, in terms of these life processes, and to constantly ask ourselves: the atmosphere in the classroom — is it breathing freely? The warmth in the room — how is its mental / emotional / motivational temperature? The lessons we are offering — are they digestible? The process through which lessons are secreted and excreted — do they retain what *we* need them to retain, or do they retain what *they* need to retain, does it have to be a bit of both? And so on — those are real pedagogical questions.

If we review what has been presented here, and then distribute these life processes along a U path, we can see how secreting is here, in the depths, and that maintaining, that huge skills area, is now starting to lead out again, into growing and generating... So we can now see this continuous process — of orientation, entering, assimilating, essentialising, and then progressively leading out into productivity:



Putting it all together, we can ask: what does *sensing* involve? What is it to ‘observe, observe, observe’? The first step is to become aware of the field, of the whole range of phenomena — so we have to sense into the space, we have to sense into our room, we have to sense into the child, we have to notice everything that’s happening there. The first stage of observation is always that sensing, that breathing into the space.

The second stage of observation has to do with warming. We won’t find the connections without warming — without developing interest we stay cold, indifferent, and separated from everything. It’s actually a form of love, to permeate the space. And that’s why it’s so exhausting. We must give a great amount of energy into that space. Our kindergarten teachers understand this. Mothers understand this. To understand the connections that exist in the life world, that connectedness through which everything is related to everything else, where everything is constantly becoming something else, we have to enter with tremendous warmth of interest. We can’t stand back coolly and look at it and get an answer. That’s the old way, the dead way of knowledge. On this path towards knowing we have to participate, as part of the process of becoming one with it.

These first stages of observation conclude with the process of nourishing — of assimilating the ‘heart and soul’ of the circumstance, any relevant attitudes or values... We need to take it in — only then can we begin to chew it over, digesting the experience. This isn’t something that can happen at some ‘fast food outlet’ — we need rather to belong to the contemplative ‘slow food’ movement... Out of this comes — no, really we must recognise that to take it in means that we are ready to ‘admit’ — that is, to let in — true responsibility...

To ‘retreat and reflect’, to allow the inner knowing to emerge, might take a second or two, or maybe forty days (or longer!). What do we have to let go of, in order to pause, to be still, and so practise *presencing*? So that we can decide what we really must keep, to sort the essential from the inessential, in order that we might let come? Here, what Keats called ‘negative capability’ lets us be ‘in all kinds of uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason’. How do we develop that? Here, we could consider those six basic exercises given by Rudolf Steiner... Or that retrospective review which he called the ‘Rückschau’...

Then, in *realising* — to find ways though which to ‘act swiftly, with a natural flow’ — we need first to support the developmental environment, to sustain our relationship, and in fact to maintain the learning situation. What steadfastness of purpose, what patience, is implied here! A good gardener knows that to prepare the soil, to till the ground, is an act of devotion towards what may come... We teachers, we parents, each one of us must do likewise in our work with children, in trust of all future development.

At last the first tender growth appears. We need to cultivate this transformational process. So we accompany and guide the successive stages of development. This is the path forward. This is the whole business of growing, of cultivating what has sprouted from this ground we have prepared. We must be patient, as it may take a long time before the results show. Finally, we experience the new as a spontaneous outcome. A flowering, a fulfilment... And also a process towards seed-forming...

We can summarise our understanding of these processes as a developmental path:

Breathing: sensing in the phenomenological polarities (in face of doubt)

Warming: permeating the experiential space (in face of hatred)

Nourishing: taking it all in to become ‘response-able’ (in face of fear)

Secreting: sorting the essential from the inessential

Maintaining: supporting the developmental environment

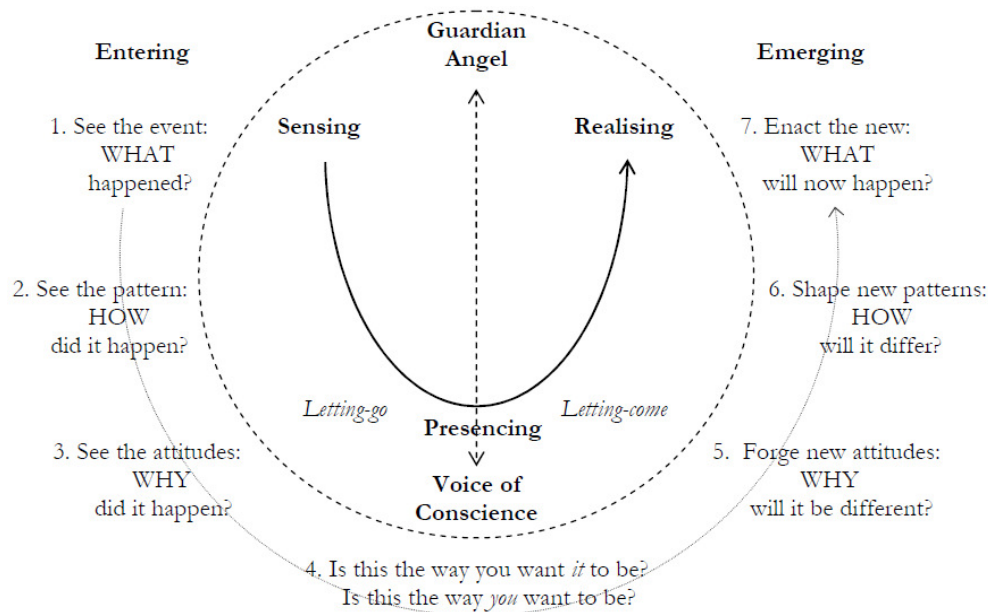
Growing: cultivating the transformational process

Generating: creating the new as a spontaneous outcome

I would add here that this also is a pathway I recommend in behavioural and incident management. Just consider, for a moment, what *breathing*, *warming* and *nourishing* imply in approaching an event. And also what *maintaining*, *growing*, and *generating* imply in looking for effective outcomes.

Reflecting on the day / night rhythm, we can relate it to that central experience of *secreting* responsibility — we could say ‘response-ability’ — regarding behaviour. Rudolf Steiner tells us that when we sleep, in the night, when all is quiet, we stand there with our Guardian Angel in the spiritual world and have a ‘dialogue’ about how things are going. And then when we come back and re-unite with our bodies in bed there’s a wonderful other being in us — an echo of the Angel — called our conscience, a ‘being of light’ that lives in our body of life formative forces. Its voice is conscience, Rudolf Steiner says.

Through this process, the child slowly begins *secreting* self-knowledge. In the subsequent encounter, when we address an issue with the child, presencing, he or she can find that true responsibility. Then with the child we can start forming a pathway towards change, and so we coach them through the developmental stages of formulating a new relationship to how things are. We support them through all that — *maintaining*, *growing*, and *generating* the new approach:



In this comprehensive diagram I have indicated the seven steps of the U Process as used in my parenting workshops on behaviour (it can be reformulated for other situations). It works. Through seeking this *increasing awareness of the whole*, we begin to find *action that increasingly serves the whole*.

To conclude, here are two stories. There was a girl who was really quite difficult. But I remember the day on which she got it, when she said, 'Oh, that's it, you mean I just have to do the process!' And she made her way forward with that — she found it worked for her to 'do the process'. Some time later another girl got into difficulties and was refusing to discuss it, and suddenly that first girl said to her, 'Look, you just do the process, it's okay, it's cool, you do the process and you come out, and then... Hey John, can I come too and do the process with her?' So this is a child who was now starting to work at the creative, generating level, and was able to accompany another child on the journey towards response-ability.

The other story is about a boy who was only seven. I was asked to work with him, and took him gently through the 'process'. So what's happening? Has this happened before? Does it happen very often? How often? He told me he was kicking, hitting, pinching, punching — he said far more in fact than the teacher knew about, and it was happening rather often... (Always remember that the child knows more than we do about what's happening.) I then asked him, 'So how do you feel about that? What else can you tell me that will help me understand?' (Which actually is a great question!) Then he said this extraordinary thing: 'I want to be good like the others, but it's too hard.'

Now, to want to be good like the others is a wonderful thing to say, isn't it? That's a real secretion! Because it means he knows there is a difference; how often do we actually affirm such admissions? (Note that an 'admission' is a letting in, a *letting come*.) And then he said it was too hard, and isn't it good to affirm that secretion too? Because have you noticed that to change your character is quite difficult? I remained silent for a few moments, and simply said to him then, firmly and directly, 'No more hitting, no more hitting, no more hitting.' He

replied, 'Is that all?' I said, 'Yes, come back when you've done that one and we'll talk about what else could happen.' Three days later he came back to me and asked, 'What's next?'

A Taoist aphorism tells us that 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step'. I'm convinced that this is a pathway, a developmental pathway, and I want to reiterate that the seven life processes are what I would call a hygienic ground upon which this pathway in consciousness can be formed: to learn to observe, observe, observe; in letting go, to retreat and reflect; and then out of that, in letting come, to act with a natural flow and to act swiftly.

That's what we want to accomplish when we do our child observations, when we retreat and reflect in the evening and prepare ourselves, and then in the morning we stand there with our awareness of this U path in saying the Morning Verse with the children. Remember that the children are doing that journey too, not so consciously probably as us — and sometimes to my shame more consciously, for the children today are quite remarkable. These processes, this U movement — they are going on, each day, each night, and if we could work more cooperatively with it all, life would be quite a lot better for us. Just imagine what our college meetings would be like if we made decisions that were in harmony with what I've presented today. Imagine how the world might be. It works if we become acquiescent to true process, and are not so obsessed with what we want to make happen.

~ John Allison, revised from the recorded transcript of a lecture presented at the Southern Hemisphere Steiner Teachers Conference in Christchurch, New Zealand, September 2006

Footnote:

This lecture is now the final essay in *A Teacher's Book*, published by Immortal Books in 2008. To order this book, download the flyer on my website.