

Learning to Accompany the Child

All real living is a meeting.

~ Martin Buber

This quote on the blackboard is one of several by the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber I'll refer to in the course of this evening — in the first place, making use of them as moments of contemplative presence in my narrative, but also offering them as a parallel commentary that resonates interestingly with some of the ideas I've been living with recently.

I want to develop several observations and reflections, to consider what might be involved in accompanying the child. This first became a question for me many years ago when I was starting to struggle with my Class 6, and a mother — a widow whose sixth child was in the class — said to me one afternoon: 'You need to find a different approach to my son now. It isn't enough to stand in front of him as his teacher — you need to somehow get alongside him, to be at his side, to be looking in the same direction and saying, this is what it looks like from here, this is how you could go at it... You need to learn how to accompany him.'

Like most lessons, it's taken me a while to learn this, and I still feel I'm just beginning to get it, and more importantly to do it. Therefore I'd like to share a little of what I've learned about this art of accompanying the child. Before we start, however, I want to say something about creative processes, which will help establish my approach. Many years ago I read one of those important books for my life: Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*. In the first chapter he asks, what are the necessary steps in learning any art? And he suggests there are two aspects: 'one, the mastery of the theory; the other, the mastery of the practice'. Now, many among us may shrink from the word 'theory'; too much in this domain can seem academic, abstract, mind-jarring. But the word derives from the Greek word *theōrein*, which means 'to behold, to contemplate'. This is the activity I seek to develop — a way of seeing things. Then, I want also to establish an approach to intelligent *praxis* — a way of doing things...

From the outset I will be looking at this task as a soul-spiritual activity — to explore *empathic presence* and how we are called upon to develop it as 'moral technique'. This latter is a term Rudolf Steiner uses almost in passing near the end of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, where he simply comments:

Moral action, then, presupposes, in addition to the faculty of having moral ideas (moral intuition) and moral imagination, the ability to transform the world of percepts without violating the natural laws by which these are connected. This ability is *moral technique*. It can be learnt in the same sense in which any kind of knowledge can be learnt.

So let's begin. And because we are teachers who like a good story, let's begin with a story you can find in both the Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments (though Protestant churches have declared it apocryphal). Old Tobit is blinded, and his son Tobias is to undertake an arduous journey to neighbouring Media, to collect a sum of money his father had deposited

with a business associate some time earlier. Azariah, a relative who offers to accompany the youth, is in fact the Archangel Raphael, who has been sent to protect and guide him.

Over in Media, a young woman named Sarah is in despair because, every time she has been betrothed, each of her seven newly-wed husbands has died on their wedding night. This would trouble anybody! Especially a prospective suitor... Quite understandably, she prays earnestly for death. Raphael's mission from God is, on one hand to heal Tobit, and on the other to free Sarah from this demonic curse afflicting her.

En route to Media to collect the money, Tobias is attacked by a large fish, which he manages to kill. Azariah tells him to remove its heart, liver and gall and take it with him. In Media, Tobias meets Sarah, entreats her father to be allowed to marry her, and is then instructed by Azariah to burn the fish's heart and liver on their wedding night to drive away the demon. And yes, it works.

Then, collecting the money and returning to his father, Tobias uses the fish's gall to cure his blindness. Azariah reveals his true identity as Raphael and departs.

You will have by now recognised the story depicted in this painting by Francesco Botticini — an artist in the school of Botticello — which can be seen in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. It is generally called 'Youth with Archangels', and I first saw it many years ago on the cover of a book by AC Harwood, *The Way of a Child*. Botticini departs from the Biblical narrative in two respects. Tobias is carrying the whole fish, not just its organs — perhaps because in a visual depiction, organs might be a rather obscure reference to say the least. How do you make it obvious to the viewer what three nondescript lumps of flesh might be? And there are now three Archangels accompanying Tobias, walking across an apparent wilderness above a typical Italian landscape: we know them as the Saints Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel.



Look here: Michael strides ahead, wearing armour and carrying his sword at the ready; in his left hand he is holding a golden orb which might represent the Sun (with which he traditionally is associated) and the way to the future. In other paintings, Michael is more typically depicted thrusting a spear into the belly of the dragon — like his earthly counterpart St George. But one feature is in common — he gazes sharply out of the pictorial space at the viewer, as if saying, 'I have my mission, and I know what I'm doing — but what about you? What are you doing?'

To the right, and slightly nearer the viewer, we see rosy-winged Gabriel, Archangel of the Annunciation, walking bare-footed across the terrain and holding a lily in one hand. This lily and the white robe evoke traditional associations with the Moon, the past, and the forces of generation and birth. But it is the look Gabriel casts back over his shoulder which attracts our attention — an anxious gaze that might seem to say, 'Why did we ever leave the Garden of Eden to end up in this wilderness? And where's the big bad wolf?'

I need perhaps to explain this a little more. Gabriel is the sheltering guardian of conception, childbirth and early childhood, who inspires nurture and protection. From this perspective, the world is a problem, full of danger, and the loss of primal innocence. The wish to remain in Paradise is implicit in this mood. And it is in distinct contrast to the challenging gesture and gaze of Michael. Just look at them. I want to suggest here that these two gestures — of shelter and of challenge — are in fact complementary gestures that represent the range of the teacher. Also, in their respective roles, of the parents. 'Come here,' we say gently, offering comfort and care. Then, increasingly — 'Wake up!' we say, confronting the emerging Self of the child. When the child is young, we tend the soul almost exclusively with the protective, nurturing gesture — however, as they grow older, it is important that the child experiences the other, sharper injunction...

These two gestures establish the parameters — the human boundaries as it were — for the real work of accompanying the child. For together they form an 'in-between' space, a dynamic place where we find the central figure of Raphael tending the youth. We know a few things about Raphael. He is the Christian equivalent of Mercury, messenger of the gods, the great communicator, and also the healer — he bears in his right hand a small casket or jar such as might hold a potion or remedy. His robe's silvery-grey colour suggests to me this connection with the metal quicksilver (mercury). But now take in the whole figure. Just look at this act of attentiveness! Such a focussed look of intent devotion, and here experience the trust implicit in the remarkable way that Tobias's hand rests in the cupped fingertips of his companion... As though Raphael is saying to him, 'I am with you — it's OK — let's go along this way together.'

This is how I 'read' this painting. And I'm convinced the first two gestures — indeed, those beings — make this central relationship possible. This gesture of attentiveness is what I call empathic presence — that is, being there, with open-hearted interest, and not at all attached to outcomes. Martin Buber speaks of specific conditions of being present — of inhabiting what the present in reality *is* — that relate to this:

The real, filled present exists only in so far as actual presentness, meeting, and relation exists.

It may be symptomatic that in recent years, more attention is being paid to *attention*. Not so long ago it seemed enough to speak of *consciousness* — but perhaps it is because we are so distracted, because we are suffering collectively from a kind of attention deficit syndrome, so *pre-occupied* by trivia and our selves, that we must emphasise the activities of attention and attentiveness. To *attend* — this word is related to ‘tendril’, those remarkable twining shoots that coil about the object they are sensitive to — to really attend is to *stretch towards* the object of attention. Thus, in my book *A Way of Seeing*, the first chapter (which you may read on my website) is called ‘Attending to Attentiveness’; and this capacity for attention is central to empathic presence. It is at the core of relating — you can see it here in the painting, in the relationship between Tobias and Raphael. Whereas the attention of Gabriel is elsewhere — as indeed is Michael’s...

Now, I want to get a little closer to a distinction between ‘consciousness’ and ‘attentiveness’, and here this painting might help us again. Look at these three gestures again: of Gabriel, gazing about distractedly, anxiously it seems; of Michael, whose stern focus is resolutely upon the viewer; and then finally of Raphael, who appears wholly attentive to Tobias, yet simultaneously aware (you can sense this in the ‘opening’ gesture of Raphael’s right arm) of the world.

In *A Way of Seeing*, I identified two distinct modes of *mindedness*, called by some Jungian psychologists (eg Irene Claremont de Castillejo in *Knowing Woman*) ‘diffuse awareness’ and ‘focussed consciousness’ respectively, and which are generally attributed to more feminine and more masculine mind-states (and perhaps they might also be related to the right and left hemispheres of the brain). Here, in the figure of Gabriel, I suggest we can see a kind of ‘diffuse awareness’ — a sensitivity towards the periphery, and towards the kinds of possible eventualities, including threats, that mothers may find familiar. And here, in Michael, we see an utterly ‘focussed consciousness’. But my point is that ‘attentiveness’ can locate itself within the field of either mode, and simultaneously in the space between. The character of the kind of attentiveness I’m interested in is that it is ‘both / and’ rather than ‘either / or’. It is *mindfulness* — an active function in the broad spaces of the mind. And I would suggest that it is always primarily a will-function to direct attention towards anything in particular.

Think about Rudolf Steiner’s six basic or supplementary exercises for instance. Let’s recall the first three... The first is called a thinking exercise; the second is manifestly a will exercise; while the third has to do with establishing equanimity in the soul’s feeling life. But just try doing them! To accomplish anything at all requires a tremendous effort. They are in reality exercises in willed attentiveness.

Attentiveness. To thought. To feeling. To the will itself. You will readily acknowledge that this is in fact the ego’s attentiveness, the ego’s ‘presencing’ activity (I use this neologism ‘to presence’ to mean ‘being present in the present’). And here is an interesting reflection, one that is difficult to state clearly, and so some contemplative thought may be necessary — that the ego (which means ‘I Am’) is only truly an I Am when it is not wholly preoccupied with itself but attentive in the ‘thou’ relationship. Attentive, that is, in the *ego-sensing* of an Other. Martin Buber establishes this in his beautiful book *I and Thou*: that the I is implicit in the experience of the Thou — which is different from ‘you’ — and vice versa. This is what he calls the primary word *I-Thou*.

If this seems hard to grasp, just look again at the Raphael-Tobias relationship, at the unity of being that is expressed there. Feel your way artistically towards the idea of the primary I-Thou articulated in that mutual engagement... Such thoughts can guide us to a point where contemplative regard enables us to imagine that empathic presence *is* a possibility, and that it can be accomplished not only by archangels but perhaps also by human beings. And if this still seems abstract, or maybe rather mystical, just stay with this image for a few moments and let it touch you...



So where is this leading us? How can such thoughts develop through moral technique into a social technology of classroom practice? In *The Philosophy of Freedom* Rudolf Steiner speaks of the conscious process that characterises the practice of the ethical individual:

Nature makes of man merely a natural being; society makes of him a law-abiding being; only he himself can make of himself a free being...

A free spirit acts according to his impulses, that is, according to *moral intuitions* selected from the totality of his world of ideas by thinking. For an unfree spirit, the reason why he singles out a particular intuition from his world of ideas in order to make it a basis of an action, lies the world of percepts given to him, that is, in his past experiences...

What the free spirit needs in order to realise his ideas, in order to be effective, is *moral imagination*. This is the source of the free spirit's action...

Moral imagination, in order to realise its mental picture, must set to work in a definite sphere of percepts. Human action does not create percepts, but transforms already existing percepts and gives them a new form.

In order to be able to transform a definite object of perception, or a sum of such objects, in accordance with a moral mental picture, one must have grasped the principle at work within the percept picture, that is, the way it has hitherto worked, to which one wants to give a new form or new direction.

Further, it is necessary to discover the procedure by which it is possible to change the given principle into a new one.

This part of effective moral activity depends on knowledge of the particular world of phenomena with which one is concerned. We shall, therefore, look for it in some branch of learning in general.

Moral action, then, presupposes, in addition to the faculty of having moral ideas (moral intuition) and moral imagination, the ability to transform the world of percepts without violating the natural laws by which these are connected.

This ability is *moral technique*. It can be learnt in the same sense in which any kind of knowledge can be learnt.

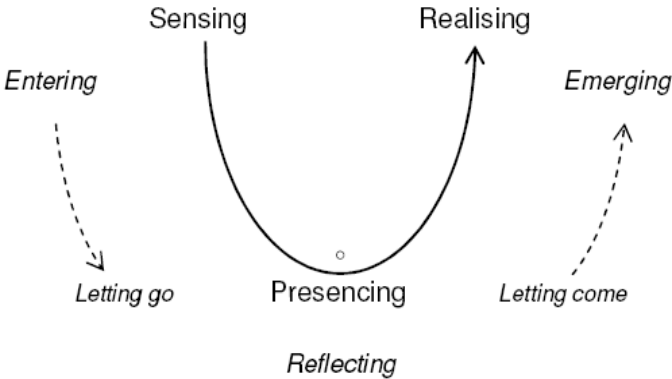
I have already referred to these last few sentences at the beginning of this lecture. The whole passage can be regarded as a meditation on free action, and I have to suggest here that we have a choice: for I'm tempted to spend some time 'unpacking' each phrase, each sentence (I've already re-paragraphed the densely-printed original in presenting it here, to enable a kind of breathing space which might let us in a little more easily)... Or may I entrust it to you, and just summarise briefly what it means for me in the context of our theme, in order for us to continue on our way..?

Briefly... creative action requires the ethical individual to experience new insights — *moral intuitions* — which are distinct from the patternings of recalled thoughts; this implies conscious choice, necessitating a clear examination of the usual habitual modes of thought which impel our reactive actions. Through *moral imagination* the ethical individual can then elaborate that originating insight within the world's field of possibilities and limitations. In developing initiative in this field, the ethical individual will consider how things currently stand and how they came thus to be; then, how they might be changed; and finally, how this might be accomplished. This is called *moral technique*. It is always a moral question because human action, at this stage in human development, is commonly experienced as damaging, at least to some degree, from the perspective of others who are affected. Imagination enables us to see the potential for this; mastery of technique enables us to cause minimal harm. It's important also to note Steiner's opinion that moral technique can be learnt like other skills.

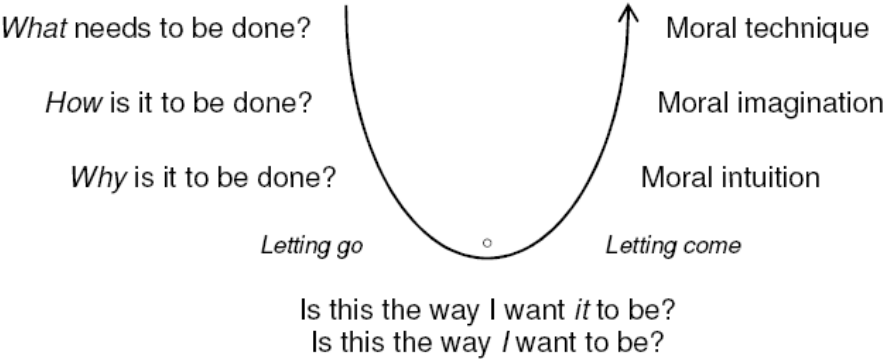
And perhaps it is helpful for our further considerations to recognise that we do not know whether actions proceeding from our intuitions are morally good until after the event, when we can perceive the consequences and reflect on them. This is uniquely so because the action is utterly new, not derived from habitual past experience through mental recall or instinctive reaction. Let's go on now, to consider our praxis...

Often today, we have a question, at the edge of which we feel completely in the dark. This is a common experience, yet it is discomfiting, and it can result in some unfortunate consequences. I've considered some of these previously (see the lecture 'Values and Steiner Education' on my website). We can observe for instance that reactivity to doubt, hatred and fear can fuel some very troubled and troublesome behaviours, characteristic of the unfree person. I'm sure you know what I mean...

However, there is a path I advocate, first presented systematically in the 1980s by Glasl and Lemson of the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute (NPI) and called by them the U Procedure. It has been a valuable tool in organisation development since that time. Recently it has been elaborated as Theory U by Otto Scharmer; however, I now prefer to call it the U Path. It is an archetypal movement, a genuine praxis-pathway, which in its essence can be represented as follows:



I have summarised Scharmer’s development of Theory U and articulated my version of the U Path in my lecture ‘Presencing through the Life Processes’ — there is a transcription on my website, and it is also the final essay in *A Teacher’s Book*. Therefore I will take the principle as a given, and here develop the process further in relation to our theme. First, let’s recall the concepts we’ve considered from the *Philosophy of Freedom* and plot them on this U Path:



Here, on the left hand side, descending deeply into reality, is the path that opens — invisibly at first, as the way ahead can seem pathless — to the future, but before which is an abyss, a void of unknowing. In the face of that nothingness, all past certainties become insubstantial, unreliable. The New, the originating, renewing impulse, emerges only out of darkness; and what is ultimately experienced there as spirit certainty has to be tested by the world before it is valued:

There, on the threshold, the response, the spirit, is kindled ever new within; here, in an unholy and needy country, this spark is to be proven.

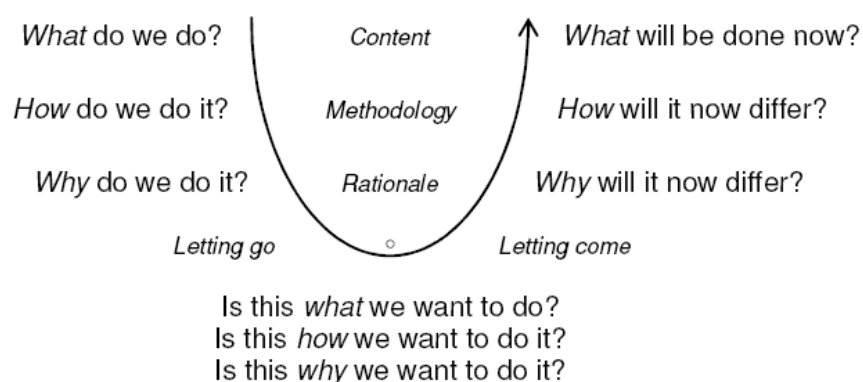
~ Martin Buber

We must have the courage to enter into the ‘valley of the shadow of death’. That’s a rather dramatic way of putting it! But there *is* in fact a little bit of death involved in this process — a darkness before dawn, a *letting go* that must precede a *letting come*. Only then, through the stages we have delineated from *The Philosophy of Freedom*, does the future emerge.

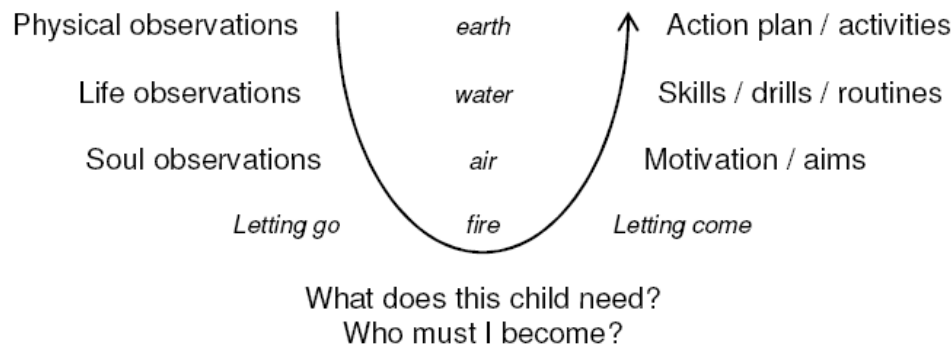
To make this more concrete, let’s consider the Waldorf Curriculum — those penetrating *indications* by Rudolf Steiner which, in their purest form, appeared as moral intuitions, in many cases then elaborated by him through moral imagination into actual approaches to subjects and ultimately instituted into practices. A wonderful example of the way Rudolf Steiner himself worked with this pathway is the development of writing and reading in the Waldorf School. Steiner’s moral intuition was that reading would best be delayed until the children were about ten years old, but the authorities demanded outcomes before that age. So Steiner, living into the situation through moral imagination, exploring the possibilities and limitations, began to develop an approach that mirrored a progression in the evolution of human consciousness. Ultimately, his highly skilled moral technique lead to the teaching of the letters, proceeding from story to drawing and movement, to the abstraction of the alphabet and writing, and thence to reading, in the way it is done in the first grades — a way that is intended to cause minimal harm, if only the child is allowed to live the journey...

If we get this right, it’s a great example of accompanying the child. And here we have to recognise there is a real challenge: to what degree do we truly accompany the child on this journey of realisation? Or do we now follow a tradition, an established path, cooking up a palatable education from a recipe? We might have to admit that in many cases we have worked these original indications (that is, ‘pointings’ towards the way) into detailed recipes which are then adhered to quite programmatically. Some suggest that this is useful — maybe justifiable — for an inexperienced teacher; but my fear is that these recipes will be the death of Waldorf Education. There can be a rigidification, resulting in unexamined practices, often referred to — you will have heard it, maybe said it — as ‘the way we do it here’...

But education is an art and therefore the practitioner must confront the crisis of the blank canvas. In this situation, *curriculum review* must be a continual reflective practice leading to renewal:



As individuals we can undertake this as a daily practice. For institutions, in our weekly meetings it forms a basis for creative and responsible group-work. The U Path can provide a procedure for our dialogues. As a further instance, in a *child study* we can work it like this:



Each time we need to find our way into the heart of the matter, asking:

- What do we observe? What are the physical phenomena?
- How do the concerns or issues manifest themselves? How is the habit-body active? How do the circumstances play out? In what situations is this apparent?
- Why might this be? What triggers these episodes / phenomena that cause us concern? What soul conditions do we perceive?

These are the first three stages of observational enquiry, through which we diagnose the situation. Then, because we do not really know, because we feel ourselves to be in the dark, because if there was not a lack of insight we wouldn't need to be talking about it at all, we have to *let go*. We feel ourselves to be helpless in this situation. This can be painful to endure. But we can only progress — and this seems to be a contradiction — if we are not attached to outcomes. Here, at the bottom of the U, in the valley of the shadow of death, to which we return repeatedly, the questions confront us at an existential or spiritual level. Michael Ray of Stanford University articulates the core questions thus:

- Who is my Self?
- What is my Work?

The answer to the first question, in terms that Martin Buber might use, is in the order of the 'I-Thou' — to know oneself as a Self, there has to be an Other. This is a fundamental matter of spiritual orientation. And the answer to the second question has to do, not with having a job, but a vocation, a Calling. What is my *magnum opus*? My *real* work? The poet John Keats calls this task 'soul-making'. I've often referred to his wonderful letters to his brothers, in which he says that we must develop 'Negative Capability — that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.' This *negative capability* — the ability to stand in nothingness — is the prerequisite state for moral intuitions.

Here, in what Keats calls 'the vale of soul-making', we notice that the attention — in those first stages so strongly focussed outside — has become more inwardly directed. When I was teaching my Class One in 1978, I brought a particularly problematic child to the attention of my colleagues. I didn't know what to do, but I was convinced the child needed to change. After discussing this child's problems for a while, seeing them all manifesting 'out there', I

caught the eye of one of the other teachers, who asked me quietly, compassionately, bleakly: 'Who do you need to become, John, in order to enable this child's development?'

Answers to such a question do not always just pop up! In fact there is a resistance to even registering the question. Time, and an attendant courage to live with the questions is needed; in his 'Letters to a Young Poet' the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke says marvellously of this challenge:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue. 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.

In the child study, the questions that come at the bottom of this U curve are:

- What does this child need? Who must I be for this child?

Are these questions in reality any different from those asked by Michael Ray? However they come, often these are humbling questions, which acquire answers only after a profound and often difficult process of *letting go*. A Taoist saying tells us that only when the cup is empty, can it be filled. So, letting go... Letting go, too, of the fear of failure:

In my discovery of the deed that aims at me — in this movement of my freedom the mystery is revealed; but also in failure to fulfill the deed as I intended, the mystery is revealed to me.

~ Martin Buber

Hence, the need for a rigorous *reflective practice* on this path. We act, and as it may or may not be good, we must examine our action. Then, *letting come*, we are attentive:

Action springs not from thought but from a readiness for responsibility.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

My mentor Albrecht Hemming always played with the meaning of the word *responsibility*, giving it a spurious though suggestive interpretation in terms of 'response-ability'. An ability to respond... We can reflect on this as we work our way up from the bottom of the curve:

- The emergent moral intuition gives us purpose, motivation, and an aim — this is a response to *Why*.
- As we develop the possibilities in our imagination, a need for developed capacities becomes apparent. We may need new skills, techniques, methods — this is a response to *How*.
- Change can be imposed, inflicted — to enable genuine development, to enable the New to emerge, our moral technique must be the art of small steps through an action plan and action learning — this is a response to *What*.

As we emerge, that inward transformation is enacted: 'You must be the change you want to see in the world,' said Mahatma Gandhi. These final steps are willed action — responses, not reactions. Their efficacy becomes visible only in the following days. Or maybe years later... This is the archetypal U Path. It is adaptable to all situations; for instance, I have formulated a U Path question sheet which I give to parents in my workshops, a particular version for them to troubleshoot difficult situations involving their teenaged children... It works, even when it is followed as a prescription, but it is more potent when the process has become internalised. When it is lived. So I say to parents, 'Pin this on your toilet wall, where you can contemplate it daily.' It's quite a good place for letting go!

That particular chart is a comprehensive development of the U Path. But it may be sufficient for you to live in mindfulness of the essential indicators of the path, and especially of these accompanying phrases that have come from the Taoist economist Brian Arthur:

- Entering / Sensing: 'observe, observe, observe' — *become one with the world*
- Reflecting / Presencing: 'retreat and reflect' — *allow inner knowing to emerge*
- Emerging / Realising: 'act swiftly, with a natural flow' — *bring forth the new*

In the heat of the moment, it simply means: press the 'pause' button, see what you're looking at, reflect on what might be required, then do it. If you want to consider it in greater depth, you can download the essay, 'Presencing through the Life Processes', from my website. Or else you could visit Otto Scharmer's website to find a detailed exposition of his Theory U.

Now, as I come towards the end of this talk, I find myself thinking of the emergence of the butterfly from its chrysalis. Have you ever watched this process? On a number of occasions I've watched monarch caterpillars, those enormous black-and-yellow creatures bristling with stiff black hairs, amazed by the way they carve at the edges of the swan-plant's leaves in a kind of culminating feeding frenzy. Each time, at a certain point, the engorged body seems to become slightly indistinct — the last time it happened I remember rubbing my eyes in order to focus — but it was as if a slight haze shrouded the creature... Then, quite suddenly the caterpillar had fastened itself from its hindquarters, hung down in the form of a 'J', and ... I think I must have looked away at just this point, distracted, perhaps because I was in the presence of a mystery — and a few moments later there was a plump chrysalis, jade-green with a series of golden dots around its rim.

That monarch chrysalis did not seem to change for the first week or so. Someone told me that if I had cut it open at the end of this time, I would have found no caterpillar, nor yet a butterfly — just a fluid mush (now *that's* an evocative image in considering the changes taking place in the adolescent! But *that's* another story...). The green chrysalis gradually darkened, first becoming nut-brown, then blackening, until eventually the butterfly's wings appeared beneath the translucent shell. About two weeks after forming, the husk split, and the monarch butterfly emerged — but not yet resplendent — it was bedraggled, crumpled, struggling to get out. Again, I have been told that if I had tried to help it at this point, to have cut it free, to ease it from the chrysalis, its wings would have been deformed, and I would have deprived it of its full development.

Once free, it sat in sunlight, its wings pulsating gently. The monarch was pumping them up into their full expansive glory... It took to the air and light and warmth of late summer.

This butterfly image is often used as a symbol for the process of going through death, to the point where the soul and spirit are released from the husk of the body. And here I can relate it to that little death that has to take place in *letting go*, so the inner knowing can emerge... Sometimes there is form, sometimes there is mush, sometimes there is a difficult transition. How therefore does one accompany the caterpillar-child, the chrysalis-child, the butterfly-child, through its transformations? It begins through learning to accompany the questions through their inward transformations:

He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires, in its need of him, to be brought — with human spirit and deed, human life and death. I said *he believes*, but that really means *he meets*.

~ Martin Buber

This is why I referred to that gesture we saw in Raphael as *empathic presence*. Empathy is the ability to accompany the inner as well as outer life of another being. David Garb — whom some of you will know — has given a clear characterisation of empathy, contrasting it with sympathy. In sympathy, one loses oneself in the other: 'I see you're in a big black hole — let me get down there with you.' In antipathy, on the other hand, one loses all real relation with the other: 'I see you're in a big black hole — but that's none of my business.' In empathy, however, there is the I-Thou relationship: 'I see you're in a big black hole — what are you going to do about it? How can I support you to do it?'

To be present — on *presence-ground*, as presence-beings in *world-presence*. That is how Rudolf Steiner articulates it in his lessons in the School of Spiritual Science. 'You are not on the Path until you become the Path,' is how the Buddha said it near the end of his life. This mystery — of being there, with open-hearted interest, not attached to outcomes — this is what I mean by empathic presence. It takes place in the world-field between shelter and challenge — and these also are gestures that belong to the task of the teacher, which in fact are necessary to open up the space for all I have presented here...

If it seems I have talked more about the adult than about the child, then you've recognised my intention. For children need us to become adults. Rudolf Steiner suggests that the truly educative element is that a teacher develops, and he articulates this methodically in the so-called 'pedagogical law' — that the higher member in the adult constitution works upon the lower member in the child (eg the adult ego works upon the adolescent astral body, and so on). We live today in an adolescent, reactive society; to become responsible (response-able) is an adult task.

Have I made our task sound complicated? I haven't intended to... I've wanted to share these aspects of theory and practice to illustrate quite clearly what otherwise can seem abstract or mystical — to create a context in which we recognise what Martin Buber might mean when he says that 'there are moments of silent depth in which you look on the world-order fully present.' Yes, I respond, knowing that such presencing moments are the source — at least the

ambience — of moral intuitions, if only we would notice them, if only we are sufficiently attentive... Then we might deliberately prepare such moments, have the imagination to see possibilities, and develop the requisite moral technique — thus learning ways in which we can truly accompany the child.

Let's conclude with a little prayer by Melbourne cartoonist Michael Leunig that evokes the tender touching of hands we see between Tobias and Raphael:

Dear God,

We loosen our grip,
We open our hand.
We are accepting.
In our empty hand
We feel the shape
Of simple eternity.
It nestles there.
We hold it gently.
We are accepting.

Amen

~ John Allison 2008. This essay coalesced in September 2008 from notes and transcripts of talks given to teachers on various occasions during the past year in Mt Barker, Perth, and Melbourne.

Footnote:

The painting 'Youth with Angels' by Botticini is also on the cover of my new book (called simply *A Teacher's Book*). In the first chapter, called 'Accompanying the Child', I similarly refer to the three gestures of the Archangels accompanying Tobias. But in all other respects, this present lecture is complementary, not similar, to that chapter.

References:

- Allison, John: *A Teacher's Book*. Immortal Books 2008
 A Way of Seeing. Lindisfarne Books 2003
- Buber, Martin: *I and Thou*. Scribner 1958
- Scharmer, C. Otto: *Theory U – leading from the future as it emerges*. Society for Organisational Learning 2007
- Steiner, Rudolf: *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Rudolf Steiner Press 1970

There are transcripts of two other lectures on my website www.johnallison.com.au which provide complementary backgrounds to aspects of this essay:

'Presencing' through the Life Processes (Christchurch Sept 2006)

Values and Steiner Education (Perth July 2007)