

Consulting and the Life Processes – a developmental pathway

As a thing the Way is shadowy, indistinct. Indistinct and shadowy, yet within it is an image; shadowy and indistinct, yet within it is a substance. Dim and dark, yet within it is an essence. This essence is quite genuine and within it is something that can be tested.

~ Lao Tzu

It has sacramental character ... It is real substance. But in order to understand this, the concept of substance has to become ethical and moral. This substance does not simply exist, it has to be generated, and it can be brought into being. Properly understood and worked with, it gives rise to the 'social organism', the 'social structure'.

~ Joseph Beuys

Whenever we consider *processes*, we are approaching the life-realm of which / within which Rudolf Steiner wanted us to become more conscious. I want to consider here how we as practitioners approach the challenges of developmental relationships, and find a living organic basis for our consciousness in process. And I want to state at the beginning that I believe that this approach is socially hygienic — that is, the way is thus enabled rather than forced.

In 1910 Rudolf Steiner first characterised the seven processes prerequisite for life: *breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting, maintaining, growing, and generating*. While these must be comprehended as simultaneously inter-weaving processes, we necessarily have to consider them in a linear narrative which does have its own significance — for in this life-realm, 'both / and' rules over 'either / or'.

Breathing and *warming* are the preconditions for all further activity. Through breathing, a rhythmical relationship is established between what is inner and outer — a space is opened up within space. This space, at first no more than a kind of pulsating differentiation, is permeated by warmth, thus forming a kind of content, and establishing a basis for presence. And the *nourishing* process draws inward all that is necessary to give shape to this formative space.

Secreting is central. A process of sifting and sorting takes place — retaining what is essential, rejecting the inessential — through which form is given substance.

The existence of any entity must be regulated through a process of constant *maintaining*. Yet this would only keep things as they are, were it not for the process of *growing* that underlies all development and transformation. Organisms develop, from their juvenile forms through into maturity. Finally, replicative, reproductive capacities appear at every level in the living organism, *generating* its own kind.

The presence of these seven life processes within the human organism suggests a pathway for our processes in developmental relationships. Change is often exhausting, perhaps because in

its character and in the way it emerges as a disruptive, revolutionary event rather than a quiet evolutionary one, it seems *unnatural*. In the event, if we can cooperate with the life processes we might find a way of working that is a genuine social ecology.

First, as practitioners working into any situation we can say that there needs to be a *sensing of the field*. We have to observe, repeatedly and carefully looking and asking ourselves what we are seeing; Rudolf Steiner comments that 'we should not try to make out, through intellectual speculation, what the things mean, but rather allow the things themselves to tell us.' We can call this *breathing* — living sensitively into a whole range of impressions, which often are of a contradictory nature. These polarities in reality form the field, in which we orientate ourselves through what John Keats called 'Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' It is too soon for assumptions — indeed, it is never the time for assumptions — so, breathing, we sense into things. Goethe first articulated this activity:

You always have to look on the inner and outer sphere as being parallel or, rather, as interwoven. There is constant systole and diastole, a breathing in and a breathing out of the living organism...

This breathing also is a living into another polarity, that two-way continuum between what carries through from the past and what streams towards us from the future. Is there sufficient *lightness of touch* to allow some breathing space *and* breathing time for others? Another word for this lightness of touch is *tact*. In sensing all the polarities and contradictions, we become aware of the whole situation — of questions and challenges becoming perceptible in the field. As these are articulated, our tactfulness may help doubts to be allayed, through ensuring that there is enough spaciousness for people to come to terms with the issues.

Simultaneously we need to be aware of another life-field. We do not merely stand outside a situation and look at it, we have to enter in, to engage, and this penetration is accomplished through the expansiveness of warmth. In *warming* to the people, to the situation, we establish *empathy*. Otherwise we might be too heated in our enthusiasm, so that the other person wants 'to chill out'. Or too cold — and then the other person might feel (as Rainer Maria Rilke put it) 'cast out on the mountains of the heart.' Cynicism — which is a kind of hatred — is freezing. Alienation is a common phenomenon in dysfunctional situations. Warmth suffuses, permeates, welcomes — therefore patient dialogues can melt the ice, establishing a genuine relationship. So we can say that warming is relating.

Warmth *gives itself*, so it involves surrender — absorbing the viewpoint of others without any prejudice. And we offer our contribution, just putting it there and letting it stand, allowing the other person time to form a relationship with it. We do not force the matter. Breathing opens a space, which warming fills. And because this breathing continues, the warmth-mood does not become too humid. When breathing and warming are in the right proportion, the effect is like mild, fresh springtime air.

In our work, we have to *digest* each situation, chewing it over, turning it over in our minds. But in order to really grasp what is involved, to find what is *nourishing*, we have to let issues sink deep down into our body's unconscious processes. We have to slow down, pause. If we

were cows, we might need to regurgitate and chew over our cud. Digestion proceeds in stages; we have to break down an event or situation into its constituent parts, and slowly work our way through these, in order to fully take it in.

We need to make sure that others have sufficient opportunity to get a grasp on the situation and on any proposed changes. Everyone's digestive processes are different: some are more carnivorous, really tearing into it; while others are ruminants. Others will be nibblers and light grazers. They digest at a different rate; if forced, indigestion results. That hard lump in the belly can be fear and dread. We must ensure not only that everyone has a meal-ticket to the same table, but also is allowed to work through the menu in his or her own way. Interest in each other's meal is important. While we cannot force others to eat what we like, we might try to understand their tastes.

These first processes are prerequisites for the central phase in a developmental relationship: *secreting* — the secret aspect of digesting. We have to secrete what serves development, and excrete the useless. We have to be intelligent (Latin *intelligere*: *inter* = amongst, between; *legere* = gather, pick out, read) — that is, to sift and sort. In dysfunctional relating, we lose the ability to sort things out. A kind of emotional diarrhoea, or else constipation, might be the result. Only now, all one's experiences are examined methodically, sifted and sorted, and then given a value in the context of the present circumstances. What is essential? What can be set aside as inessential? Or simply not suitable at this particular moment? What needs to be forgotten? What remains in the sieve of consciousness? A whole range of possibilities and limitations begins to emerge.

Establishing what is actually in the field, and what does not belong there, may involve some real effort. Here, forces of sympathy and antipathy come fully into play, but they need to be objectified through repeated reflection: what is important, what is less important? Being hard on issues, while gentle with people, is important. Antipathy can easily become hostility, and sympathy can become submissiveness. Always be prepared for surprises — the miracle of secretion is the complete transformation of substances, so that nothing remains as it was. And through all this we need to be aware that the most vital secretion in this process is the Self. Am I more *present* — from Latin *praesens* = 'being before (one, the other)' — to my Self? Does the other's Self become more present? For although this may not have been articulated at any point as a purpose or aim, it is in reality the greatest fulfilment.

What begins to take shape has to be borne forward. *Maintaining* is a conscious task. We need to bear the essential substance — the *quinta essentia* — towards a future becoming. What has been acknowledged between us? What has been decided? Who is responsible for carrying it further? Is there sufficient institutional and personal steadfastness? How does each moment set the stage for the next? Holding the event in memory, and yet keeping outcomes in movement, bearing them towards the necessities of letting things change — of *letting-go* and *letting-come* — are each important elements in this. We need to keep things in mind, ticking off each step as we proceed yet retaining that essence. And we also need to consider what faculties need to be developed, what skills are to be learned. What training opportunities are to be put in place, what coaching or mentoring is to be provided...

Growing is a conscientious extension of this bearing-in-mind towards an ever greater facility. This is a maturing stage. We will be looking for growth, for development, for change. The details of what now is needed must be worked out as we proceed. Where are the reflections, the review points when progress is to be evaluated? What has to change in the face of practical experience in the course of life? Who decides on what changes?

We encounter resistance especially during these stages. We need to find our way beyond the wall, recognising that this testing also serves to consolidate and temper what otherwise could be rampant growth. Constraining habits exist at every level — they have been established especially as a hardened function of maintaining, and are fed by continuing doubt, cynicism and fear. In response, the requirements are attentiveness, poise and presence; and saying ‘yes’ to whatever comes — not a resignation to it, but assent to its challenges...

Ultimately, the realisation or fulfilment: of the task, of the mission, of ourselves — our Selves — implies a truly creative stage where something new is generated, freshly born from all that has gone before. *Generating* results from all the work that we do — conceiving a previously unimagined future that blossoms into a new world of possibilities, and finally into fruition. The decisive moment is not a direct function of life processes — that is a gracious event. But it are well prepared-for through increasing awareness of these processes, which are *already taking place in us* — we are simply considering how we might cooperate more fully with the functional basis of our own lives.

In summary, we can identify the essential qualities of what has been presented here as a transformational field-path as follows:

Breathing:	sensing the phenomenological polarities	<i>(in the face of doubt)</i>
Warming:	permeating the experiential space	<i>(in the face of cynicism)</i>
Nourishing:	taking it all in to become ‘response-able’	<i>(in the face of fear)</i>
Secreting:	sorting the essential from the inessential	
Maintaining:	supporting a developmental environment	
Growing:	cultivating the transformational process	
Generating:	creating the new as spontaneous outcome	

We need to remain aware that the life processes are simultaneously active, continuously breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting, maintaining, growing, generating... All the others are present in each; for they sustain and support one another — this is the nature of life, after all — and they are to be seen imaginatively as continuous, interweaving processes as well as sequential ones. So, too, our consciousness moves like little boats, vessels of the spirit, upon these streams of life, layering and weaving our experience. As developmental practitioners we can learn to work more consciously with such processes, perceiving them as realities in the world and in ourselves, and giving them real organisational substance.

~ John Allison