

# THE TAO OF DEVOTION

## PROCESS -ORIENTED PSYCHOLOGY AND

### DEVOTION IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

A research dissertation submitted in fulfillment

of the requirements for

Process - Oriented Psychology.

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## INTRODUCTION

*What is the Key to Devotion?*

*Open your Heart*

In this paper, I intend to examine the nature of devotion which has been part of my personal path for the last twelve years while being involved in Process Oriented Psychology and Buddhism. Having just completed my first book, 'Devotion, Following Tibetan Masters,' I realised that I am still passionate about the topic of devotion and wish to explore it within Process Oriented Psychology to see if it has any relevance. The writing of this paper can be summed up, most aptly in alchemical and meditative terms by Radmila Moacanin;

*'I soon realised that the act of writing... was like a meditative process. It was like an alchemical opus too, starting with the massive confusion, and leading up through the various stages to final crystallization into its essence. And along the way, as the work was building, its inner meaning was gradually unfolding to me.'*

I hope that in reading this, you also find the inner meaning for you, as it unfolds and the relevance and significance that it may have in your life.

Part of this paper also focuses on the topics of spirituality, enlightenment, meditation, Buddhism and Process Work. I felt that I needed to explore these areas in order to place devotion within context. In some ways devotion is inseparable from the spiritual path and is a short-cut to enlightenment. Devotion comes from a heartfelt appreciation, like when we are really deeply touched by love and have a profound conviction. Then we begin to feel very differently about ourselves, our relationships and the world. Through devotion, a feeling of gratitude arises through the recognition that we have been given a great gift of recognising and realising our own inner true nature. We are able to become truly free.

However devotion also appears to be a controversial word and subject in the West, and is often misunderstood. It has definitely had 'bad press,' sometimes due to misuse and abuse by 'fake guru's' which has fuelled misconceptions and fears. People are afraid devotion means that they will somehow fall under someone else's control and that they will lose their independence and freedom. They will have to give up their money, partners and family and become part of a cult. All these edge figures or unresolved parts of ourselves connected with power, teachers, relationships, religion, money, sex, abuse issues, competition and jealousy etc. and are projected upon the word devotion, without any real understanding of what it means and how it is useful as a method of truly becoming who we actually are.

The main point of devotion is as simple as opening our hearts. When we do that, we are more receptive to the truth of what simply is. We allow it to resonate deeply within us, so we can rediscover our own inner truths;

*'So opening our heart to the teacher is opening our heart to the teachings. That's what devotion is. It allows our heart and mind to open to allow us to hear the acoustic of the truth and allow the truth to enter in. Devotion is a path, a supreme tool of training the mind to see in a pure way. The teacher is the teachings brought alive and we can confront our difficulties. When you really become the teachings, then you are the teacher. '*<sup>2</sup>

This paper then, will explore if devotion has any relevance to Process Work through interviews with two senior Buddhist students and two Process work teachers. An overview of spirituality linked with Process work is given in chapter 2 and an essential explanation of Buddhism is offered in chapter 3. The basic beliefs and structure of Process -oriented Psychology are outlined in chapter 4 with particular emphasis on inner work, metaskills and meditation as being more closely connected to the topic of this paper.

A comparison of psychology and Buddhism is given in chapter 5 and throughout the paper gives other work in the field such as Jung, Krishnamurti,

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Jung's Psychology and Tibetan Buddhism. Western and Eastern Paths to the Heart. Radmila Moacanin. Wisdom, Boston 1986. P. 107.

Sogyal Rinpoche. London. March 1999

Moacanin, Epstein, James, Kornfield and Goldstein, Welwood, Grof, Capra, Almaas and Johnson, among others. The topic of devotion within Buddhism and Process work is developed and expanded in chapter 6. The methodology is then outlined.

There were four hypotheses that I was originally researching through these interviews;

1. Devotion is a tool, on the relative level to assist people to become more open and receptive to the truth of what is. The teacher is the vehicle through which this process occurs.
2. Devotion enables a trust to develop and deepen, so that eg. a Process worker can follow the Tao, no matter how inexplicable or mysterious it seems.
3. Devotion helps us recontact deeper levels of ourselves which are normally out of our everyday awareness.
4. Process — Oriented Psychology is a therapeutic modality that itself is a spiritual path.

I used three main qualitative methods of collecting and analysing the data, including the interviewing and collating methods of S. Kuale, heuristic research questions and the methodology of story telling, all described in the methodology section of chapter 7.

The data of the interviews is given in chapters 8 —11 and is then analysed in chapter 12, showing what evidence brings me to the conclusion as to whether the hypotheses have been proved or not and other key observations from the data. I examine what and where is the process of devotion within the interviews, whether the person is identified with it or not and indicating where there is a result of that process.

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Within the conclusion, there is also discussion of how the data fits my conclusions and therefore whether it is possible to verify that devotion is a useful concept or usable intervention within process work. The paper also includes some of my own personal observations, experiences and ideas and these are clearly indicated.

In my experience, it is often difficult to separate being a psychotherapist and a Buddhist. In the following article by Maura Sills who is a Buddhist psychotherapist, I feel it could well be a process worker as well as a Buddhist practitioner speaking;

*'The psychotherapist has to be vulnerable. It's the vulnerability of the warrior as opposed to the vulnerability of a vulnerable person. It is the ability to meet whatever is coming at them. It's about the capacity to hold, to take things personally and not personally at the same time, the capacity to hear the full cry of the client and to allow whatever arises in us to arise. Then to be able to watch that and see it as much as possible. It's not just about being vulnerable and affected it's about what you do with the responses and what arises. .... Any meditation practice that helps equanimity and endurance is very important....*

*I also think devotional practices are very important: without the heart meeting the person unconditionally, with love and compassion, no matter how brilliant the psychotherapist is technically<sup>3</sup>, it would be an empty practice. The opposite also isn't helpful — the psychotherapist who is only able to offer unconditional love and positive regard is going to miss a lot of the sharpening activity which is necessary.'*

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<sup>3</sup> Maura Sills. Psychotherapy as a Spiritual journey. View magazine. Issue no.3. P.48

<sup>4</sup> Process Work thesis' y Gemma Summer. Conflict — Gateway to Community P.16

## PROCESS WORK AND SPIRITUALITY

What does devotion and spiritual practice have to do with Process Oriented Psychology? Dr. Arnold Mindell says that at the *'centre of process work will be a compassionate awareness of our own perceptions. Loving kindness and other types of spiritual feelings for others transform in process work into accepting and processing all of those events which reach our awareness.'* <sup>4</sup>

He discusses the subject of spirituality with Gemma Summer in her thesis; *'Process work has a pluralistic view of spirituality and supports its many expressions..... It recognises that for some, spirituality is experienced as a momentary process subject to constant, while for others, it is experienced within the context of formalised faith.'* <sup>5</sup>

The path of devotion is a short-cut to realising enlightenment. Being devoted in the relationship channel to a teacher or being devoted to following your own process like a spiritual warrior, with appropriateness, patience, diligence and attention can be a similar process. Mindell defines enlightenment in the following way;

*'What is process work enlightenment? It is the practice of noticing and valuing one's perceptions, and then unfolding them. It is the practice of making what is happening more useful for oneself and others ... ..Enlightenment is how you practice something. The way you work at something describes your state of enlightenment. If you have a little detachment and can make use of what's happening in the moment, then that's an enlightened practice and person.'* <sup>6</sup>

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ibid P.232 <sup>6</sup>

ibid P.229

*God in all Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing. Edited and with Introductions by Lucinda Vardey Millennium Books. Australia 1995. P. 627*

Arnold Mindell points out how Process work sees enlightenment not as a static state or goal, but as within an understanding of a framework of change.

*Process concepts understand liberation within the paradigm of change, not as a goal to be obtained and held onto.* <sup>7</sup>

He also says that he prefers not to use the term enlightenment but rather the meaning of it, being awake. His definition of this is as follows;

*'An awake person has rapid access to and ability in working with altered states in many channels.... An awake person can get into altered states and still metacommunicate... ...You change according to the world within and around you.... An enlightened individual could have a great deal of feeling and compassion for other human beings but would also be very detached and tough when this is called for.... For me a highly awake person is capable of bringing out reactions to others in such a way that everyone benefits from them.* <sup>8</sup>

### Waking Up

Charles Tart, a psychologist, in 'Waking Up' discusses what he thinks enlightenment is. He says that it is difficult to capture the essence of enlightenment in words, because the most important aspects of it are nonverbal in nature. Also it cannot be comprehended in our ordinary state of consciousness. However, he sees it rather like process workers as;

*A process, on a continuum, not just a final state. There are jumps' though, created by the functioning of altered states....a person who has directly experienced certain kinds of knowledge in an altered state has much more understanding of it than the person whose mind has never functioned in that mode.* <sup>9</sup>

Any one of us who have experienced altered or extreme states of consciousness know that it is possible to connect with deep spiritual processes

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Arnold Mindell. Working on Yourself Alone. Penguin. England. 1990. P. 72. <sup>8</sup>  
Ibid. P.132

8. Stan Grof The Adventure of Self-Discovery. New York press, Albany. 1998. P.268

within those states. In those moments, we become enlightened, in the sense of being released, or freed from our primary or ordinary experiences and touch the nature of the universal energy that some people choose to call God or the Buddha. We can experience that inside of ourselves or outside, or both simultaneously.

### Physics and Spirituality

To be able to live in a spiritual way, we need a commitment to the divine in ourselves and others so that we can experience altered states of awareness and be open to different realities of existence. Physics, as well as mysticism also explores nature in a similar way to uncover and reveal the atomic world that we inhabit.

Some traditional Western scientists dismiss spirituality as

*'primitive superstition, regressive magical thinking, lack of education and clinical psychopathology. Psychiatry and psychology governed by the mechanistic worldview are incapable of making the distinction between dogmatic religious beliefs of mainstream religions and the profound wisdom of the great spiritual philosophies such as yoga, Zen and Tibetan Vajrayana.'*

The concepts of modern quantum physics that identify force fields that we do not perceive with our senses are only just beginning to be studied in the West. Stan Grof in 'The Adventure of Self-Discovery' says that the increase of interest in spirituality and in inner quest is one of the more hopeful developments that is presently happening.

*'In full agreement with the Jungian perspective, spirituality or numinosity appears to be an intrinsic property of the deeper dynamics of the psyche.'*

Fritjof Capra writes about the parallels between physics and spirituality in 'Uncommon Wisdom.' He says that the Zen tradition developed koans, or paradoxical riddles and non verbal instructions that the thinking ordinary mind cannot solve.

*'Once the solution is found, the koan ceases to be paradoxical and becomes a profoundly meaningful statement mad efrom the state of consciousness that it has helped to awaken. '11*

He began to notice the similarity between koans and physicists trying to solve problems which could not be solved by logical reasoning, but needed a new awareness.

*'Nature was their teacher and, like the Zen masters, she did not provoke any statement, she just provided the riddles.*

He goes on to say;

*'Whenever the essential nature of things is analyzed by the intellect, it will seem absurd or paradoxical. This has always been recognised by mystics but has become a problem in science only recently.'*

This is also similar to the idea that the Tao cannot be analysed or really talked about, as it then ceases to be the Tao. It is something that is on another level of reality to the rational, organised mind. Capra discusses Taoism and how *'their careful observation of nature, combined with a strong mystical intuition, led them to profound insights which are confirmed by modern scientific theories.'*

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He was also drawn to Carlos Casteneda,

*'As the Taoist sage flows in the current of the Tao, the Yaqui man of knowledge needs to be light and fluid to see the essential nature of things.'*

He describes Buddhism as being very adaptable to various different cultures and he thinks that compassion plays a central role in attaining wisdom. As the combination of the new physics, mysticism, spirituality, Buddhism and psychotherapy begins to engage and interact, it is fascinating to observe the theoretical and practical experiences melting together into a fusion of wisdom. This provides useful tools which we can follow to connect more deeply with ourselves, others and the world.

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*God in all Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writings. Edited and with Introductions by Lucinda Vardey Millennium Books. Australia 1995. P. 784*

## Dream and Illusion

In Buddhism to be enlightened means to be 'awake'. Most of us think we are awake because we are not asleep in bed. In this tradition, as in many other spiritual paths, it is observed that, in fact, we spend our whole lives asleep. Our life is like a dream. Sometimes we have a nightmare and sometimes a rather enjoyable dream, but when we wake up we realise it was only a dream. If only we could-wake up from our ordinary reality, like we do from our night time dreams, we might live our lives in a completely different way. As it is traditionally taught, we need to realise that this life is but a dream, or a magic show. Then we would not be fooled by the illusion and therefore would be free. When we watch a movie, for example, we may still laugh and cry but because we know it's only a movie we don't get so caught up. We don't take it that seriously.

The process of waking up is what we might call our spiritual journey. We can wake up in a moment and realise that we have been dreaming or it may take many lifetimes. We may get glimpses through our meditation practice, but then we have to stabilise our mind in that state of realisation.

## **WHAT IS BUDDHISM?**

Tibetan Buddhism is a topic on which many books have been written. However, it is useful to understand the basic history and philosophy when discussing this ancient wisdom. The historical story of the Buddha began with an Indian prince called Siddhartha who was born in the fifth century BC. After leading a sheltered life of luxury, he became aware of sickness, old age and death and left the palace to search for a way to end suffering. He discovered that both extremes of denial and indulgence did not lead to happiness but, by following a middle path, he became a fully enlightened, awakened being, a Buddha.

Buddhism was introduced to Tibet from India in the seventh century AD. It thrived as the country's religion (replacing Bon, which consisted of animistic and shamanistic beliefs) due to the strong support of the early kings of Tibet such as

Songtsen Gampo and Trisong Detson. There are four schools, or lineages, within Tibetan Buddhism, Nyingma, Sakya, Gelugpa and Kagyu. Although these schools diverge in their emphasis, they all encompass the basic teachings of the Buddha. In its essence, Buddhism outlines the stages on the path to enlightenment.

The teachings, known as the Dharma, encompass 84,000 different methods for working with the mind and attaining everlasting happiness. These fit within three categories.

The first is Hinayana, which emphasizes renunciation, moral discipline and ethics for individual liberation and can be summarised as 'refraining from harm'. The second is Mahayana, path of the bodhisattvas who focus on compassion and wisdom to obtain their own and others' enlightenment. This can be summarized as having a good heart, 'helping others'. The third is the Vajrayana Tantric path, relying on the more direct methods of visualization, mantra and meditation which brings realisation in a relatively short time. It stresses pure perception, 'seeing everything purely'. Guru Rinpoche, a precious master from the eighth century, said that Vajrayana would be especially powerful for people living at a time when emotions were very strong, and therefore this path is thought of as particularly appropriate for Westerners. Lama Yeshe, in *Introduction to Tantra*, says that Tantra, the root texts of the Vajrayana teachings, is particularly well suited to the Western mentality, which wants instant results, because it is the quickest of all paths. The principle of transformation is also well understood.

*Tantra teaches us to break free from all conditioning that limits our understanding of who we are and what we can become.<sup>13</sup>*

It is also explained in the introduction to a famous Buddhist preliminary or foundation practice;

*The Vajrayana is particularly flexible and adaptable to the sorts of situations in which modern people find themselves and, without losing its traditional form, has now been taught to a wide range of people all over the world.<sup>14</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Lama Yeshe. *Introduction to Tantra, A Vision of Totality*. Wisdom, Boston, 1987

<sup>14</sup> Patrul Rinpoche. *Words of my Perfect Teacher*. Harper Collins, India, 1997

Vajrayana and Zen Buddhism are paths where it is said that it is possible to become enlightened within one lifetime. Therefore they are regarded as a fast path and this is why they are more suited to Westerners who like instant results!

There is a traditional story which can be seen as a metaphor of how to work with our habitual patterns of mind as well as describing the four different paths in Buddhism; Hinayana, Mahayana, Vajrayana and Dzogchen, which is regarded as the highest teachings within the Vajrayana path.

*There is a group of people who find a poisonous tree in their backyard They think the tree is dangerous and therefore cut it down, but the roots are still there and so the tree grows back. A second group of people think the same, cut the tree down but also try to burn the roots so the tree can't regrow. A third group which consists of some doctor's and alchemists are happy they have found the tree because they realize they can transform the poison into useful medicine. Fourthly a peacock comes upon the tree and just eats the poison directly and becomes more beautiful in the process.<sup>15</sup>*

This is of course, an advanced stage, but also not a literal recommendation that people eat poison! but a description of directly using the substance that might kill you to become even more radiant, bypassing even the need to transform.

### The Paradox of Enlightenment

Enlightenment can be seen to include an attitude of accepting what is. Yet this is somewhat a paradox. It is seen as a goal to be attained if one travels along the gradual relative path, which involves a process of meditation, visualisation, chanting, purification and other methods. At the same time, it is possible, depending on the capacity of the individual to actually become enlightened in any moment. Once enlightenment is attained, it cannot be 'unattained' ie it does not go away or we cannot go backwards. Yet at the same time, it is also said that there is nothing to attain and if we pursue enlightenment like we do our worldly goals, we are totally missing the point and will probably never reach our goal. As

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<sup>15</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche

and admasambhava. Rigpa, Berkeley<sup>y</sup>, 1989. P. 80

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Patrick, a Buddhist student says;

*My understanding of Buddhism is that there is no target. Enlightenment is not a goal to be striven for, in the way we normally understand being goal-oriented. As soon as you start setting targets, I think you've gone off the path. Striving leads nowhere. It's difficult to understand but as soon as you have a goal in spirituality, you are no longer floating. Floating is the only possibility of moving forward. It's about respecting that things happen at their own pace and the teacher is an influence. The old tools that we use are meaningless in this setting, because we are talking about losing the ego.<sup>12</sup>*

Though there is nothing to be attained and there is no goal to be reached 'out there', still we embark upon the journey of enlightenment. Ken Wilber in 'No Boundary' talks about the ultimate, saying that we can't really do anything to get it, yet if we don't do something, we just remain as we are, without changing. He quotes the Zen master, Ma – tsu;

*'In the Tao, there is nothing to discipline oneself in. If there is any discipline in it, the completion of such discipline means the destruction of the Tao. But if there is no discipline whatever in the Tao, one remains an ignoramus.'*<sup>17</sup>

The question is then, why if we are all already enlightened, should we do anything at all? The difficulty is that firstly, we don't recognise that we are already enlightened and secondly, we don't manifest it. In Zen Buddhism it is seen that *'everything we do is an expression of original enlightenment.'* Suzuki Roshi says; *'If our practice is only a means to attain enlightenment, there is actually no way to attain it ....The state of mind that exists when you sit, is itself enlightenment.'*<sup>18</sup>

In 'The Pearl beyond Price' Almaas says that there is actually not an agreed definition or sustained concept of what enlightenment is. He says that sometimes it *'refers to a certain insight perception or understanding.....a certain*

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<sup>16</sup> Sherry Marshall. Devotion. Following Tibetan Masters. Simon and Schuster. Australia. 1999. P. 104

<sup>17</sup> Ken Wilber. No Boundary. Eastern and Western approaches to personal growth. Shambhala. Boston. 1986 P.144

<sup>18</sup> ibid. P.146

*stage of inner development... ..the transcendence of ego ....the death of ego... the transformation of ego.*<sup>18</sup>

This is more similar to the Process work idea that enlightenment is similar to a certain perception or attitude that arises within, at a certain moment. Alan Watts writes that in Buddhism, we discover that the normal or accepted way of perceiving ourselves is conventional and there are many other different ways that we could look at ourselves. He asks, what are we in reality?

*From one side is no-thing... (but also we are) things happening spontaneously by themselves..... when one learns the feeling of thoughts and mental impressions coming and going of themselves, one has discovered the clue to a mastery of the mental art which could, if so desired, be applied to experiments in parapsychology.* <sup>20</sup>

Capra says that the Eastern world view is dynamic and organic, seeing the cosmos as one inseparable reality, spirit and material at the same time. The aim of certain spiritual practices are to penetrate behind the veil of the accustomed reality into an awakened state or enlightenment. Ordinary consciousness is regarded as being in a deep sleep.

Mark Epstein says that one of the tasks of being an adult is to discover the ability to lose oneself, which we often have in childhood. The paradox is that we can only truly find ourselves by surrendering into the void. This is not disintegration, however, but an opportunity to have new experiences which are no longer centered in our thinking mind.

If we allow thoughts, emotions, mental impressions to pass through us and are fluid, not identified with anything, then freedom comes from accepting what is. Therapy and meditation offer a window into our liberated state of mind that comes from an absence of identification. Being in a free state of mind means that we can really follow what is happening in the moment as there are no edges.

<sup>19</sup> A. H. Almaas. *The pearl beyond price*. Diamond, California. 1988. P.182

<sup>20</sup> *God in all Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing*.

## Towards Process Work Enlightenment

In Process Work we could perhaps view enlightenment more as a momentary state, like other states which we move in and out of. Process work stresses awareness of what is happening and inner work can certainly help that awareness. Process work enlightenment is *'being open to all events and not grasping onto them and saying this is good or bad.* <sup>21</sup>

Buddhism would agree with this, yet views these states of enlightenment as just having glimpses of what is possible. The use of meditation practices helps the student to stabilize these glimpses. Some descriptions of experiences of meditation though, begin to sound very process like;

*'In mindfulness practice, self is experienced as a flow, a process, a rushing and teeming patterning that changes over time.*

*When a therapist can sit with a person without an agenda, without trying to force an experience, without thinking that she knows what is going to happen or who the person is, then the therapist is infusing the therapy with the lessons of meditation...  
.The possibility of some real, spontaneous, unscripted communication exists at such a moment <sup>22</sup>*

Arnold Mindell says that enlightenment cannot be obtained by willpower and happens spontaneously. It is a special attitude towards life. Process work focuses on what we notice, rather than who we are or might become. We are for moments, connected neither to our old identity, nor to the new things that are arising within us.  
*The moment you identify yourself as being aware of the flow of life and also as being part of the flow, you have a peak and meaningful experience. Many people describe this state as ....knowing that you are at any one moment any one of your different parts and yet none at all.* <sup>23</sup>

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Lucinda Vardey Millennium Books. Australia 1995. P. 717

<sup>22</sup> ibid. P. 187

<sup>23</sup> Arnold Mindell. The Shaman's Body. P.34

## INTRODUCTION TO PROCESS WORK

*'Come to the edge and jump.'*

*No.*

*Come to the edge and jump.*

*No.*

*She pushed me and I flew.'*

Process Oriented Psychology, or Process Work or POP, as it is colloquially known, is an original and innovative approach to working with individual, group and collective change, which combines psychology, spirituality and social activism into a single paradigm. It was developed by Dr. Arnold Mindell in the 1970's, a physicist and Jungian analyst and has its roots in Jungian psychology, Taoism and the new paradigms in physics. Process work is unique, in that it combines many other forms of therapy and covers mental, emotional, physical and spiritual areas. One of the main things that initially attracted me was its holistic approach combination of many modalities. Having originally trained as a body worker and a family therapist, I had never found a way to bring them together in my thinking or my practice. Process work appeared to me as an umbrella that supported and oversaw both, as well as many other approaches.

### Background Beliefs

There are, as with any therapy, particular theories and skills that are associated with Process work and I will briefly outline these, with a special

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emphasis on inner work, which is the closest to the topic of this paper. However, first, I feel it is important to briefly discuss the background belief systems that Process work embraces. It is particularly important to know 'where a therapy is coming from.' This is because often there are unspoken belief systems and attitudes that colour everything that a therapist will do. Unless these are explicit, they can form a hidden agenda which the client, and sometimes even the therapist is unaware of. Process work is a study of perception and the way we observe is strongly determined by our primary process, or what we are more identified with. Our secondary process is much further away from our awareness and often can only be accessed through our unoccupied channels. Therefore identifying our beliefs as therapists is vital.

### Congruence

In Process work, the belief systems are congruent with the work itself. The basic philosophy is-that whatever is happening is right and needs to be encouraged, rather than it is wrong and should be changed. It only looks wrong when we do not understand the context or behavior sufficiently. This sounds simple, but is a radical departure from many therapies that work on a belief system that behavior or people need to change or be 'fixed' or helped to function so that they can fit in more to everyday life. Process work believes in inherent wisdom and purpose in disturbing, random and apparently chaotic phenomena. Everything within the field is part of a pattern and the collection of roles are waiting to be occupied. Only when all the parts are represented and appreciated can the field manifest its wisdom.

Arnold Mindell says that what happens to us in each moment is exactly what is meant to happen. Our task is to learn how to follow this process as it unfolds and thereby help it reveal its deeper significance.

*'A physical symptom, for example, may force us to deal with a relationship issue, get us in touch with a mythological figure, resolve an old childhood dream or guide us into a profound meditative state. I think we're doing what spiritual*

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*practices are trying to do as well. Long ago, I dreamed that the Buddha said that if process work had been available in his day, he would have used it, because it's an express train to the same spot.<sup>24</sup>*

### **The Flow of Nature**

In noticing and following the meaningful flow of nature and life and unfolding the process of what is happening, process workers are Taoist in their approach. Arnold Minden says that really everyone is a Taoist at heart. He says that we would all like to follow nature and people all over the world say they believe in human nature. However, it is interesting that when we get sick, we fight the illness, rather than trying to find out the meaning or purpose behind it.

A teleological perspective is taken, rather than a causal one, understanding that what is happening is meaningful, even if we cannot make sense of it. Also, because concepts are structural in nature and have no value laden content, they therefore have cross-cultural applicability. Process work can and does exist across countries and cultures, including America, England, Europe, Australia, India, Israel, Africa etc. Process work is descriptive, rather than prescriptive and believes in synchronicity, a term defined by Jung, used here to mean that a secondary process is occurring in the world channel. These events can sometimes take on a numinous quality in that they can become mystical or magical, with a spiritual essence to them.

Many theories from physics are included in Process work and it is interesting to see how some of these theories are now being more included and recognised in therapeutic and mystical, spiritual paths.

They include;

- the Bootstrap theory developed by Geoffrey Chew who maintains that using only one theory doesn't work well
- the Uncertainty Principle developed by Heisenburg, saying the more we emphasize one aspect, the more uncertain the other aspects become

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Stephan Bodian

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- the Holographic theory, in that each part contains the whole and the whole is contained within the part
  - the Quantum theory, emphasizing the basic oneness of the Universe
  - the theory of Participant observation, with the observer always being included, rather than separate from the system being studied
  - the theory of Non-locality, where what happens in one part of the system impacts upon another part.
  - Interdependence, which notes that what happens in one part of the world, affects another part.

So perception and beliefs influence how we view what is happening. Perception is also one of the key elements in Buddhism. They maintain that how we perceive is filtered through our conditioning, belief systems and theories. If we look at a mountain with white snow on the top, and we are wearing yellow sunglasses and do not know that we have the sunglasses on, we will insist that the snow is yellow. This will not change unless we realise, or someone points out that we have the sunglasses on. When we take the sunglasses off, only then will we see that the snow is white. In the same way, if we are ignorant of how we view things, we may harm our clients by insisting that the 'snow is yellow'.

Process work includes bodywork, symptoms and illnesses, coma, death and dying, relationship work, family therapy, group work and worldwork, working with altered and extreme states of consciousness, addictions, and inner work. The beauty and challenge for me, in learning Process work, was no longer to just be able to be a good practitioner in one or two areas, but to be able to follow whatever the client presented. Rather than 'fitting' the client into 'my theory of working', I now had to learn to skillfully follow the client, no matter how or what they presented.

## **METASKILLS IN PROCESS WORK AND BUDDHISM**

One of the important aspects in learning Process work is developing what Amy Mindell calls metaskills. She discusses in 'Moon over Water' certain qualities that we need as therapists. She describes metaskills as;

*'attitudes...that are a direct reflection of our most heart - felt beliefs about life, nature and human development ..... the living manifestation of our deepest beliefs and philosophies. '24*

These metaskills cannot really be taught, but rather are demonstrated by our teachers in such a way that as therapists or meditators, we slowly embody them over a period of time. It requires an openness and humility, a willingness to follow the process and to work with oneself in a consistent way in order to develop these metaskills, rather than just reading or talking about them. They become like second nature and are not an intellectual or academic exercise.

She also says that Eastern disciplines are a path to spiritual enlightenment and that becoming a therapist is often a spiritual path, if we allow our underlying beliefs to surface through our work. It is a path of learnin<sup>g</sup> and then letting go of the learning in order to

*'live in accordance with our basic feelings about life. The therapist's techniques become transparent, infused with the spirit of her feelings and beliefs. '25*

The therapist then becomes a role model who embodies and demonstrates her beliefs in practice.

One of the metaskills we need in both Process Work and spiritual practice is having 'beginner's mind' so that we are open to listening and learning, not only to therapy skills, but also to our clients! In the mind of an 'expert' there is often

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<sup>25</sup> Amy Metaskills. The Spiritual Art of Therapy. New Falcon. Arizona. 1995. P.50

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no space for anything new to come in, but is rigid in his or her belief that their knowledge is right.

There is a story of a professor visiting a Zen Master for tea. The master poured from the teapot and kept pouring, even after the cup was full and then overflowing. The professor said, 'you are spilling the tea.' The master replied; *'This is your first lesson. To study Zen, the mind must be empty of preconceptions or else there is no room for anything else to come in.'* <sup>26</sup>

The teacher is trying here to loosen the concepts in the mind of the professor, in a slightly shocking way, so that he will be more open. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities. In the mind of the expert, there are few!

In Tibetan Buddhism, it is also taught that there are three ways that people listen that do not allow learning to take place. These are called 'The Three Defects of the Pot.' The first is having a mind like a pot that has been turned upside down. Even though we are physically present, we don't hear a word. We can also have a mind that is like a pot with holes in. Whatever goes in, it just leaks out and we don't remember anything. Thirdly, we may have a mind like a pot containing poison. Then whatever we hear is contaminated by our opinions and judgements.

Therefore having a beginner's mind, no matter how much we think we know, allows us to remain open and receptive and discerning towards whatever is being presented in the moment.

It is also important to be able to be fluid with one's own internal states as well as in external situations. Being fluid and spontaneous, with the ability to adapt and flow with any given process is an important metaskill as a therapist. It is similar perhaps to the skill of 'dynamic mindfulness' in Tibetan Buddhism. This is an ability to enter into any given situation and instantly and spontaneously see the overview as well as all the details and act according to what needs to happen in that moment. If the situation changes, then the meditator changes with it, without hanging onto concepts of what she thought needed to happen.

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Awakening the Heart, ed. John Welwood. Shambhala, Boston, London. 1983. P.132

The skill of awareness which is so central to all meditation, to notice what is happening from moment to moment translates into the metaskill of the metacommunicator. This monitors the overall picture and is able to comment on what is happening, rather like a 'weather report'. The metacommunicator does not judge or criticize, but notices what is happening. Detachment also plays a large part in this, where we are not caught up in any part, but can view the overall process. In Zen Buddhism the experience of 'satori' allows one to detach from the personal viewpoint or our everyday minds, and view the entire field.

Compassion is described in Process work as a metaskill that allows us to develop a caring and loving attitude, not only towards the parts that we like about ourselves, but also appreciating the parts that we don't feel so good about or that we disavow.

*'Further compassion involves helping all these parts to unfold and reveal their essential nature and meaning.'*<sup>27</sup>

Equanimity, treating everyone equally, no matter who they are, is also developed in the practice of devotion. Equanimity in a process work context of compassion 'refers' to a neutral focus, the ability to accept whatever nature is pointing to in a given moment with a natural and fair heart.<sup>28</sup>

It is not having a bias towards or against any particular part or process but seeing that in having a fair and equal attitude towards all, can only benefit the overall process and ultimate wellbeing of the person.

In doing so, we begin to develop the ability of exploring and bringing forth the spiritual in every situation, no matter how mundane it seems. Every part and process and action becomes like a prayer and a blessing. When we have developed equanimity, nothing has the ability to really disturb us. When we no longer have an ego, our secondary processes are no longer disturbers and in fact we welcome them. No matter whether we are up or down, high or low, we surf the waves and feel that

*'every day is a fine day. This reminds us to trust that even the absurd, the difficult,*

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<sup>27</sup> ibid. P.70

<sup>28</sup> ibid. P.75

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*the painful and mysterious are meaningful if we are able to ride the waves of our experiences.* <sup>29</sup>

Put another way, everything becomes a gift or a blessing. All our difficulties and processes are understood in the light of this attitude of learning and meaning. Even death loses its power and fear over us. Learning to be compassionate plays a large part in a spiritual training; compassion for ourselves as well as for others. His Holiness the Dalai Lama includes relationship and worldwork while speaking about the metaskill of compassion. In 'The Policy of Kindness' he says;

*‘What is my purpose in life, what is my responsibility? Whether I like it or not, I am on this planet, and it is far better to do something for humanity. So you see that compassion is the seed or basis.... the topic of compassion is not at all religious business; it is very important to know that it is human business, that it is a question of human survival, that it is not a question of human luxury. I might say that religion is a kind of luxury. If you have religion that is good. But it is clear that even without religion we can manage. However without these basic human qualities we cannot survive.* <sup>30</sup>

These words for me, are a true demonstration of great awareness, recognition, compassion and fluidity. The leader of one of the fastest growing religions in the world says that religion is a luxury but compassion is not, if we are to survive.

Humour, play, learning to relax and let go are also key elements. The concept of no self, or no-mind, throwing the self or ego away again and again translates in Process work to negotiating at the edge. We are not getting rid of anything or throwing anything away, but are detaching enough and being open

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* P. 101

<sup>30</sup> God in all Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing. Edited and with Introductions by Lucinda Vardey Millennium Books. Australia 1995. P. 432

and empty to be able to have the courage again and again, to stand at the edge of the unknown. We open ourselves to verge on entering something else, something new, something unknown. The secondary process becomes primary, we usually attach ourselves to that and then something else is secondary. Negotiating at the edge is an ongoing process. Arnold Mindell says that there is no state of consciousness that we can call our own, because we don't really have a fixed identity

Ian, a Buddhist student puts it another way;

*'Rinpoche often says that the teacher is actual' a working context for the student. The process gets deeper and deeper over the years. Sogyal Rinpoche often uses an image of an onion. We have to peel, layer by layer. Unless we are exceptional students, we don't just pop open, we have to peel. As the layers come off and we get some insights into ourselves, almost simultaneously with that sense of liberation, comes the next layer that needs to be worked on. Usually you're the last person to be conscious of what that is. It's about learning to be somewhat comfortable and at ease with that process as it is revealed and trying to resist it less and less. '31*

Chogyam Trumpa, a renowned Buddhist Master and one of the first to bring the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism to America, describes the warrior's path; *'it has four dignities.... which is also connected with realising egolessness. The four dignities are meek, perky, outrageous and inscrutable.'*

Meekness is a feeling which is true and genuine, with an underlying brilliance, that encompasses great confidence and a vast mind. This can be translated as a metakill of courageousness, having the courage to be true to who we are, even if we are frightened or think people may dislike us. It is also being spacious in having an ability to be flexible and pick up different parts and positions within ourselves as well as in the field.

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Sherry Marshall. Devotion. Simon and Schuster, Sydney. 1999.

Perkiness is described as an experience of having an uplifted mind and being in a state of trust. This is similar to having a deep and unshakable trust in the process of nature and allowing that trust to enable us to follow it. Being fluid and spontaneous and having the confidence to follow any process where it needs to go demonstrates awareness and adaptability. Having a joyful mind can perhaps be seen as when we are in a high dream. It does not necessarily relate to what is happening outside of us, but more to do with an inner state.

Outrageousness is having strength, power and fearlessness, even when afraid. It is a little like crazy wisdom, the path of the advanced yogi's or shamans, which allow us to 'turn situations on their head', or make the most difficult situations into something that can work for us. Everything is workable. This is like a belief system that understands that however our clients manifest, even if within the grip of severe addiction or depression, for example, we can help them uncover the meaning and have the strength and power not to give up on them. Sometimes we have to be outrageous as therapists to help the client.

### **Inner Work and Channels**

In Process work, as in Buddhism, the method of working is the goal. In developing the ability to live completely in every moment, this is the path and the fruition. Process work however understands meditation *as* a process which needs to include different techniques as they are needed by the individual over time.

David Roomy in 'Inner Journey to Sacred Places' says that inner work involves us with our own centre and that a definition of ultimate centering is enlightenment. It is possible to believe that we can become enlightened in this lifetime, or put another way, that we can 'individuate' and become whole.

*'Inner work is a discipline for working towards one's full realisation.'*

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David Roomy. Inner Journey to Sacred Places. Pentland Press USA. 1997.

20 *ibid.* P. 841

21 Arnold Mindell. Yachats, September 1999

Robert Johnson says that the point of inner work is to build consciousness and to gain insights into what life presents us. He believes that within the unconscious lie hidden strengths and resources waiting to be discovered. Any form of meditation that helps us open ourselves to the unconscious can be called inner work. Jung observed that Australian Aboriginal people spent two thirds of their waking life in some form of inner work, through religious ceremony, interpreting dreams, having visions and spiritual quests. I would maintain that this is also true of practicing Tibetan Buddhists, through meditation, visions, chanting, and religious ceremony. What they have in common is that their approach to the inner world has been maintained and is not separate from their external life. Their daily life is imbued with symbolism and meaning from their dream time.

Arnold Mindell in 'Working on Yourself Alone' gives practical tools to working with our inner realities. He identifies the different channels in Process work and the different meditation aspects based on them. Our sensory channels are the way in which we receive and grounded sensory information. Mindell says that if we know what channel we are perceiving in, we are already at our goal, as knowing how we perceive means that we can work with ourselves. Therefore asking ourselves which channel we are in, already raises our awareness. There are channels that we are already aware of, called occupied and other channels that are further away from our awareness, called unoccupied channels. For example, within a meditation practice, we may be consciously visualizing a deity, with intricate detail and therefore our visual channel is occupied. However, we may not be so aware that we have a song or tune or mantra running through the back of our mind. In this case, the auditory channel is more unoccupied in the moment. If we realise this is happening and choose to chant mantra rather than visualize, then auditory becomes more occupied.

Arnold Mindell includes different methods within each channel that belong to varied traditions. Within the proprioception channel are Hatha yoga, relaxation techniques and counting the breath. Within the visualisation channel is concentration and yantra meditation and dream work. Within the auditory channel

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is mantra, drumming and prayer. Movement includes Tai Chi and Sufi dancing and within the relationship channel is Tantra, Taoist alchemy and Siddha yoga. In the world channel is American Indian vision quests.

Within Tibetan Buddhism, I would utilize the channels in the following way. Tantric practises use visualization techniques, while chanting is in the auditory channel. Movement is through meditative walkin<sup>g</sup> and deity dancing and the main practice of guru yoga encompasses the relationship channel by mixing one's ordinary mind with the wisdom mind of the teacher. The proprioceptive channel is a vital part of the meditative practice throu<sup>g</sup>h feeling the presence of the deities. The world channel can be represented in terms of the sangha or community that all the practices take place within. As in process work, everything is accepted and never discarded. The basic material is used for the transformation.

However, the method of Process work encoura<sup>g</sup>es amplification within the channel or noticing channel changes. As with the alchemical process, turnin<sup>g</sup> up the heat to cook what is in the pot, once we have perceived what channel we are in, the signal is amplified in the channel within which it occurs, which then helps the process unfold. In Tantric meditation, the method is different. We notice, but return to the breath, or include what is bein<sup>g</sup> noticed or brin<sup>g</sup> our attention gently back to spacious, limitless mind, called 'sittin<sup>g</sup> in the View or the Nature of Mind.' Everything else is perceived as a distraction, or put another way, we are never distracted if our mind is always aware. Therefore the methods are definitely different, even though the result may be similar.

### **Towards Process Work Meditation**

Meditation techniques are for opening the heart, stillin<sup>g</sup> the mind and making them one, for grounding the soul in the body and uniting the spirit in both. In 'Working on Yourself Alone' Mindell say's that,

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*many Buddhist teachers are in principle, open to all experiences, techniques and religions, but in practice they tend to stress an inner focus which represses fantasies, spontaneous thoughts and ideas and emotional affects.*<sup>33</sup>

He discusses whether a method of inner work can be explored so that both Western and Eastern ways are included. Then meditation is a *'process which includes various techniques as they appear in the individual over time.'*<sup>34</sup>

Meditation allows the person to benefit from an exchange of energy with an unidentified source of energy. In the quiet of meditation, a person is more able to tune into a force of 'energy' that helps the meditator renew and replenish herself. Meditation is often advocated as an inexpensive, self-regulated and effective procedure, which results in deep transformation of identity, life-style and relationship to the world.

James Bugental<sup>35</sup> says that when we realise that our truest identity is as process and not as fixed substance, we are at the edge of freedom and yet, the realisation of the endless possibilities of awareness make us fearful and lost. The world which we think is solid is merely our construction. Being in the moment now, as described in Buddhism is also within therapy's insistence on paying attention to the subjective life. This creates a transformation and change and begins to focus the person more inward than outward.

There are hundreds of different techniques, practices and systems of meditation. Some use the breath to focus and calm the mind, some use awareness as the basis of the meditation, chanting, eyes open or shut, sitting, standing, walking, in silence or noise. Shamatha, or calm abiding meditation is based on the mind resting one-pointedly on an object, which can be the breath or an external object such as a picture. The mind becomes very calm, relaxed and stable

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* P.5

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* P.35

<sup>35</sup> *God in all Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing.* Edited and with Introductions by Lucinda Vardey Millennium Books. Australia 1995. P.27

and rests in peace. Vipashyana meditation is clear awareness or insight meditation which means that we can look at things in a very direct and clear way. *When both are developed, the result is that we have the freedom to focus with one pointed concentration on anything and develop wisdom so we can see the true nature of mind. Our mind becomes workable, in that we can do whatever we want. If we send our mind somewhere, that is where it will go and if we want to leave it in a particular spot, it will stay there. Normally our mind behaves as if it belongs to someone else and goes wandering off everywhere.* <sup>36</sup>

Process work meditation is different and would probably be interested in the mind belonging to someone else! As Process workers we might ask who would that particular state of mind belong to and would be interested in following and amplifying that. Process meditation is usually fluid and follows the shifts that happen inside a person in several channels, whether proprioception, visual, auditory etc. Process work meditation

*can never be left. From the viewpoint of the awake meditator, all of the many separate worlds, whether they are inner or outer, death or life, physical or mental, are all aspects of the same mysterious universe; all are different channels of luminous signals and meaningful information waiting to be unfolded by you.* <sup>37</sup>

Meditation is a tool or technique which can be an ongoing renewable source, not only for developing stillness and peace of mind, but also to ignite the devotion which is inside all of us or re - inspire us when we have lost touch with that feeling or experience. It is similar to when we first attend a Process workshop and become passionate and interested in learning Process work and then continue to fuel our learning and attraction by contact with our Process work teacher and community. When we meditate, we engage and reconnect with the open, spacious, limitless mind that reminds us of our introduction to the nature of who we truly are and helps us embody our potential.

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<sup>36</sup> Essentialised notes on meditation. Sogyal Rinpoche. Manual 1997-1998

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* P.

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## **PSYCHOLOGY AND BUDDHISM**

There have been many books written on Western psychology and Eastern Buddhism. C. G. Jung said that

*'The longing for light is the longing for consciousness.... ('being) awareness, receptivity cognizance, being fully alive — nothing less than total awareness in all facets of our being. '38*

The word longing and this description is very close to the devotional experience, which is sometimes a longing for what the teacher can introduce to the student ie. his or her own awareness and cognizance. The student already has this within them, but as we cannot see our own face, we have to look in the mirror and see its reflection. J. Krishnamurti said;

*Only in the mirror of relationship do you see the face of what is. '39*

Two thousand, five hundred years ago, the Buddha employed concepts such as altered states of consciousness, cognitive behavior modification, social constructionist models of reality and meditative techniques which are at the growing edge of Western psychology. In Radmila Moacanin's book, 'Jung's Psychology and Tibetan Western and Eastern Paths to the Heart,' she discusses

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<sup>38</sup> God in all Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing. Edited and with Introductions by Lucinda Vardey Millennium Books. Australia 1995.

38 Ibid. P.138

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the possible parallels between both, while also pointing out the differences. Some of her comments seem just as relevant to Process work as to Jung;

*The ultimate goal in both systems is for us to become what we truly are... ..Progressive development of consciousness is the initial goal of both Buddhism and Jung's psychology.....The principle use of opposites is fundamental (in both)... ..Both systems require that every aspect of the individual be involved in the process; nothing is to be rejected. Knowledge and intellectual understanding are important... ..but they have to be complemented by feeling and intuition and the insight gained in the course of contemplation or meditation has to be translated into action... ..Symbols are abundantly made use of as vehicles and means of transforming our awareness and our ordinary reality into a significant one ....Both ways lead to the Self— the center, the heart of the mandala. Buddhist teachings and Jung's therapeutic methods are invariably adapted to the specific needs, conditions and capacities of the individual; the guru and therapist are guides on the way. They are never regarded as ultimate authorities. 39*

In Buddhism, we are constantly urged to test our own experience of the validity of the teaching, and adopt or reject it in accordance with our findings and personal experience. Both systems warn against dangers and remind the student of the dangers on the path. Necessary precautions need to be taken when contacting powerful inner forces, potentially disruptive to the psychic structure of the personality. Warnings are frequently given to students. However, in the West, this seems to spur people on, rather than encouraging them to consider the potential dangers. Mark Epstein believes that meditation can clear away defensive rigidity and therefore allow a natural flow of love to be reconnected with. Meditation restores our capacity for connection from the inside. Connection is always present in the Buddhist view and is our natural state. Therapy is also effective in a similar way in that it also allows a person to discover their capacity for connection.

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It is also important to recognise though, that with the recent combining of psychotherapy and spiritual practice in the West, that they are, in fact different and also have different results.

*‘There has been such an interchange ... ..that there is a prevalent notion, at least in the psychological world, that western psychology can actually get you to the same place as spiritual practice. I think this is really quite a dangerous assumption.....They do not develop the penetrating insight that helps one cut through the deeper layers of illusion and hallucinations about individual separateness.’<sup>40</sup>*

### **Becoming Who We Are**

Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein emphasize that spiritual practice is also not just about rituals and prayers being repeated endlessly. This, in itself really has no meaning and does not always produce change in people. They say; *How we act, how we relate to ourselves, to our bodies, to the people around us, to our work, creates the kind of world we live in, creates our very freedom or suffering.* <sup>41</sup>

In other words, who and how we are, is what counts. If mindfulness practice and prayers help us in some way to be more of who we are, or being in therapy, both are valuable. Sogyal Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher often says that people can practice meditation for many years, but somehow, it doesn't really touch them or they become what he calls ‘dharma stubborn.’ Nothing goes in anymore and nothing changes. In therapy, we can also continuously recycle our story and our drama and our trauma for many years. We cannot hear anything different or work with our edges. There may be good reason for this, but staying stuck and rigid in one position may also prevent us from being more of who we are.

Jung thought that the most vital need of a person is to discover one's own inner reality through the cultivation of symbolic life and to 'live in active,

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<sup>40</sup> Awakening the Heart, ed. John Welwood. Shambhala, Boston, London. 1983. P.36.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield. P.160

dynamic contact with the collective unconscious and the Self.' So being in touch with our own inner life as well as carrying out our day to day tasks focuses us on self-exploration. Graf suggests that this can be done through meditation, humanistic and transpersonal psychotherapy, and shamanic and trance rituals etc.

*'Repeated experiences of the transpersonal domain can have a profound impact on the individual involved. They tend to dissolve the narrow and limited perspective characterizing the average Westerner and make one see the problems of everyday life from a cosmic perspective.'* <sup>42</sup>

Transpersonal psychology, like humanistic psychology is concerned with psychological health, but also includes the spiritual dimension of life and states of consciousness that transcend the ego and personality. Spiritual traditions include Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Yoga, Sufism, Christian mysticism, Taoism, etc.

Transpersonal psychology promotes and facilitates growth and is interested in expanding awareness beyond the limits set by most western models of mental health. In *Transpersonal Psychotherapy: Reflections on the Genre* by Carolyn Keutzwier<sup>43</sup> she quotes Walsh and Vaughan;

*'in addition to working through psychodynamic processes, the therapist aims to assist the client in disidentifying from and transcending psychodynamic issues. Thus the therapist may instruct the client in the possibility of using all life experience as a part of learning (karma yoga) the potentials of altered states, and the limitations and dangers of attachment to fixed models and expectations.'* In 1907, William James wrote;

*'our normal waking consciousness... is but one special type of consciousness...whilst parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness, entirely different. We may go through life without*

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* P.272

<sup>43</sup> *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, in *Humanistic Psychology* Spring 1988 edited C. Keutzer. P.201

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*suspecting their existence, but .... at a touch they are there in all their completeness.* <sup>44</sup>

So, our usual states of consciousness are dreamlike and illusory and we are trapped in our own minds by a 'continuous inner fantasy dialogue that creates an all consuming illusory distortion of perception and reality – samsara.' However, this condition goes unrecognised until we begin to, eg. meditate. When we dis-identify from this dream we become awakened, or liberated or enlightened.

When people experience themselves as nothing and every-thing and do not identify with anything exclusively, then they are pure awareness and the entire universe.

Yasutani Roshi says;

*'this is the direct awareness that you are more than this puny body or limited mind.*

*Stated negatively it is the realisation that the universe is not external to you.*

*Positively, it is experiencing the universe as yourself* <sup>45</sup>

Conditioned thoughts and emotions pass through the mind, but without identification with them, awareness is now experienced as unconditioned or liberated. A person in this state experiences themselves as identical or the, same as everyone else. Therefore the thought of harming 'others' makes no sense and also there is nothing to defend against. This is the true love and compassion; recognising oneself as the same as others.

Dogen, the Zen Master says;

*'To study Buddhism is to study the self to study the self is to forget the self To forget the self is to be one with others.'*

The concept of addiction in the West, to drugs for example is taken a further step in Buddhism. The Buddha stated in the 2nd Noble Truth that the cause of all suffering is attachment and craving. Attachment can occur to

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<sup>44</sup> William James 'The Varieties of Religious Experience 1935, P. 298

<sup>45</sup>. Transpersonal Psychology edited by C. Keutzer. Summer 1986. P.108

anything, relationships, substances, material possessions, belief systems etc. The word attachment is often misunderstood. It is not that we have to renounce everything. It just means that we can have what we have but we can also just as easily let go. Letting go does not imply conscious effort necessarily. When the sun shines on the snow mountain, the ice naturally melts away. Or if we receive a phone saying we have won a million dollars, we can receive that. The next day we are told there was a mistake and we have won nothing, we can receive that too! We just let go. This is freedom of the mind. The opposite is the mind which is ruled by attachment and aversion and is said to be a slave of every situation and environment in which it finds itself. It is constantly involved in a never-ending search to get what it wants and avoid what it fears.

### Similarities

There are certain similarities in psychotherapy and spiritual traditions. John Welwood in 'Awakening the Heart' names some of these. Firstly there is the idea that we see things as we want to see them, not necessarily as they actually are. In traditional therapy we name this as projection, denial, idealisation and fantasy and in spiritual traditions the concept of samsara and appearances come into play. In both, people are viewed as divided or fragmented, not being whole or all of what they can be. Self-knowledge or awareness is seen as the key to becoming whole and rediscovering and accepting the 'shadow' or 'negative' parts of ourselves. This process is viewed as sometimes painful, but necessary as it leads to growth and healing.

*The unconscious is made conscious... and a clearer perception of the world and a greater capacity to understand, accept and relate to others can be seen to follow from this greater self-acceptance and objectivity.* <sup>46</sup>

We all have hidden potential and we expect in successful therapy or spiritual practice that the negative feelings and sufferings will slowly disappear. This expectation is shared on both paths. Both also require regular contact with a

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<sup>46</sup> Awakening the Heart, ed. John Welwood. Shambhala, Boston, London. 1983. P.23

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teacher or therapist. In Process work and Buddhism, the awareness of the moment is also central. Not being attached to a goal of, for example, healing or wellness, but following what is happening now and letting the meaning unfold is crucial. Buddhism teaches that there is no such thing as 'I' or 'self,' as there is no constant identity or entity. The 'self' is like the present moment or 'nowness.' Moment by moment, there is no such thing as the past or the future, and yet the present also dissolves into the past and the future becomes the present. So there is no fixed thing that can be identified as constant and unchanging. The self has no fixed nature and once the absolute nature is realised, then the limiting and repetitious nature of the ordinary self is also understood. Everything dissolves and is reconstructed, only to dissolve again.

This description can be recognised, to a point, when, eg, observing roles within a group field. In Process work, we see that we are a series of roles, and can choose not to become identified with any one particular role. Finally, we become fluid, like a river, able to pick up and drop roles when appropriate. The concept of impermanence is also shared, recognising that life and processes are like a river, always moving and changing and not being attached to a particular state. The view of interdependence is also similar and I have discussed in detail, the aspects of metaskills in both paths.

### Differences

One of the main differences between the two is that most psychotherapies do not transcend the nature of ego structure. Therapy is focused on developing a functional ego structure and is mainly interested in adjusting to the world. Buddhism is more concerned with non-identification with the ego and sees both pleasure and negativity as suffering, rather than just unhappy states of mind. Jack Kornfield says that another difference is that, although both emphasize analysis and investigation, meditation concentrates on

*‘the cutting power of samadhi, the stillness of mind ....through deep focus and inner contemplation. 47*

Psychological tools do not penetrate the surface of the mind and do not have the depth and penetration of spiritual practice, but are more concerned with the adjustment of personality. He continues that concentration, tranquillity and equanimity are also lacking.

In Buddhism, a causal view is taken, the concept of karma being that every thought, speech and action has a consequence. This is seen as a universal law, whether people believe in it or not. In Process work, a teleological view is taken. The comparative discussions tend to conclude that the Buddhist approach has not been integrated yet into psychological theory and practice. Mark Epstein says that the situation is

*‘analogous to that of China two thousand years ago, when Taoism was the prevailing philosophy .48*

Some Taoists adopted Buddhism producing Zen Buddhism. He goes on to suggest that maybe the Buddha was the first psychoanalyst. He says,

*‘contemporary psychologists can start to sound suspiciously Buddhist when they compare the nature of self to that of a river or stream. As psychotherapy and meditation begin to come together, it is the function of mindfulness that will prove pivotal, because mindfulness permits continual surrender into our direct experience, from which we have all become experts at keeping ourselves at bay. 49* So, we seem

to still be in the beginning stages of these two similar, and yet different modalities working together. However, as Sogyal Rinpoche says, ‘Dharma is not therapy.’ Meditation works directly with the mind itself, whereas therapy works with the stories that arise in the mind.

Working with meditation and therapy gives us the opportunity to realise that everything that happens externally is also within us and we begin to realise that everything is part of us. Being free of ego, in a Buddhist sense, means losing our sense of separate identity, which in Process work can mean releasing physical,

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<sup>47</sup> ibid. P. 35

<sup>48</sup> Thoughts without a thinker. Mark Epstein, MD. Harper Collins. 1995. P.7

<sup>49</sup> ibid P.147

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emotional, mental and social identities. Life becomes then, more like the flow of the river which is carrying us.

*'We don't make the river happen or be responsible for making things happen in the river. We participate in the flow and trust it. 50*

## **DEVOTION**

We now can enter into the main topic of this paper, knowing that all the discussion on enlightenment and meditation, psychology and Buddhism etc. is a necessary introduction to the subject of devotion. It gives the context and the framework to discuss devotion.

So what is devotion within Tibetan Buddhism? The opportunity to enter into a relationship that totally mirrors who we are in an open, naked, appropriate and immediate way is unusual. The closest we would normally have access to that is with a partner or a mentor or therapist. However, even in those relationships, the other person sometimes has their own projections, agendas and self-interest. To be with someone over a long period of time who is only interested in reflecting us back to ourselves, with the intention of helping us, with no self-interest at all, is almost beyond our imagining.

*'The most intimate relationship between disciple and master becomes a mirror, a living analogy for the disciple's relationship to life and the world in general. The master becomes the pivotal figure in a sustained practice of pure vision, disciple's every culminates when the disciple sees, directly and beyond any doubt, the master as the living Buddha, his or her every word as Buddha speech, his or her mind the wisdom mind of all the Buddhas ... They begin to see naturally that they, the universe and all beings without exception are spontaneously pure and perfect.*

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50 Yoga International. July 1999. USA Issue 48

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*They are looking at last at reality with its own eyes. The master, then, is the path, the magical touchstone for a total transformation of the perception.'* <sup>51</sup>

In this tradition, the whole relationship with the teacher can be encompassed within devotion. Sogyal Rinpoche says,

*'So then, it is essential to know what real devotion is. It is not mindless adoration; it is not abdication of your responsibility to yourself nor indiscriminating following of another's personality or whim. Real devotion is an unbroken receptivity to the truth. Real devotion is rooted in an awed and reverent gratitude This most intimate relationship between disciple and master becomes a mirror, a living analogy for the disciple's relationship to life and the world in general. The master becomes the pivotal figure in a sustained practice of 'pure vision', which culminates when the disciple sees, directly and beyond any doubt, but one that is lucid, grounded, and intelligent.* <sup>52</sup>

Many Buddhist students come to their own understandings of what devotion is and a few also compare it to therapy. Christine says that devotion, for her, is the highest, most profound level of love which radiates from our absolute nature. She believes that devotion helps us develop a deep connection to the divine within us all and that 'it becomes our own presence.'

*'Devotion has a quality of unconditional compassion and wisdom that is available to everyone, like rays of sunlight.'* <sup>53</sup>

Part of understanding what devotion is, is also seeing clearly what it isn't. Ian, a Buddhist student, very clearly states what devotion is not. He says that we are not talking about making someone else very high and ourselves very low. It doesn't mean that the teacher is very pure and we are impure. We do not give up the right to think or to lose our critical faculties and become mindless and brainless zombies. It is not giving up the responsibility of our own lives and handing it over to someone else. Ross, in his interview emphasizes that devotion is not a blind conceptual situation where we are devoid of intellect and do exactly what we are told. This is a total and complete misunderstanding. It does not have

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<sup>51</sup> ibid

<sup>52</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Harper Collins .1992

<sup>53</sup> Sherry Marshall. *Devotion*. Simon and Schuster. Sydney 1999. P.19

a sense of subservience or being less than.

Albert, a Buddhist student, has some interesting angles on the subject. He initially equates devotion to the concept of 'sacred outlook' which he describes as simply relating to things as they are.

*'Sacred outlook is a profound acceptance ... ..that sits squarely in the experience, letting things be as they must. It is this basic acceptance that somehow makes every moment of our lives sacred and, eventually, in the process, a devotional experience ... .. keeping this sense of the sacred, as a commitment in daily life, is my definition of devotion.'*<sup>54</sup>

He continues to say that devotion is actually rather like a Zen koan, in that you own back all your projections completely. Is this not also part of the process we go through in therapy?

However one of the differences between Buddhist teachings and practices is that they deal directly with the mind itself, whereas it could be argued that therapy deals with the stories that arise in the mind. Julie, a Buddhist, discusses that both therapy and spiritual practices are about relieving suffering and supporting happiness but that most therapies are engaged in rearranging, improving or relieving the person, which is also perfectly acceptable. She says;

*'Devotion is never only about you, but about helping you wake up.... What the teacher is blows apart all the models that we carry with us. Nevertheless we use those models because they are the ones we have, and we relate mostly through roles, not reality. We try the, one after another, until we find out that none of them apply... .. The moment we are willing to let the mind rest ... .. then openness comes simply and effortlessly.'*<sup>55</sup>

Often our own inner teacher finds an outer spokesperson, which is like a mirror, an outer expression that crystallizes in the form of a teacher who shows us the truth of our own nature. This is the catalyst that reconnects us to our own deep truth which we often search for, without finding. When a teacher touches our heart and there seems to be a truth there for us, it's our truth that is resonating. In

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<sup>54</sup> ibid. p. 117

<sup>55</sup> ibid p.174

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the mirror of the teaching, we discover our own face. The teaching is the living expression of the teaching and devotion is a vehicle that allows us to open to connect with that.

### Towards Process Oriented Devotion

Although the word devotion is not really used within Process work and certainly not in the same way as within Tibetan Buddhism, it appears that there is a similar process happening, perhaps under another name. One of the reasons people say they are reluctant to use the word devotion, is because of its bad image in the West. The concept of devotion is often misunderstood and maligned, conjuring up images of power and abuse issues, sects and unquestioning obedience to the leader.

A Process work teacher says;

*"I'm against devotion, but then I also think that I'm devoted. I have to be, even if its politically incorrect. It can lead to excesses in the wrong direction, which then can lead to abuse and giving one's power away, especially as women. We're trained and brainwashed to be devoted.*

*I was a Zen Buddhist for many years, practicing Vipassana meditation, which is not really devotional. However in Process work I have to say that I'm devoted to the Tao, to following processes. That to me is similar to Buddhism, where you devote yourself to the Buddha mind. Arnie is a huge teacher of following process, in fact, he embodies that.*

*So, in order to do Process work, you have to be devoted to unfolding nature and your own spiritual warriorship because you have to be devoted to working at your edges. You can't work long-term on your edges, unless you're on your path of heart. In the end, it's a spiritual decision to stay on your edges. I mean, by that, to be continuously cooking and sitting in the fire, which is sometimes hard. I think we all need models of how to do this and to follow the Tao of our dreaming, which is why community is so important because we can't really do it on our own.*

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*Devotion is remembering that 'every day is a fine day.' It's following nature in the moment. Basically it's a spiritual and not just a psychological practice. To remember that at the edge though, is a huge task, which is why we train and train. We are a learning community because we are continuously challenged at the edge and to meet that, we have to be dedicated to the unknown. In Buddhism, every moment can be viewed as the moment of death. In Process work, we are challenged to drop our known identity and go into the unknown. That is also a death. Every edge is a moment of death. You have to be pretty much devoted to keep doing that!*

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Certainly if we study to become a Process worker, we enter into a deep and ongoing relationship with a therapist who may also teach us. Being open and receptive to whatever arises, even if we are being open to being closed in the moment requires similar qualities to following a spiritual path. If the teacher is viewed as a mirror to our inner teacher, trusting our processes is very similar to trusting the teacher. There are three forms of trust or faith that are described in Tibetan Buddhism. These are vivid trust, when we feel particularly energised or inspired by what we are learning and by a particular person who is teaching us. There is also eager faith when we become very enthusiastic about what we are engaged in, and finally there is confident trust. This is when we have a deep and irreversible trust in whatever is happening, even when we don't understand. These forms of trust can be clearly identified at different stages of being a Process student.

In Process work, we believe that what is happening has meaning and we learn to unfold that. Spiritual life also gives or shows meaning to ordinary, every day life and from that perspective, all experiences have meaning. Both joy and suffering are part of the experience of our lives. The dualities of good and evil, joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain are part of life and part of us and they are all connected.

*'This is the nature of life and we learn to live life according to its nature.'*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Conversation with Rhea, Yachats, September 1999

<sup>57</sup> Yoga International. July 1999. Issue 48. USA. P. 27

Having and developing gratitude, appreciation and awe for everything that happens to us, seeing things 'as they are' and realising that we are not separate is a path of devotion. Devotion is love for the work and the delight in exploring the unknown and in not knowing. The more we are able to come from a place of not knowing, the more we become devoted to Process work in following the unknown. This is because we find the freedom to be spontaneous, free from prescriptions about how things ought to be. It's a deep feeling of caring for people, the group and the community.

*"Devotion, for me, is love for the process. It is an inner urge to at least say hi to a process. When I meditate on Arnie, I notice how open he is to things that I can't be yet. I wonder where that comes from, that openness. I get closer to him by observing him. I meditate on where he is coming from. I think that going beyond devotion, it's becoming one with everything and really feeling, knowing, sensing that the other is me."* <sup>58</sup>

So, another way of viewing devotion is opening the heart and opening to love and allowing everything to touch us in a vulnerable and naked way.

*"I'm not devoted to process work because that is a model. I'm devoted to love, compassion and freedom from suffering. Process work also has that nature, so, in fact, the model is consistent to my philosophy, my devotion. In its essence, Process work is interested in that. Devotion to the Tao, to me, is following my heart, not my surface heart but my deeper heart. It is following that which is best for everyone and that is connected to my deepest truth which is in my heart. It's not about thinking and being in my head, it's essentially me, my heart. Devotion isn't external and I think people mistake it when they think it is. God, guru and self are one. The idea is not so much to follow the guru, but who you are in your deepest essence. That is the guru."* <sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Conversaion with Salome. Yachats. 1999

<sup>59</sup> Conversation with Stephen. Yachats. 1999

## Shamanic Therapy

What are some of the qualities that we might need to follow a spiritual teacher that are similar to learning how to be a therapist? Amy Mindell says that the therapist as shaman needs to allow the magical and mysterious or unknown to arise. Then this unpredictability allows us to follow the unique process that is trying to unfold. Therefore, the greatest teacher of shamanism is nature and life itself.

Arnold Mindell says that people interested in becoming shamans often apprentice themselves to a teacher. The apprentice is fortunate to find a teacher, but the teacher is also lucky. A good teacher, without being troubled by a stubborn student, often does not reveal the details of his or her experiences. "The apprentice forces the teacher to begin again." For a shaman, life is about ecstatic journeys into other dimensions.

For me, training in a spiritual path in Buddhism or training to become a shamanic process worker is similar.

*"The gradually developing apprentice is in many ways similar to a person involved in psychotherapy. While many seek help from therapists, others often seem to be looking for spiritual or shamanic teachers."*<sup>60</sup>

Amy Mindell says that becoming a therapist can also be a spiritual path if our underlying beliefs are allowed to come through our work. She compares the learner of therapy to those on a path of learning meditation or Buddhism.

*"The therapist's techniques become transparent, infused with the spirit of her feelings and belief's....she becomes a model of someone who manifests her beliefs in living practice just as the moon's reflection rides the waves of the water."*<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> The Shaman's Body. Arnold Mindell. Harper San Fransisco. 1993. P.7

<sup>61</sup> Metaskills. The Spiritual art of Therapy. Amy Mindell. New Falcon. Arizona. 1995. P.5

Surely the skills and metaskills that we practice as therapists are the very same processes as in being devoted to a teacher. We need to be open to follow the process into the unknown and to allow whatever is mysterious to manifest. We need to work with whatever is constellated and whenever we have an agenda about where the process needs to go, we lose touch with the natural flow of the Tao.

A Buddhist student talks about the impossibility of manipulating the relationship with her teacher. She learns that when she is just open and follows where things need to go, then somehow, magically, everything works out!

*My experience is that as I continue through the process, my projections and insistences are gently loosened ... or radically stripped away, and all manipulation fails. Simple presence is always profoundly met and received but any manipulation on my part has been refused with knife –edge sharpness.<sup>63</sup>*

The teacher works with us within the alchemical relationship of devotion and acts as the disturber and mirror. We begin to have the opportunity to experience impossible challenges that take us to our very limits and beyond. The teacher accelerates or amplifies what life may bring us more slowly, in the form of body symptoms, altered and extreme states and relationship difficulties, so the student has the chance to work with, learn and move through these processes.

*‘Most learners can, or perhaps must, read about the Mystery schools of modern and ancient times, study Zen, Buddhism, Taoism, shamanism and the martial arts. But frankly, we think that the impossible challenges of life are the best teachers.’<sup>64</sup>*

### **The Alchemical Relationship**

The process of transformation can be a life-long journey, yet, if we are truly ready, it can happen in an instant. The alchemical relationship between teacher and student can certainly accelerate the process. The ancient art of alchemy, of turning base metal into gold, also used by the Taoists for discovering the formula of everlasting life, was full of mystery and secrecy. It has been used

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* P.123

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Julie Henderson. Devotion. Following Tibetan Masters. Simon and Schuster 1999

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by many, as a metaphor for change and transformation. The alchemists were never sure what they would produce. Would they get the gold or a more poisonous and deadly mixture? Occasionally, when chasing the elixir of immortality, testing their brew by swallowing it, they would die in the attempt.

*The Taoists believed that the spiritual was rooted in the physical ... the body was the practitioner's base for transcendence, and it had to be made into a sound spiritual vehicle.* <sup>65</sup>

Part of the alchemy, linked with the metaskill of compassion, allows us to notice and pick up unusual, unpredictable and neglected experiences and *'like the medieval alchemist, cook it until its gold or secret is revealed....we discover the spiritual in the mundane.'*

### **Cooking in the Relationship**

As in the process of devotion, 'cooking' in the relationship with your teacher over a long period of time is one of the ways to have all your impurities burnt out of you so that you finally end up being the gold. Traditionally it is said that if you come too close to the teacher you will get burnt, but if you stay too far away you won't feel the heat of the fire. Nothing will get cooked and you will stay the same, with all your habits and patterns, ignorance, judgments and misperceptions. We have to learn how to walk the fine line and stay just at the right closeness and distance to benefit the most from the teacher's presence. A few people have a natural instinct for how to do that, but for some of us, it can be a painful and scorching journey.

*'The warmth of the teacher's wisdom and compassion will melt the ore of our being to release the gold of the Buddha nature within.'* <sup>66</sup>

Everyone is your teacher, so therefore everyone is treated as you treat your teacher.

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* P. 176

<sup>65</sup> Deng Ming Dao. *The Wandering Taoist*. Harper and Row. San Francisco. 1983. P.107

<sup>66</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Harper Collins. 1992

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*No matter what I think, my thoughts are of my teacher,*

*No matter what I see, I see my teacher.*

*No matter what I hear, I hear my teacher.*

*No matter what I feel, I feel my teacher within.*

*No matter whom I touch, I touch my teacher. No  
matter whom I meet, I meet my teacher.*

*No matter what I dream, I dream of my teacher. No  
matter where I am, where I go or where I stay, I am  
with my teacher.*

*Always, everywhere, beyond time and place I  
remember my teacher.*

*May we all have the lama in our heart. 67*

The alchemist believed that the starting point, the process of transformation and the goal are, in fact, the same. It needs nothing outside or extra to be added. This is similar to the recognition that every being has Buddha nature and that what we experience within the process of devotion does not introduce us to anything new. We already are enlightened, but we don't know it and neither do we manifest it. So the teacher does not give us anything that is not already ours. We contain all that is needed inside us to be enlightened. The outer manifestation merely reflects our own inner teacher. What the teacher does is to continuously remind us, by his or her own example, teachings, mirror-like wisdom and blessings, what we can achieve and, more importantly, give us the tools to do that. The Buddha taught that the mind was like a gold nugget. It doesn't seem like much, but if you know what to do with it, it shines.

### **Becoming the Gold**

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The work of transforming base metal into gold, through the alchemical stages, provides a metaphor and a symbolic language for the development within the devotional relationship. Becoming the gold gives a picture of the work that

<sup>67</sup>Sherry Marshall, *Devotion. Following Tibetan Masters*. Simon and Schuster. Sydney. 1999.

needs to be undertaken, with all its dangers, difficulties and rewards. The reconciliation of opposites occurs, duality no longer exists and enlightenment is attained. Yet the paradox is that there is nothing to be attained; as the philosopher's stone, the *prima materia*, was seen by the alchemists as the starting point of the whole process, the agent or means, and the goal.

Though there is nothing to be attained and there is no goal to be reached 'out there'. Ie. embark upon the journey of enlightenment, because even though we are all Buddhas, we do not realise it or manifest it.

*'Alchemy is full of paradoxes - as Jung's work is -since paradoxes are the only way remotely to express the inexpressible, the phenomena of the psyche that can be apprehended only through direct experience .....Jung concluded that the phases of the alchemical procedures, the reconciliation of the conflicting opposites into a unity the stages of the individuation process.. In his dreams as well as those of his patients, he could at times discern a portrayal of the mandala, the symbolism represents the psychological equivalent of unus mundus, while its parapsychological equivalent is Jung's concept of synchronicity'.<sup>68</sup>*

Arnold Mindell takes the alchemical example and translates it into process work terms. He says that the basic material is process, which is signals undergoing change, then focus is put on the signals and cooks or amplifies them to completion, hoping that whatever is happening will turn into gold.

*The alchemist's gold is greater contact with experience of and sometimes even insight into, her own and others' nature. This gold comes in the exact form she needs ....Whatever finally occurs will be a process connecting her to the core of events.*<sup>69</sup>

In the symbolism of alchemy is reflected our inner process.

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<sup>63</sup> P. 37 -39

<sup>69</sup> Arnold Mindell. Working on Yourself Alone. Penguin. England. 1990. P. 17

## Spiritual Warriors

The teachings of all the mystical and psychological paths make it clear that each one of us has enormous potential within us and if we learn how to tap into, or transform our energy we can harness that strength and power, not only for ourselves but for others as well.

The concept of the warrior is used in Buddhism and psychology. It can be seen as a journey, inner and outer, where a person learns how to be genuine and authentic in each moment. It is usually someone who has the armour of compassion and endurance and the courage to face experiences directly while remaining vulnerable and open.

*What a strange combination;*

*Spiritual, being of the spirit, transcended, beyond this material plain,*

*Holy or wholly gone from the concerns of worldly life,*

*Dedication meditation, reflection, contemplation,*

*Wisdom and compassion, giving one's life to God*

*Or serving the higher spirit.*

*Warrior, fierce, strong, fighting until death,*

*Noble, untamed, loyal, giving ones all to the fight.*

*Battling, always alert, ready, aware, never at rest,*

*Skillful manouvering, standing firm yet flexible,*

*Dedication to a calling, a passion, above pain and personality.*

Carlos Casteneda says that a man of knowledge is a warrior;

*to be a warrior was a form of self-discipline which emphasized individual*

*accomplishment; yet it was a stand in which personal interests were reduced to a*

*minimum.....in spite of fear, one had to proceed with the course of one's*

*acts .....also needed to be wide awake .... be self - confident.... he had to have an*

*attitude of deferential respect which was equivalent to having accessed one's*

*insignificant resources when facing the unknown,'*

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Amy Mindell says that the learner who is on the path to becoming a therapist is like the student on a spiritual path, whether they are learning martial arts, meditation, Zen Buddhism or Taoism. The therapist's work can become effortless, similar to the spiritual traditions.

*'When psychology becomes too much work its no longer engaging for you or the client. Zen writers describe this effortless oath as the act of folding neatly along the dragon lines or creases of the heavens, the natural oath requiring no resistance.'*<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Amy Mindell. Metaskills. The Spiritual Art of Therapy. New Falcon, Arizona. 1995. P. 115

*(continued next page)*

## METHODOLOGY

### Method

This paper has two main goals. One is to explore whether the concept of devotion within a Tibetan Buddhist perspective has any relevance within a Process work or therapeutic setting. The second is to examine two interviews given by senior Buddhist students and two interviews given by Process work teachers and to collate themes, similarities and differences in the two approaches and testing my original hypotheses. I am also interested in looking at the possibilities of integrating the two modalities, so they can complement and work together as I feel both have much to offer in facilitating people's awareness and growth.

I have also been engaged personally in the process of integrating both within myself over a number of years. I have also observed that I am only really interested in studying and learning about something, if I feel passionate and devoted towards it. Therefore this paper on devotion is congruent with the topic and method that I chose to conduct the investigation.

The research methodology used was qualitative and involved interviewing people and story telling. This was for a variety of reasons. I decided to interview people who were not identified themselves or by others formally with being enlightened. This was because there are very few accounts of ordinary people telling directly their own spiritual experiences and journey's. I decided on interviewing because traditionally, Buddhist teachings are passed through an oral tradition, 'from ear to ear'. Therefore it was important that the stories were told from one person to another, rather than more impersonally through a questionnaire or survey. It is also a way that indigenous cultures pass on their life knowledge and tribal customs. It is interesting to note that part of the formal training that students have undergone for many centuries within Tibet has been to commit long texts and teachings to memory. This has ensured the survival of this ancient tradition, as most of the written texts were destroyed by the Chinese since their

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invasion of Tibet in 1959. The teachers themselves who escaped, are like 'walking books'. They have the knowledge, the knowing and the experience embodied within them.

In 'Interviews' by Steinar Kuale, it is stated that there are many different ways of interviewing which require different approaches. Some interviews vary according to content, seeking facts or opinions or narratives or life histories.

*'The interviewees can also be regarded as informants for recording oral history.'*<sup>71</sup>

There are seven steps suggested for an interview investigation;

1. Thematising, which involves deciding the purpose of the study and the concept of the topic, before the interviews are conducted.
2. Designing, which involves planning the design of the study before interviews start, with the intention of obtaining certain knowledge and also addressing any ethical issues.
3. Interviewing, including a reflective approach to the information sought and paying attention to the interpersonal relationship of the interview.
4. Transcribing, which involves preparing the interview for analysis and transcribing from oral speech to written text.
5. Analyzing, deciding based on the purpose and topic, which methods are appropriate.
6. Verifying, which looks at the reliability, consistency and validity of the study.
- 7 Reporting, which means communicating the findings of the study resulting in a readable form.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Interviews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research. Steinar Kuale. Sage Publications. London 1996. P101

<sup>72</sup> Paraphrased from Interviews. Ibid P. 88

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Jytte Vikkelsoe in her research thesis, 'Beyond Guilt and Innocence: Towards a Process Oriented Criminology,' states that a

*`a qualitatively oriented heuristic study seeks to discover the nature and meaning of a phenomenon and to illuminate it from first person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon in experience.* <sup>73</sup> There are five characteristics to a heuristic research question that include: revealing the essence or meaning of a event of human experience, discovering qualitative rather than quantitative measurements, a personal involvement and active participation in the process, not predicting or determining casual relationships and being illuminated by creativity in the forms of stories, poetry, drawings etc. Both Buddhism and Process work inquire into the meaning of human existence and use qualitative, creative and often spontaneous approaches.

Interviewing also corresponds with how therapist and client sit together and talk. My training as a therapist has hopefully honed my skills of asking relevant and key questions, listening and hearing and sometimes anticipating where the person wants to go and creating a safe and empathic atmosphere so that a person feels comfortable to open and reveal what they wish to, including difficult and painful stories as well as joyful and successful ones.

### **Data Collection**

I did initially have a set of questions which each interviewee was asked but soon found myself, as in a therapy session, actually following what the person was saying.

### **Questions**

What seemed to work really well is people telling their personal stories of how they met their teacher, their experiences along the path, their expectations and disappointments etc and what has really inspired them and their devotion.

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<sup>73</sup> Beyond Guilt and Innocence. Jytte Vikkelsoe Portland 1997. P.84

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These questions were just a guideline to bring out their story.

1. Some background information - family, job prior to Buddhism /Process work.
2. How and when did you first come into contact with your teacher/Process work What actually happened. Please be as personal as possible. What did you think, why did you continue, what 'hooked' you etc.
3. Please talk about your path over the years, giving as many examples as possible ie. telling your 'story' of your spiritual path. What has been difficult and easy for you; what has really inspired you; have you nearly 'given up' and what kept you going etc.
4. Please talk about your relationship with your teacher and how you understand the teacher / student relationship
5. Please talk about your understanding of devotion, what did you understand devotion was, at the beginning and how has that changed or deepened over the years.
6. Please clarify some of the misunderstanding Westerners have about devotion in terms of eg, surrender, sexuality, power etc.
7. Give examples of any teachings that have really inspired you, or meetings with teachers and what they have said to you.
9. What are some of the challenges being faced by yourself on the path in this time and age?

The questions asked corresponded more to the primary process of having an idea of what people could talk about. However, in sitting and talking with people, it became clear that the most fascinating material was actually in the more 'far-away' states, what was not so in awareness. By following where people wanted to go rather than just the list of questions, we entered into many unknown and unfamiliar places.

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This was clearly demonstrated with one of the students talking about thinking on railway tracks, having certain ideas, expectations and concepts, However, he says he learnt how to think more laterally, being open to what was happening from all directions all the time and having several different attitudes to a situation, simultaneously. I think about this rather like having ideas or a hypothesis about a client but then being open and fluid, following signals etc, moving with what is meant to unfold by following, rather than going in a particular direction even if the signals don't go along with that.

My interview with this student changed dramatically close to the end when I asked him about what he would like to call his chapter. Something totally new emerged from what we had been talking about. He quoted an old Zen saying, that his experience has been one continuous mistake. I realised that if I had not been so fixed on my concepts about what I wanted to hear from him, the interview would have been very different. Subsequently I was much more free in allowing the story to go where it needed to.

Of course this meant that there were different choices about what to follow and what to ignore or pay not so much attention to. I decided in different ways. Sometimes as in a session, when a client presents a lot of material, I would ask the person what they themselves would want to explore more of. I would watch their signals and try to decide what was primary and secondary for the person. Often the topics or memories that they seemed to have more difficulty in articulating was where I would encourage them to expand upon. Sometimes I would followed my intuition, what really interested me or the stories that I really wanted to hear. This was because I thought that my interest must mirror an interest in the readers, or the world channel. Sometimes the person just talked about certain themes that really interested them, like Christine and death and dying and another student with magic and illusion.

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## Story Telling as a Method

I was also interested in the methodology of personal story telling. Again, traditionally the Buddhist teachings use this method. Tales are often told from long ago of when great masters were students and their journeys and experiences of becoming masters. These stories serve to inspire us and help us realise that teachers were once students like us. Often what we do as therapists is listen to people's stories. We journey together to unfold where the story has come from, how it manifests in the present, what belief systems and judgements and opinions we hold, and what life choices follow from these. Stories deepen and help us to make sense of our experiences.

Stories in general are one of the ways that we make meaning out of what happens to us. Stories that are in our minds or stories that are told to us about our family, community or country give us a context about who we are, where we are and where we are going. Myth and traditions are often bound up with storytelling. It is a form of transmission that passes down through the generations. We not only love being told stories as children but, as we grow, we read and hear stories all the time. It is a simple, direct and spellbinding way of learning about different places, people and times. Stories are told over and over, and there are always old and new stories to be told, or the same story told in a new way.

We constantly create our reality by telling our stories over time so that we and our world are revisited and revised. Everyone has a story to tell. It may move us to tears or make us laugh, deeply inspire us, remind us of our own heritage, heal us, spark a half-forgotten memory, help us recognise our interconnectedness, show us wisdom, tell us about different places and times, and help us relate to one another. Stories reveal our varied lives in all different shapes and colours, textures and flavours.

Taking time to stop and listen to our own and others' stories reconnects us to the reality of our lives, to the truth of our innermost being and to our heart

essence. They remind us what is really important in life and cut through all the superficiality and falsity. Every story needs to be told, even if it is only half-finished or there are only glimpses or fragments. Our stories are always in process and are always changing and are not even completed when we die. They continue in some form or other, spoken by those who knew us, and sometimes by those who didn't.

They are not fixed states, but fluid and moving like our lives. We think that things are permanent, or try to make them stable and secure, but our lives, like our stories, are impermanent. As the story is told over and over, the overall themes and elements may stay the same but, depending on the teller and the listeners, and the particular circumstances in which the story is told, it will have different atmospheres and meanings for people. The most secret and sacred stories were always told and heard rather than written down and read, and were passed from 'ear to ear'. Tibetan traditional tales are often funny or confronting, and always make a point.

### **Analysis of the Data**

There are a possible six steps suggested by Steinar Kuale for analysing data;

1. The interviewees describe and relate their personal experiences in relation to the subject they are being interviewed about and talk about what they experience, feel and do.
2. The interviewees discover new meanings in what they experience and do.
3. The interviewer interprets the meaning and feeds it back to the interviewee, who then has the opportunity to clarify. There is ongoing dialogue until there is only one meaning or agreement of multiple understandings. This is an 'on the spot' confirmation or otherwise of the interviewers interpretation.
4. The transcribed interview is interpreted by the interviewer. This involves

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structuring the material, clarifying by editing non-essential and repetitious material and analysing the meaning.

5. Re-interviewing by returning the interview to the interviewee.
6. Action, in which subjects begin to act from new insights gained during the interview.

*The research interview may in such cases approximate a therapeutic interview.* <sup>74</sup>

In analysing the data, looking at similar themes and the relevance devotion may have to Process work, I have used most of these stages suggested. I have also included some conversations that I had with Process work and Buddhist senior students.

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<sup>74</sup> Interviews. P. 190

## INTERVIEW 1.

### **Julie Diamond**

Nothing initially drew me to Process work because it didn't exist! However I could say that I was dragged to Zurich as Dawn and Adam had been there and Dawn said, " come to Zurich and study and meet this guy, Arny Mindell.' I didn't really have any interest in psychology, though I was interested in dreams and inner work, but I didn't have a vision of wanting to study with Arny or drawn to be a therapist. It was really a coincidence. I was in college studying education and literature to be a teacher. So I went to Zurich for 3 months and stayed for 10 years.

#### The Ground Floor

I stayed because I adored Arny and the work and it was all very exciting. Something was happening at that time and it was like a spirit of the times. Arny was just beginning to experiment with doing weird things in his Jungian practice. He was still teaching at the Jungian institute and most of his students were Jungian students. He opened it up to other people also and some people started to be interested in studying and not just being clients. It was an unbelievable time when things were growing and developing and it was like getting in on the ground floor of a magical mystery tour. I couldn't leave that. It was really special and fun and an era of discovery. It wasn't institutionalised and didn't have a name or a structure. It was precious.

I had a lot of resistance in the beginning against therapy because I was convinced that it was going to try to make me different. I thought therapy was going to tell me that I had to be more soft and feeling and more in touch with my feelings! I was a tense young person and from my other experiences from personal growth, I thought I was going to be told to be soft and relaxed! However

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the first thing Arny said to me, was that I needed to be smarter and more intelligent. I was really afraid that my intellect was going to be put down. The experiential therapies are like a counter-cultural flip where you are supposed to be in your body and not in your head. Arny even recently commented when someone said, 'Oh I'm in my head now,' that isn't our head part of our body. So, from the very beginning, I adored him for that, for embracing the very thing in me that I was sure wouldn't be embraced. Initially though, I felt more intimidated and shy and didn't have a more personal relationship with him until a number of years later.

He was so wild and radical and an unusual figure as a man and an authority figure. He so represented the non-rational and irrational in life. I have a very rational father and an internalised one as well and to be able to learn from someone who was irrational was great. He was so in the dreaming world and I think that hooked me more than anything. As I'm answering the question about what I adored about Arnie, I'm aware that I'm answering it without really knowing the answer to the question! I feel it's a very deep question and I'll know more in another 40 years time.

### **Devotion to the Dreaming**

I'm not really identified with devotion either in my relationship to Arny or my relationship to Process work. The word devotion doesn't have a lot of currency and it's very controversial to some people. The West has such criticisms towards the concept of devotion and it's misunderstood. However what drew me to Process work was not that, 'oh, I'm devoted to process work', but of course, I am. It's an unexplored thing. But, what keeps me here, and I've been here for 20 years is probably that I can leave any time. Every minute it's my decision and there has never, ever been a sense that devotion is necessary. That's why it's so controversial to talk about because in some of the Eastern religions, there is a theory of devotion. That is an aspect of the teaching.

This is not the case in Process work, because the devotion is to the dreaming process and that is utterly individual. So that's where devotion does come in; devotion to your dreams and following the irrational. That's the only element that I can think of, where I would say, devote yourself to that. There is nothing in Process work though, that say's, devote yourself to the teachers or to Arny or to the training programme. It is all utterly dependent on your dreams and you may want to enter the training programme but there is no guarantee that you will graduate or that it will be right for you. Your dreams will want you to stay in it.

Arny does ultimately embody following the dreaming process but your individual dreaming may lead you to Mongolia and following that would mean you were devoted to Arnie. For example, if my dreams told me to do something, somewhere else, I would have to follow that and that would make me closer to Arny, even if geographically I wasn't. I remember a story about that. Once, in my therapy, I went through a phase of transference and wanting to be closer and have more contact with Arny. I mentioned to him, in passing, that I had been in the mountains that weekend. Arny asked where I had been and he said that he had been there on the same day. He said, 'see, we are close. We have a spiritual connection, so we are spending more time together.' Of course, the little ego wasn't satisfied. I was like, 'alright, fine, but.' but that story said something to me.

When I first arrived in Zurich, Max was one of the first people I met and I remember we took an immediate liking to each other. I was really amazed by that, because I was young and didn't know who I was or that I had anything particularly intelligent to say. Max has always been a very important teacher for me. When other people apart from Arny started to run classes, which only happened in the mid-80's, Max was doing classes in German. I've always loved Max's combination of being radical, mischievous, brilliant and incredibly non-linear and really heartfelt. He's one of the most unique people I've ever met and a hugely important teacher for me. I adore him. Our relationship has

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changed so much over the years and we have also had big fights. One of the things I love about him now is that he is in a tradition that I feel very aligned with. He's very political and related to the world and so am I.

Max is an incredible student of history and political theory which are big passions of mine too. He adds to Process work this incredible passion about the world. He makes it more real. He's like a Renaissance man.

### **What is Therapy?**

I think it's pretty amazing that I have been seeing the same therapist for 20 years. Of course, there are different ideas about what therapy is. Some people go because they have something they need help with, and that's great. Other therapies are not so much to solve a problem, but for continual deepening of understanding of who you are and why you're here. It's more like a spiritual journey. I see phases in therapy. Initially, typically people go to therapy to work out problems and then, if they get interested, it's no longer about a problem that's troubling you, but more about your attitudes. Then you start to realise that there are always going to be things that can trouble you, but it's the you that gets troubled. You then become more the focus of the therapy, rather than the problems.

In that stage of therapy, you begin to work deeply with your inner metaskills, or what I call the wall paper of your inner house. When you open your eyes in the morning, what kind of mood is present? Who are you and how do you view things? When you get there, then it becomes very spiritual, necessarily so, because you are starting to work with deeply held approaches to life and death.

### **Process Enlightenment**

I would see enlightenment in process work more as a verb than as a noun, and see it more as 'enlightening,' a process rather than as a state. I think one of

the problems in talking about enlightenment is that the debate is centred around the state of attainment. Maybe that's because I'm so far from it, that I think it should be a verb! Maybe in cultures where you see more states of utter attainment, you are more comfortable with it being a noun.

In Process work, the sense of enlightenment is more the process aspect of it, rather than the state. It's dropping yourself and seeing every role as you, as much as possible. You are not caught up in struggling and straining against things happening, because you see what is happening is you. You go along with what is happening and that totally changes everything. It changes even your physical body, because so much of who we are is wrapped up with struggling against experiences. It's a physiological experience. Once you drop that and change that, you're no-one and everybody at the same time. You drop yourself and then you become everything around you as well and I think that's enlightenment. It's very similar.

As Process work really develops, and refines its methods and theories, it becomes similar to Buddhism. It's uncanny. I think about how group work has changed Process work tremendously, in understanding picking up all the roles and seeing it as an inner process. Picking up all the roles is what the Buddhist's say, not getting caught up in any one thing, not getting stuck in an identity, not getting stuck in your little ego. Seeing everything as a dream that you are part of. That's very much an attitude of Buddhism and also Process work.

For example, there has recently been a dialogue about teaching, about who wants to teach and who can etc. Then a teacher said, 'well I taught a class and only 2 people came. I got really insulted and thought, what's wrong with these students! They're not interested and I then realised that it's me who isn't interested in my teaching. That's me. There are no students on the outside not interested in my teaching. It's me and I should pick that up and I should drop teaching because I'm not interested in it. I'm not attending my own classes.'

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### The Tao of the Edge

On the other hand, in following your dreaming process and how it manifests, if you're attached and obsessed and you can't drop something, then you follow that. The edge is interesting because there is also a Tao to the edge. I remember a story about that. Years ago Arny used to run Sunday night classes, and one was about the basic elements of psychology. We were sitting at a long director's conference style table and someone asked Arny why there were edges. This person was sitting right opposite Arny across the table. Arny said, 'well, if I didn't have an edge, I could just reach out and shake your hand. If I have an edge however, I can't do that and in order to get to you, I have to go around the table the long way. In so doing, I meet him and her and him and her, and I stop to meet all these 25 people on the road to getting to know you. That's the Tao of the edge.

The whole journey has all been ecstatic and difficult, every minute. In the beginning I talked about that sense of utter excitement around discovery and research and learning together. Everything was an experiment and we would do unbelievable things which we might not do now! The culture, climate and whole profession is so different now, around boundaries and therapy. These days, people go to seminars and work in the middle can be quite brief. I remember in the 80's, we would spend a whole morning working with one person. It was partly because maybe we didn't know what we were doing and the concept of the edge wasn't so sharp, so it cycled more. I think actually though, part of the reason it went so long was because it was a trip! It was wild and pure raw discovery. We'd stay up late at night brainstorming. That was the ecstasy of research and discovery and was some of the highpoints of my time in Process work.

However, it was also difficult, initially, in Zurich. We were young people and no-one would talk to us. There was Amy and Adam and Dawn, Jan came later. There was a group of people studying with Arnie in their 30's and 40's and we were 21 and they were not that friendly to us! We were

intimidated, being immigrants and couldn't speak the language and had no money. There was no structure even to support us, no classes, no centre and no place to go. You had one hour a week in therapy and a class on Sunday night. There was a seminar 2- 3times a year, so there was nothing to do but work on yourself. In fact, in retrospect it was fantastic, but really painful at the time.

The other difficulty for me is that we've changed so much and now we're a school and an institution and that has its own challenges. It's a contemporary change with the development of group work and worldwork. We're also developing our persona in the world and our structures simultaneously and that has been challenging applying it to ourselves and to the world. It's been exhilarating but also painfully difficult.

I have taken a leadership role within the political structures of Process work and that has been hard. I have organised Intensives and courses from the early eighties and was also involved with setting up a business structure. of process work with others, like Max, Jean-Claude and Arlene. Then Joe and I and others helped transform the training programme into the Master's programme and got it through the State and Immigration. I was also the academic director of the programme and the first Portland centre administrator.

The challenges for me around all that has been working with consensus and other people, especially at the centre. I felt a lot of times like the lonely voice in the wilderness and didn't have the people skills or the ability to work with a group. I found myself trying to batter people into making a change or trying to make them understand what I wanted to do. That was really hard for me and felt frustrating and painful because it was also with my closest companions. Now, in retrospect, I see that there was a huge change going on and I was going through a process of learning how to work with groups and develop detachment and take things less personally. That was a hard period.

## **Mentorship**

The whole thing about devotion is that it's connected to the word teacher. That is one of the reasons I think it's controversial, because Process work is now a formalised structure with teachers and students and it brings problems of rank, autonomy and independence and power abuse. Our style of the training programme now has a very strong mentorship component. You choose the people you want to study with and can more or less, study what you want. I could say that we allow room for devotion in the programme in the form of mentorship.

Mentorship is actually a very spiritual idea. You choose a mentor and it's a very direct and personal relationship that you have with a teacher around who you are and what you are doing in the world. You can give a lot of power to the mentor to train you. What makes it controversial is the interface between deeper feelings and the world in which we live. The world in which we live doesn't really believe in mentorship. We have to have a school which is accredited. We can't say that we require people to be devoted or you follow who you're devoted to. It's not a popular concept in mainstream American and most Western cultures. It's not to say that devotion is not a strong aspect of Process work, but we talk about it differently.

When you ask someone to be your teacher, or to be their student, you are asking them to engage very deeply over who you are. That means that you open up to potentially painful and complex experiences. You are asking the teacher to come forth with their perceptions and awareness, understanding that they have rank which comes with that perception, so it can be experienced with great force. These are huge, deep spiritual components of the teaching and learning of Process work, without calling it devotion.

## **Reality and Rank**

One of the problems is that people get identified with the rank that they have on a social dimension only. I feel this is what can make people begin to be abusive with their rank, because they confuse reality with material reality. They think that reality is the reality of the social structure, where I'm older than you, or a man, or I have more money than you or a better education. However, if you are really devoted to dreaming, you understand that is not THE reality. It is one reality

but there are multiple realities. I may have more social rank by being a teacher, but on a spiritual level, you may be my teacher. That is where I

*(continued next page)*

think roles flip. Someone might have more balance or depth or detachment, charisma or popularity than a teacher. A teacher may be jealous of those elements of rank and use their social rank as protection against the jealousy that they feel about the other dimensions of rank.

Devotion to the dreaming path is what connects us all in Process work. Following the sense of the unknown, and following that which we perceive as the other. It gives us a sense of largeness. We relate to everything in the universe. That sense of alienation and opposition to other things diminishes and yet we can still fully engage. It may be right for me to be firm and fixed with who I am, or a social activist and campaign for something very strongly, that is also following your dreaming path. It's only problematic when your soul is not aligned with what you're doing. That's simple; that's an element of suffering. When you are in alignment, you have a sense of creativity and happiness, even when what you are engaged in, is difficult. You also feel that this is really right for me to be here or this is important. You have a larger view of things, so you don't feel the additional difficulty of lack of energy or congruence with the project you are involved in.

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## **INTERVIEW 2**

### **Jytte Vikkelsoe**

In 1989, I attended a conference at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland titled "Psyche and Soul.' I was looking for cutting edge psycho-therapies that could combine my spiritual practice with psychology. On the list of presenters was Max Schupbach presenting Process Oriented Psychology. I was very intrigued and touched by who he was as a person. I was impressed by his way of relating to life, people and situations. There was an openness and sense of freedom about life that moved me deeply. We went out for tea together, and within moments I felt like I had known him all my life. Our interaction seemed so easy and meaningful.

Life through his eyes made sense in a way I somehow felt I always had been looking for. He put a lightness into life with an attitude that life is not all that serious. Life is something you can step into and there are all kinds of options and possibilities and it has to be mixed with a good dose of humor. There was a metaskill around his attitude to life that made it seem like a wide open space.

We fell in love and I moved from Denmark to Zurich and later we moved to the States. The life we shared was like a 24 hour training in Process work, because he is living process work. So I began to learn to see life from a Process work perspective, meaning I was not only travelling with him from one seminar to another, our life was process work with a great emphasis on living what you are teaching. It was a tremendous thing for me to learn to perceive life from that paradigm, learn to do my inner work according to that paradigm. Learning that there is no separation between 'you and other', the idea being that whatever disturbs you out there – freedom ultimately comes through your ability to take this in and deal with it as a mirror of you. Your ability to do this ultimately allows life to become a process of

constant change, flow and curiosity.

### **Internal and External**

I remember that in the beginning, the concept of you and other was a big realisation for me to learn. Initially everything out there was external to me and it took a while to learn that actually, everything out there is a psychological reality that happens in you. Everything is seen through the filter that is you. I was not used to think that way and it far from always an easy thing to identify things that I didn't like in others, as also part of myself. In certain situations I was pretty convinced that what was out there was out there and didn't have much to do with me! It was easier to think that if I didn't like somebody, it was because that person wasn't likable! It wasn't because I was seeing myself out there. it wasn't connected to me. They were them and I was I. I still forget that in between those moments steals the sense of freedom in life.

Max really taught me that every perception is also a psychological perception. And once you truly open up to that life becomes pretty amazing and it actually becomes fun and makes life much more interesting. Today I really believe that everything I see, is perceived through my mind and my experience and therefore a mirror of who I am.

My dream line to Process work happened very much through my relationship with Max. He was and is my mentor and spiritual teacher, and partner. His embodiment of Process work was the greatest teaching of process work. His spirit and the way he relates to life has always been such an inspiration to me and gave me the courage to follow the same yearning and path within myself. He has such freedom in life and the world and the courage to live himself in the world. He has a great love for people and also has an ability to have a good time and play and this has been a tremendous encouragement and inspiration for me to experience for me. He gave me the courage to go into areas that I would not have gone into alone and inspired me to try out a lot of things that I was scared of. He was always living it and

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demonstrating that life is what you make of it and following your heart.

### Atmosphere and Dreams

One of the great things I learned was that the atmosphere that everything is happening in is much more important than the outcome. The moment has to be right and feel right and the practical solutions will automatically follow. I'm aware that I am talking about Max and how he changed my life, and that he was also my entry into Process work. He believed in me till I had the capacity to believe in myself. Through him, I received the courage to do what I did and am doing today. I didn't believe much in myself or thought I had the capacity to do what I have done. His attitude that everything is possible, led me to do my exams and eventually my PHD. Going through all these studies was a big thing for me. I used to be terrified of exams, coming from that European background where there is only one answer to everything and that is the right answer! The Phase 1 exams were a big deal for me and I did really well and it was a tremendous breakthrough for me. I learned that anything could be done if only you gave it the time and work it needed.

### The Garbage and the Gold

So I entered Process Work through Max and his love and support. I also remember reading Arnie's books and being so touched about the paradigm and its view on people. I came from a spiritual paradigm and I remember thinking, 'This is really what the best of Christianity intended to do!' in the sense of loving and accepting people where they are at. There is such a respect and understanding that wherever people are, and whatever is happening is meaningful and deeply useful. The idea that there is something meaningful behind everything, no matter how disturbing or troublesome it looks, is right and has to be supported. It's not

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that Process work just loves people and reflects back to them, but there is a deep seated belief that in the garbage is the gold.

The love for the impossible and the ability to make something useful out of what looks most outrageous is so amazing to me. Makes life magical. The concept also of the edge, I do think is really useful and new in psychology, as well as it gives you a more detached relationship to what is happening in the moment, I think. It's an amazing tool to relate to what looks impossible, in a new way. It helps so much with things you think you can have no relationship to, at all. Somehow those situations become possible through this paradigm. In conflicts, for example, realising that if someone accuses you of something, there has to be at least 5% truth in the accusation. I remember all my past conflicts made sense in a new way. When I learned that, I could suddenly understand why there had been no resolution possible.

Even before I met Arny, I dreamt that I was having sessions with him and I dreamt that I came to a big mansion. As I walked through the entrance there was another door right opposite. I knocked on the door and Arny opened and said, 'welcome into the most holy of all places.' I walked into his study and all the walls were covered with books. In the middle was a big old fashioned globe of the world and around that were all these alchemical and astrological and mystical symbols flying and soaring in the air.

At that point I didn't really understand the depth of that dream. Later I realized the depths of it, especially when I crossed my edge and began the doctoral study. I discovered that I love research and thinking and theory and I have a real passion for going to the core of a problem. I won't stop until I am at the depths of an issue and really understand it, all the way through. Today I realise it was no accident that the walls of the study were lined with books.

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## Following the Dreaming

Process work, devotion would be seen as your relationship to your own dreaming. That's the most sacred of all things for a process worker. Following your own dreaming comes before anything else. It is all you have in the end Your dreamline to various things is what needs to be supported, more than anything else. Process Work sees dreaming as everything that is outside of your control, everything that is happening to you. It's not all the things that you easily identify with, but a deeper layer of reality beyond consensus reality, your secondary process. For a process worker, that's where your devotion goes. How closely can you connect to your dreaming and to your process and to the Tao of the moment? How well can you open up to the moment you are in and embrace it and dance with it and allow it to become whatever it wants to become?

Awareness is the only fixed point in the universe, in the sense of the only thing you have is your awareness. There is nothing else than the awareness in the moment and how well you can track yourself and be awake about all the different processes that are happening in you in the moment, as they transform. How open you are to the different emerging parts is all a matter of awareness. It's only awareness that will keep you close to your dreaming process. In a sense, awareness is the goal. It's important to be open to primary and secondary processes, yet it is the awareness that will get you close to your dreaming. It's your relationship to the moment which will help you with awareness in how open and well you can embrace the moment.

Spirituality to me, in Process work, is to have the bigness of heart to be open to all parts and supporting what is weakest in the moment, what is marginalised and unrepresented. Once you have experienced how it is to be understood or met in your process, it's a really dreadful thing to live without. It's such a unique experience. Unfortunately it is not yet a widely spread idea in the world. The idea of being open to all parts, be it in an individual or a group allows people to be understood in their deepest yearning regardless of where they are coming from. The experience of not being seen only as a static state, but

understood as an ever changing process - following what is trying to emerge in yourself - is very special.

There's no frozen idea about who you should be, what should happen and where you should go in your life. One of the finest things of process work is that it will truly support you, in where you need to go.

### Truly Open

Together with Max I have been in many very tough situations working with *group* processes and social tension. However, the paradigm has proved over and over again, that if you can be truly open to the moment and accept and support what is emerging, no matter how impossible it looks, it will transform. That has blown me away again and again. In the beginning, I would get very tense and scared as difficult situations arose, but over time, I learned to believe in the impossible that even this impossible situation would transform as well if enough awareness could be allowed into the situation. It is all about awareness – the more awareness present - the more it allows to let go of a need to control situations that seem scary and impossible – it becomes a spiritual process and an awareness meditation. I still get very tense and polarized in between – more and more, though, I remember process work and awareness in the middle of turbulence, relax and believe in the wisdom of it all – open up to what wants to happen and should not be changed but can transform through an awareness process

In psychology, the idea is that everything you experience is a psychological reality. It gives you the tools to open up to the disavowed - to transform your everyday life by becoming more of what you think is only "out there" – but really is disavowed in yourself. By opening up, by taking in the things that you think you are not, you become bigger and bigger – more and more of you – and it allows you to feel more connected to the whole. By recognizing the "other" in you – the one you dislike "out there" – by becoming the "other" through a psychological process, you discover not only that you are everything

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"out there" but everything then eventually IS you – you are IT and it will lead you to enlightenment.

So psychology teaches you to open up and encompass everything as you –whereas the spiritual paradigm sort of starts out with the idea that we are the whole - but we don't realize that, so the task is to track backwards!

In psychological terms, as long as there is something out there that is 'not you,' you will resist this "not you" because you are so 'full' of what you should be, and you feel you have to defend yourself. However, as you take in all these "not you" parts, you actually become more and more empty – because you become more detached about who you should be. When there is no 'me and other' you can be open to everything – you have become empty.

### INTERVIEW 3.

#### **Ross Mackay**

I met Sogyal Rinpoche in January 1981 at a house in Princess Road in Kilburn when I was working in a dental practice in London. I can't really say it was a preordained meeting or fate. I was already very interested in Buddhism. One of the reasons I had left Australia for Britain was to explore Buddhism. A lot of the books I had read had been published by the London Buddhist Society in Eccleston Square. So when I got to London I looked up the Society and started to go to meetings there on Saturday afternoons for group discussions and a little meditation.

Though there were some people at the Society who were quite interested in Tibetan Buddhism, I was more interested in Zen Buddhism and had read a massive amount about it and been to a monastery in Malaysia in 1980. I quite liked the very plain and distinct style of Zen. Its clarity appealed to me. There was sitting, there was calm and there were these beautiful instructions on the understanding of the nature of mind. When I was seventeen and still at school, I had read a book called *Buddhist Scriptures*, writings of different traditions and masters of meditation, including a particular Zen master whose words really touched my heart. So I suppose it was that book that started me. It was shorn of all religiosity, if I can call it that. Initially, one of the things that I didn't like about Tibetan Buddhism was all these gods and deities and teachers. At the time I thought, 'It's not for me.' In fact, I can actually remember having a very vivid dream about Tibetan Buddhism. It was almost prophetic in a way. I went to Tibet (in my dream) and saw that all these religious things had fallen apart.

Anyway, I liked Zen Buddhism very strongly. I used to read all the Suzuki books - *Essays in Zen Buddhism* and *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Zen is very straightforward and quite disciplined. It seemed to have a real heart. The heart wasn't actually in the writings but the feeling of the writings. So I had quite a strong heart connection with it. Then I met two Zen missionaries in Sydney in

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1974. They used to talk about Buddhism and the understanding of mind from a Zen point of view. So very clear, very strong and without any flowery extras. Through their kindness and their teaching and a little bit of meditation, I started off.

I came into Buddhism not through any pain, suffering, loss or grief, not anything obvious like the loss of a relative or abuse in childhood or difficult periods. I came from a very good home, a very easy life actually. It just sort of all made-sense to me on a very deep level. I can even remember being involved with a Gurdjieff group for a while. They said to me, 'Well, you need to make up your mind rather quickly whether you are going to become a Gurdjieff person or a Buddhist person.' To me there was not even a question. I said, 'Well, if that's the case then I think I should resign from this group and become a Buddhist person.' So it's always been within me. If I look back, I see there is a very strong karmic connection to it. In lay terms, karmic connection would mean, very simply, that I have had some connection with the Buddhist teachings in a previous life. In this life it accumulated very quickly by reading the writings of great teachers and masters.

### **Discovering Tibetan Buddhism**

The group in London talked to me about Tibetan Buddhism and gave me some books to read. It appealed to me because they were particularly interested in approaching the spiritual path by themselves but, not really understanding it myself, I thought I might need a group to help me. So I looked up the societies affiliated with the London Buddhist Society and under 'T' for Tibetan. The closest one to where I lived happened to be Sogyal Rinpoche's group. I didn't know it was Sogyal Rinpoche's group as it was called Dzogchen Orgyen Choling at the time. When I visited for the first time, Patrick Gaffney, Rinpoche's closest student, opened the door. In my brash young Australian way at the time, I said that I was interested in Tibetan Buddhism and that I hoped this was the Tibetan Buddhist place and asked what they did.

Patrick cordially invited me in, showed me a few pamphlets and brochures

and said that there were meetings happening and I was welcome to attend. So I went along to one or two practices and a few weeks later Rinpoche was coming to teach on the Nine Yanas, which are the way the Tibetan Buddhist religion sees the whole Buddhist path. They encompass all the different aspects of Hinayana Buddhism, like Theravada Buddhism, which is in Thailand and Burma. They encompass Zen Buddhist ideas, Chinese Buddhist ideas and the ancient Indian and Tibetan teachings. All the Buddhist schools are encompassed in the Nine -Yanas.

### **Making the heart connection**

I can still remember going armed with pen and paper to listen to Sogyal Rinpoche, and taking copious notes. I think there were probably forty of us in the front room. Rinpoche taught all weekend and it really solidified my understanding of Buddhism and everything started to make a bit more sense. I don't remember much of what I thought about Rinpoche but I do remember being very grateful that I had gone. It really helped me to understand. Then at the end of it all everyone had an interview. We went upstairs to meet him and I remember being a little bit shy. I didn't think I had a lot to say to him and I thought, 'No, no I won't go up,' but the older students insisted and I really did have numerous questions to ask him. Having read much about meditation and about signs and colours and light, my mind was really all jumbled up and my understanding had no basis in reality or any great teaching. I introduced myself to Rinpoche and said, 'Well, I do have some questions. I've got to the point in my meditation practice where this colour and light comes ... ' Rinpoche was very, very kind to listen to me. Now, in retrospect, I was obviously way off the track.

He just replied 'That's all fine. It's very good, it's fine. Just settle first in your meditation,' which is what he always says to people, even now. 'Really settle, just practice, let your mind settle.' Up to that point absolutely nothing was special, but somehow it was fantastic to be there.

He came up to me just as I was going. We stood up and I thanked him and was about to go. He just touched me on the arm, just between the shoulder and elbow, and squeezed me there, saying, 'Ross, I think you belong here.' From that

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time on I have never had a doubt. Something connected me very, very closely with him at that time. I still feel his hand touching my arm. That was a really strong heart connection. That was created there on that day. From then on I have stayed, through thick and thin.

It was in fact, the very ordinariness of the situation that made it very profound. Anyone could have said that to me. The feeling, though, that was transmitted through the words and through touching me was something that I had never really experienced before. The feeling was more a knowing. It's a deep instinctive knowing that was there like an incredible confidence. There was no doubt. It was just amazing because there was no particular reason to have felt like that. I didn't feel particularly awe-inspired by Rinpoche. I mean, I was grateful to him for doing a lovely weekend's talk, but I had certainly been to hear a lot of other people talk also. It was that ordinariness of the situation, of the touch and the words, the very deep profound confidence in that feeling, that was absolutely correct at that time. It didn't bring a big passion, a big emotion, a big feeling.

The development of devotion for me has actually been fantastic and has been over a period of episodes. It has always generally moved upwards, with peaks in the devotion, such as meeting great masters such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Devotion is my connection to the Dharma. Devotion is a heart connection, which develops from a very close understanding and relationship with your teacher. I think, initially, part of devotion is feeling thankful for the wisdom to help tie together all the thoughts and threads. The other part is very much the heart connection, that profound knowledge of confidence that came when he touched me.

### Meeting the Masters

We older students were so lucky to have been exposed to teachers such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Holiness Karmapa, Dudjom Rinpoche and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche through Sogyal Rinpoche. I think devotion towards my teacher became even stronger because of who he introduced me to. He not only exposed me to himself but he wanted his students to meet the really great masters of that time.

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Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche came to London in 1982. He was quite a profound leader. He lived in Tibet, spent most of his life as a monk and then was recognised as an incarnation, a great master who has continued through many existences. He spent many years in solitary retreat. He was one of the few masters who got out of Tibet when China took over the country and it was due to his profound knowledge, love and wisdom that a lot of the Dharma survived and has come to the West. There are so many great younger teachers now for whom he was their focus and inspiration.

In 1982 he came along to the Rigpa Centre and did all these initiations. We had no idea what was going on. We all had an interview with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse. I remember Sogyal Rinpoche coming around and saying, 'Now look, really, please ask sensible questions and for God's sake don't ask questions about your relationship, your love life and the opposite sex.' Now that was fine. I didn't want to ask any of those questions. I walked into the interview and there was the translator, who was also a teacher, on my right and there was Dilgo Khyentse almost straight ahead, and I got a little bit overawed.

When you come into the presence of great teachers it sort of affects you, almost like walking into a particular energy field. It touches your heart. Of course I was pretty much an Australian male, not really much in touch with heart and feelings and stuff, and it was a bit strange for me. The ground started to feel a bit uncomfortable under my feet. What put me off even more was that the translator said, 'Are you Ross the dentist?' I replied, 'Yes, I'm Ross the dentist.' He said, 'I really want to thank you very much for helping my student to be able to come to France.' I had helped one of the students to get time off work to come to the retreat. I said, 'Oh, that's fine Rinpoche.' Then I talked to Dilgo Khyentse. I asked him questions about the difficulties I was having with my practice and he gave me very simple replies. He said, 'You just keep at it, keep doing it. That's very good.'

Having spoken to Dilgo Khyentse I was really getting a bit shaky you know. I didn't understand what was going on. My heart was getting a bit racy and I was getting a little bit teary-eyed. Then the translator started thanking me again

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for helping his student. It was all so strange. Here we were in the presence of this great master and his translator, whom I also had great respect for, was thanking me. This just really blew me apart. I said 'Well, thank you very much,' and left quickly, straight down the stairs. I went outside and just burst into tears. I was quite inconsolable. I just quietly sat under a tree and cried for at least a couple of hours, which is quite unlike me. And I thought, 'What the hell was that? What happened to me?'

Again it was nothing he said. It was so ordinary and nothing greatly profound in the language. It was a bit like when Rinpoche touched me on the arm - 'I think you belong here.' Dilgo Khyentse just said, 'Practice a bit more. Of course it's going to work.' It was like peeling back layers and allowing me to open up. It was that openness of heart that allowed the emotion to come. It was an emotional outpouring from something very deep within me.

Devotion isn't something, then, that is contrived. You can't really contrive devotion. It is something that comes from your heart when you connect with a great teacher or someone else you have a connection with. It can actually be other students. At that stage Sogyal Rinpoche, through his great humility, compassion and wisdom, edged us towards a teacher whom he knew would be able to open our hearts. Now I'm a bit of a tough nut to crack anyway, so it was probably good that he pushed me up the stairs and got me in there.

### **Strengthening devotion**

My father died in 1981. Not long after I met Rinpoche, and had teachings on death and dying from him, I had to return to Australia quickly because my father was very ill. I can still remember reading the teachings on death and dying on the way home. All that helped me in a very simple way to be with my father. It helped me understand and probably come to terms with loving him very strongly at the end. The intellectual aspect opened my heart because I could see how it helped me in my life. You could say the feeling with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche might be a sort of little bit airy fairy and sort of teary-eyed stuff, even though it really wasn't, but people could see it that way. When you get profound help from the intellectual concepts and you see how it does work, especially when someone

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is dying, then I think your devotion, your thankfulness for the teachings, increases.

In 1983 we were on retreat with Rinpoche in France. We stayed in this great old monastery. Rinpoche was talking about devotion and his masters, particularly Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodro, who was said to be one of the greatest masters of this century. He passed away in 1959. He brought Rinpoche up for many years of his early life. He nurtured and looked after him like a father. Rinpoche changed the whole atmosphere as he started to talk about his teacher. He kept talking and talking and, in the end, he started to cry. He talked about Khyentse and his life, how Khyentse cared for him as a child and what a great teacher he was. I can still remember the final thing he said was, 'You must realise that your master leaves nothing unattended.' And I was in tears again, except this time the words were very profound. What it was saying was that your master would never give up on you. He would always be there. He would always look after you. That increased my devotional aspect because I started to see then, in my own teacher, that no matter how much he had been wronged by people, he would always welcome them back and look after them.

I also realised that he's always looked after me. In war, when men fighting have been shot and are about to die, many will call out for their mother. I really feel that, if ever I was in that situation, the person I would call for, to help me, would be Rinpoche. Not that I don't love my mother. She has always been a very good mother to me. But that's the level of profound feeling and love that I have for this man. It's a tough one to explain. I suppose it is because of what he has very subtly done for me. He has shown me lots of things about myself, a lot of them incredibly confronting. But in essence he has shown me that there is a way to get out of the cycle of suffering. It's not only written down but is also passed on through the teachers. They have some understanding of death, the process of death and what goes on afterwards in rebirth.

In 1994, at Lerab Ling, the retreat centre in the south of France, the older students and national directors were asked to come together to do some training. We did an exercise where I ended up talking about appreciating Rinpoche and

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what he had done. I said that I appreciated Rinpoche for helping me along and opening my heart and I just really wanted to thank him. I suppose I had never really had much of a chance to say that. Whenever I got a chance to talk to him, it was all organisational details or thanking him formally for coming to Australia and it always sounded so hollow to me.

It was strange because, although I was glad that I had that chance to do it, it was also a real physical thing for me. I had this real pain in my heart, a very strong pain, while I was saying this, and felt very emotional about it. I felt like something had broken through, like it was a physical manifestation of an opening. In a way it was something that happened devotionally but the feeling afterwards was of an open heart almost to the point of pain. It made the devotion in me even stronger.

It's just so nice being around 'the boss'. I call Rinpoche the boss. When you are close to a great teacher like Rinpoche and you connect with him intellectually and emotionally, you begin to almost feel what he is feeling. I remember once a woman asked him about her son dying. I could feel in my heart a really strong sense of Rinpoche's great compassion towards this woman. He drew out her question to make sure that he could help and had done his best for her. Little things like that happen quite a lot to me now with my connection to the teacher. It's good for me too, because I lead quite a busy life, with my family and my work. I think it's quite easy to lose the connection to the teacher and the teachings. So I think I'm lucky to have such a connection to a living teacher who can just rekindle that devotion to hold to the Buddhist path by just being around him.

### **It's not so bad**

I've never really had much difficulty with devotion because it slowly developed for me. I didn't have great devotion from the beginning, but it grew slowly and profoundly over time. I thought initially Rinpoche was a good teacher and I helped out and enjoyed being around him. He's never asked anything of me that I've considered to be too much or out of line or seemed to be very difficult for me. Sometimes when I'm tired and there's this hassle or that hassle, I just go

back to the teachings.

I always remember when His Holiness the Dalai Lama was younger and there were big problems with the refugees coming out of Tibet. Many people were dying and it was very hard for them in the camps. He said that whenever he got a bit despondent he would read through the teachings and see how difficult it was for a great teacher like Milarepa, who is like a Tibetan saint. Milarepa had a very difficult time and he often came close to death, but he stuck with the teachings. His Holiness would say, 'Really when I think about Milarepa and how tough it was for him, it's not too bad for me so I shouldn't get too despondent.' I take it the next step down and think, if things are tough for me, look at His Holiness the Dalai Lama looking after 100,000 refugees, and it's not so bad for me. Then I just let the difficulties go. It's really not so bad. Others have far worse problems. In a way, I just think that I've been lucky.

### **Understanding devotion**

There is a whole linguistic, semantic misunderstanding about the term 'devotion' itself. There is also a very big cultural Christian aspect to it. Devotion is not a blind conceptual situation where you are devoid of intellect and do exactly what you are told. That is often the feeling of the teacher-disciple relationship, where devotion is the central theme. Once you experience devotion in Buddhism, you quickly realise that is a total and complete misunderstanding. The problem is on the surface; when we don't understand, it can appear that way.

Often people coming originally from a Catholic upbringing (and I have a great respect for the Catholic religion) have reported that they had difficulty with the devotional aspect of Catholicism when they were children. Talking with newer students about devotion, when, for example, they have had a Catholic background, there is often a strong resistance. It seems that devotion often has a sense of subservience. We are a fairly individualistic society that says to get out there and do the best for yourself. Being devoted often makes people think they have to give up that strong sense of self and ego, that ambition, or become subservient to someone else. Of course, again, it's definitely not that either. We have difficulty with this term because of Western religion, our intellectual

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misunderstanding and the cultural aspect of being a fairly macho society.

Also we see the hideous abuse of devotion that has happened, for example, in the Jim Jones mass suicide. So the devotional teachings of the East and also from Catholicism, if they are misunderstood or abused, can kill people. Then I become so sad as, every time that happens, people become more wary and maybe don't connect with a teacher who really, through devotion, can help them a lot.

### Uncovering the answers

A few years ago the most profound thing of my life happened to me. I was a little confused in my mind about some things. I had this really burning question and I got so centred on the question that it got right out of proportion. I remember at that stage I was doing Guru Yoga practice, which is a practice where you visualise your teacher and then you visualise your mind becoming one with theirs. I really wanted to know the answer to the question on my mind. I was out jogging in Centennial Park, and this question was really affecting me, just completely overtaking me. I called out to Rinpoche asking, 'Please tell me what I should do.' I had two alternatives. He came to me in a very profound vision. It was like I was running but I wasn't there anymore. I just kept running and there was Rinpoche in front of me and there, very strongly, all around Rinpoche were other great teachers of the Tibetan lineage, with very profound light all around them. I was standing there in front of them, even though I was still running. It was just in my mind - this vision. I was really taken. I mean I could probably have got run over.

Rinpoche just looked at me, a big beaming smile on his face, and he said something that I had never heard him say before. He said, 'It's not so serious.' Something clicked. It's not so serious. The whole thing was not so serious, and he just broke it for me there in the vision. From that time on, even though it was a very difficult time in my life, I sorted it out. They say that in the most difficult times, the teachings are the greatest, and this was certainly true for me. The teachings were very profound and it was very personal because it was obviously just for me. It didn't finish there actually. I got a phone call a couple of days later from Rinpoche. 'Are you all right?' he asked. I told him I was and he said, 'I had a dream about you the other

night.' And then he asked, 'Did someone phone you

*(continued next page)*

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from me?' And I said 'No, no one phoned.' Rinpoche had never spoken to me in this way before. He then told me the dream he had of me being in a green car going downhill and about to crash. Somehow he stopped me crashing the car. The whole episode was pretty amazing and I've never forgotten seeing all the teachers up in the sky while I was running.

It is often said in the teachings that if you ever really need the teacher, he will be there for you. When I've prayed to Rinpoche, it has certainly been proved to me strongly that it works. The teachings also take care of us in that the answers are there, the help is there. I see Rinpoche himself as the active aspect of the teachings. He's the one who can really show the teachings to me and help me understand.

### Attraction, sexuality and gender

In Tibetan Buddhism, teachers work in four ways: pacifying, enriching magnetising and subjugating. The way a lama teaches and the way he presents can be very magnetising, not necessarily physically, but I have noticed women can find this attractive. After having discussions with female students, some have said that they see the teacher as a father/lover figure. I have often wondered if it is easier for some men when they initially come to the teachings, as they may not have to deal with the possible complications of this physical attraction.

I see the intentions of Tibetan lamas teaching and working with people on the spiritual path as coming from a good and compassionate motivation. However, the issue of sexuality is often raised. In Tibetan Buddhism, not all lamas or Rinpoches have celibate vows. This can be confusing for Westerners who think that everyone in robes is a celibate priest. In some people this can bring up questions of sexuality and power, leading to confusion and obstacles on their spiritual path. It is said in the teachings that we should go beyond our concepts to realise spiritual fruition. If you create a conceptual framework you will make it difficult to experience the benefit of the teachings. If you just open up and mull the teachings over and think about them and then try them out, you will see if they work for you.

As most Tibetan lamas are men it may appear that women are not so

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important, but this is not true if you really look into the teachings. There have been many great women teachers in Tibetan Buddhism; even today the wife of Sogyal Rinpoche's teacher, Khandro Tsering Chodron is recognised and respected as a great practitioner. Because of the feminist movement, I feel as Buddhism comes to the West, there will be a much greater recognition of the feminine aspect and many more great women teachers.

### **Meeting the Spiritual Longing**

It would be nice for people to have the opportunity to meet any great teacher, because I think within every one of us is a great spiritual longing. There is a part of us that cannot ever be satisfied with the usual way we live this life. There is a longing that is beyond the material world, beyond the family world, beyond a lot of things. I think that appears in people often in a very negative way, in a sense of loss and lack. We lack spirituality in the West. We have that spiritual longing in the sense that we all feel that there is something more to life than just the material level. It is important to know there are great teachers out there who can show you a way, not even necessarily Buddhist. So, if you feel in your heart that you want more out of life, explore that by reading and talking to people and listening to teachers when they give talks. Just give yourself a chance to feel that longing and bridge an abyss that may be there in your heart, and to connect to your essential spiritual self.

The Buddha talks about how you should see the phenomenal world and existence around you. He says, 'Know all things to be like this, just as a magician creates illusion, horses, ox and cart and other things, nothing is as it appears.' That's always been very profound for me, nothing is as it appears. If nothing is as it appears, then we shouldn't take things too seriously.

### **Sticking with the path**

The one thing I would say to people, and maybe I have a little bit of authority now, having been on this path for seventeen years, the one heaviness in my heart is that I feel that people sometimes don't stick with it. However difficult

it may seem at the beginning or even how great it is and then maybe it gets a bit hard, when you stick with it, that is when the benefits come. If you really stick with a path that you've chosen, that you have a heart connection with and that intellectually makes sense to you, then go with it. Then you see what devotion really is. Things begin to happen and experiences come and it confirms what you're doing is right and it's helping you. Then devotion comes automatically. You don't have to worry then whether the path is right. Once you are there, you can continue with it. I think sometimes there is a lack of consistency in us and in our society. We have a great desire to get something quickly, to be successful, see quick results and then to move onto something new. That often drags us away from the thing of real benefit. Getting things quickly doesn't work so well with the spiritual path. It requires diligence and consistency through thick and thin, through good and bad times. People really need to see that, to start on the path and to stick with it to get there.

#### **INTERVIEW 4.**

##### **Christine Longaker**

*'Most of us feel that living is hopeful and that death represents the loss of hope ... To feel that we can face our death with hope, then, we must be willing to take our life seriously now, and use its rich potential for our own change and growth ... For an individual who takes the teachings to heart and cultivates a deep experience in her meditation practice, applying herself with sustained commitment to realise her highest potential, death can be an extraordinary opportunity to reach enlightenment - complete liberation - a state that is totally free of all suffering, fear and delusion.'*

I was born and raised in southern California and both of my parents were from the mid-west of the United States. My religious education was a very traditional Catholic one. Certain parts of that tradition were very inspiring for me, particularly the aspect of devotion, and feeling a close and personal connection with Christ. So I have a very deep appreciation of Christianity and even now I feel that it is part of my life. In the middle of my university studies I dropped out, got married and had a child. For a few years I worked and helped support and care for my family. Then, just after he had finished his professional training, my husband Lyttle was diagnosed with acute leukemia and I took care of him for a year until he died.

During that year I was able to go back to university so I took courses in sociology, psychology, philosophy, American Indian studies: all subjects that I found interesting. Lyttle and I weren't practising actively in any spiritual tradition at that time, so we didn't have anything to rely on spiritually during his illness. We made mistakes during that year and sometimes failed to understand each other, yet overall we really learned about love, deepening our communication and

our relationship. He died in 1977, and my son and I moved to Santa Cruz in northern California, where I felt there was a sense of community. I had a feeling of gratitude for my husband's life and his peaceful death and I wanted to give something back.

### **A spiritual path**

Even before my husband fell ill, I was looking for a spiritual path, but I didn't know how to do that in southern California. In Santa Cruz it was easier to explore, because the area was a 'spiritual crossroads', with many centres and teachers from all different religious traditions. Over time I became clearer as to what I was looking for in a teacher and a path. In 1978, while I was finishing my university degree, I met a group of people who were interested in starting a hospice home-visiting program. Because of my own experience, I felt drawn to help others have an easier time in their dying, and so I became part of the core group that helped to found the hospice. Doing this work, and contributing to the dying and their families this way, made my life meaningful and I was happy.

In 1980 one of the hospice volunteers, Dorje Seawell, who is now a Buddhist nun, introduced me to Sogyal Rinpoche. She told me she had invited a Tibetan lama to teach in Santa Cruz on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and inquired if the hospice would like to sponsor his talk. Initially I wasn't interested because our hospice was already having a hard time being accepted by the medical community. Dorje replied, 'Well, you might find it interesting for yourself personally. You should come and hear him talk because it's really about the work that we do, and it might give you new insights and skills for your work.'

### **Perceptions of death and bereavement**

In Sogyal Rinpoche's public talk he emphasised two vital things to remember when we have a loved one who is dying: first, to give them our love fully and to let them go; second, to find a practice that they can do to help them prepare for death and for whatever ultimate potential they believe comes after, so that they are prepared to let go in the best way possible. Rinpoche then told a story about the death of his great aunt, who was a Buddhist nun. In the last part of

her life, she had been practising her prayers and meditation night and day. One morning the signs came that she was very close to death and she was no longer able to speak. An old man who was the cook for the household, and also her spiritual mentor and friend, came to her room to give her his loving encouragement and say goodbye. He reminded her to rely completely on the spiritual teachings and practices she had received for the time of death, as this was the moment for which she had prepared her whole life. He encouraged her to not worry about anyone else, but to concentrate on her spiritual practice until her last breath, and then, he reassured her, she would be fine. Finally, he said, 'I am going shopping now, and perhaps when I come back, I won't see you, so goodbye.' Although she was not able to speak, the old nun understood the heart of his message, and she nodded and smiled her goodbye.

When I heard this story I was riveted to my seat, because I recognised it. About six months before my husband died, a *Psychology Today* article offered evidence about the survival of consciousness after death by recounting the then new 'near-death experiences'. The article also explained that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* describes one's existence after death in great detail and provides essential spiritual guidance for the dying and their loved ones. Sogyal Rinpoche's advice, and his aunt's story, were offered to illustrate the essential points from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

On reading it, I was really struck by the potency of that message and story. I thought, if I were a close friend and spiritual mentor to someone who was dying, I would think I should stay right by his or her side and guide them at the moment of death. How much love and trust there must be in the spiritual path that this old man could say goodbye at the door and let her go. How much trust he had that she would be all right spiritually. It completely changed my perception of bereavement and death and what spiritual practice can really mean, especially at the end of life. I was quite shocked when I read this story in the spring of 1977, yet also inspired and moved. Later I thought I had forgotten all about it.

### **Giving love and letting go**

However, six months later when my husband was in intensive care and his

physical condition deteriorated to the point that he was very close to death, I wondered, 'What can I do for him now?' I felt very helpless in the intensive care unit because all his other needs were being taken care of. Then that story came back to me, along with Rinpoche's advice: 'Give your love fully and let him go.' It was important to consider Lyttle's needs and forget myself, so that at the moment of death, I could give him the support he needed, with all my love. Just the day before, we had asked each other forgiveness for the difficulties we had had that year. We also expressed our gratitude for the precious time we shared, for all we had learned and come to trust about love, and we said our goodbyes. Now, when he was actually dying, I knew that fully letting him go with all my love was the last gift I could give him, and there was a deep peace in my heart. But I also knew, as he lay dying, that one day I was going to die. Before that happened, I decided that I wanted to have a much deeper understanding of death and clarity about how to spiritually prepare for my own death.

When Sogyal Rinpoche gave this advice again in his public talk, I was immediately grateful that this teaching and teacher helped me at a very profound moment in my life. I was also convinced that he had a lot more to give that could help me in my hospice work and in entering a spiritual path. A path that could support me in going through the sufferings of life, including my bereavement, and especially at the time of death.

### **Lighting a flame**

For me, Rinpoche was embodying what he was saying. When he was teaching about our absolute wisdom nature he was also in that state of pure vivid wakefulness and compassion. Through the teachings, Rinpoche was awakening that state in me, almost like 'lighting a flame' inside my mind and heart. I felt that Rinpoche - and the lineage of masters, teachings and spiritual practice to which he is heir - have the means to take me all the way to enlightenment. Tibetan Buddhism, and Sogyal Rinpoche, have many of the qualities that I was looking for in a path: wisdom, clarity, spaciousness and skilful methods. A quality of profound compassion and also a sense of being very connected to life. Not denying life, not denying family or laughter, the path shows us how to be in the

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world without becoming trapped in it.

It was important to me to choose a spiritual path that wasn't too restrictive, one that I could introduce to my family. Rinpoche has a special quality of humour and groundedness. He has experienced life's sufferings and joys and he sees and encourages our ultimate potential. This really sparked a connection in me.

### The universality of death

My husband's death awakened me to the realisation that one day I was going to die and for this I needed a real spiritual training. There isn't anything else I really need to do in life. The pain of bereavement was beyond anything I could have imagined, and I was in the middle of it at the time I met Sogyal Rinpoche. The only hell worse than what I was feeling would be the pain of losing my child. The Buddha's teachings show that life is imbued with suffering. Even if you are not suffering now, it's still going to come sooner or later.

Going through the pain of bereavement was much harder than my husband's illness and death. I also realised that sooner or later I would lose my son - either through his death or mine. It was just a matter of time before loss or death would come again and I had nothing to help me cope. This thought was excruciating. Thus I found myself at the beginning of Krisha Gotami's story.

Krisha Gotami was a mother whose only child died as an infant. She kept begging people to bring her child back to life, and someone finally sent her to the Buddha. The Buddha said, 'I can help you - but first bring me a mustard seed from the household where no one has known death.' After going from house to house, Krisha started to see the universality of death, bereavement and loss, and realised she was part of the human condition. Understanding that her intensive pain is also part of the inevitable suffering of life, Krisha Gotami became determined to get out of this cycle of unending, painful attachment and loss. She went to the Buddha and said, 'Please show me the path to be free.' The Buddha's compassionate offer to help didn't mean he could make her immediate grief disappear, but that he could help her to see the truth, and show her the path to liberation. Krisha Gotami's painful grief led her to follow the Buddha's teachings, and it is said that before she died she finally attained enlightenment.

## No greater gift

My first experience of devotion was one of immense gratitude to Sogyal Rinpoche and the teachings for how they had helped me. I didn't feel I was 'worshipping' someone outside of me; devotion was a feeling of close connectedness and wonderful interdependence. Every time Rinpoche taught, he was reawakening a connection to this inner wisdom, or Buddha nature, as though he were re-lighting a light inside of me. My devotion is a profound appreciation of that potential, that spark, that interdependence. I felt he kept giving me a gift. Yet he wasn't giving me something new, he was helping me glimpse and recognise what had always been there. With this recognition, it was clear that on the level of our true nature, the teacher, student and all beings, are the same.

Hearing Rinpoche teach, I also felt an appreciation that this path could help me heal my bereavement and, if I chose, it could enable me to use my life well in preparation for death. It's impossible to repay this, for there is no greater gift than the ultimate hope of knowing who we truly are, of discovering this deathless nature that is always there. I reflected as well on everyone else who was caring for a dying friend, all those who might be feeling suicidal, or going through bereavement and feeling despair or helplessness. The hope offered in this deeper spiritual perspective could help many people relieve and heal their suffering, and I appreciated that these teachings and practices could also help me serve others more effectively and compassionately in my hospice work.

When I met Rinpoche I was president of the board of directors for the hospice. I invited him to come back to America again and again over the years to give teachings and retreats. Over time, the teachings and the practice began to unfold for me. I was able to understand my own condition, my suffering and patterns, and, I hope, able to develop a little more compassion for others - keeping in mind that, although we all have suffering, we also all share the same ultimate potential. Even though I was very busy as the work increased over the years, and had less time for formal meditation practice, there was always a blessing when I was able to really open my heart in Rinpoche's presence: my mind would become more and more clear, more spacious and free. Make no mistake, my mind does

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not stay that way all the time. But these glimpses showed me what the teachings say, 'When you have devotion, the blessings are spontaneously present.' In the presence of the sun, the clouds just melt away.

### **Devotion is profound love**

The word devotion is sometimes misunderstood. Devotion is not giving love to the Buddhas or masters because they need it, nor the sense they are superior to us and must be 'worshipped'. I remember once seeing a quote on a poster that was a key for me: 'You've been spending so much time searching and searching for love and always getting disappointed. What you need is a love that will last forever.' For me, this is what devotion brings. It has nothing to do with conditional or temporary love, nor love based on ordinary levels of relationship, which are subject to impermanence and death.

Devotion is the highest, most profound level of love, a love which radiates from our absolute nature, like the sunlight. When I open my heart, I don't experience it as a dualistic love that's going from me to someone else. Devotion seems to simply radiate from my heart, while at the same time it rekindles my mind and heart, fulfilling me. With conditional love, we give something away with attachment or fear, and then measure whether we are going to get anything back. This is how we get burned out, frustrated or hurt. On a spiritual level, devotion constantly re-nurtures us, because it is the doorway into who or what we really are.

Pure love has a quality of appreciation and gratitude; you find it is there almost as soon as you have opened your heart to give it. Devotion can be inspired by a deep reflection on how meaningful our life has become now that we've met a teacher and entered a spiritual path through which we can attain enlightenment. On one level, we don't need a teacher because the potential is already there. However, on the relative level, if we didn't have a teacher point it out, we could easily miss it, and always feel some lack in ourselves, some disconnection or yearning.

Devotion especially seems to help me on the path. When I am able to fully open my heart, I can really hear the profound wisdom of the teachings, and I can

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receive the blessings and love coming toward me from the Buddhas and my masters. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition the relationship between teacher and student is for life, not just this existence but for all lifetimes, until we attain enlightenment. Therefore, it is beyond birth and beyond death. Devotion has a quality of unconditional compassion and wisdom that is available to everyone, like rays of sunlight. I've been grateful to find that the connection doesn't go away if I make mistakes or get moody. This helps me deepen my trust, and feel safe to open more.

In choosing a spiritual master, I realised that for my tough and stubborn ego it wouldn't help to study with a teacher who was very sweet and nice all the time, because my ego would be very comfortable and might even get stronger. Perhaps I could develop some positive qualities, but my spiritual progress would be limited by what the ego liked or didn't like. So I wanted to find a master who had the clarity and compassion to serve as a mirror to me, and a path that could help me overcome my judgmental, selfish mind.

#### The teacher as a mirror

Sometimes, in remarkable ways, my teacher seems to be a mirror reflecting back my true nature. I've experienced glimpses of the vastness, the freedom, the ultimate joy and the deep love and compassion that radiates from that state. As life does sometimes, the teacher can also reflect everything I don't want to face and acknowledge in myself - all of my nonsense, negativity and habitual patterns. Like having a smudge on my face: when I see it in the mirror, I am embarrassed because I have been walking around with it all my life, but now the spiritual path gives me a way to finally clean it off.

I was actually very privileged to work with Rinpoche for many years and see him in many situations. Many times I observed him doing what was appropriate for me in the moment even though it didn't fit with my wishes or concepts. Sometimes he would correct me very strongly and I would wonder why. Yet each time it helped to clear the ego out of the way - my attachment to everything being perfect. With the teacher's skillful support, sometimes I could cut through the ego's games, dissolve my grasping and fear, and simply rest in that sky-like state of openness and peace.

Everyone has a different sense of connection with a spiritual master. In my own experience I have had a confidence about Rinpoche's compassionate motivation and his realisation. That confidence was only strengthened over the years when I witnessed how the other Tibetan masters related to Rinpoche -seeing, for example, how he was treated by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche -which showed that he is respected and deeply appreciated as a lineage holder.

The main disciple of Padmasambhava (also known as Guru Rinpoche) was Yeshe Sogyal, who became the heir to the lineage. Originally, the lineage was named after her. Padmasambhava taught that women should be revered because of their qualities of wisdom, openness and devotion; and, if women applied themselves to the practice, enlightenment may come easier to them. It's not been a problem for me that many of my teachers are men. In many ways on this path I've felt lucky to be a woman. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, devotion is described as a skilful way to help us realise our absolute nature, the union of wisdom and compassion. This is possible whether you are a man or a woman, for, as the teachings say, 'The Dharma belongs to those who practise it.' The teachings, the entire path and the blessings are equally available to all.

### **Unrepayable kindness**

One aspect of Rinpoche's kindness that I can never repay is the fact that he took me to meet his own masters, including His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche. This is a very personal story, when Sogyal Rinpoche not only took us to them but taught us how to understand who they were and how to be in their presence.

It's difficult to understand, being born and growing up in the West, the impossibility of making such a connection in the way that many of us did, and the gratitude I have for that. There was a time in 1984 when we had a summer retreat in the Dordogne valley in France. We were going to receive teachings and empowerments from His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche and His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. I had heard for years about these great masters with whom Rinpoche was studying. I had met Dudjom Rinpoche a few times before, but not

### Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

Sogyal Rinpoche told us that many Tibetans used to say, 'If the Buddha was alive today, he would probably look just like Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.' Rinpoche would talk about his special qualities and I yearned so much to see him once in my life. It was on the birthday of Guru Rinpoche and we had received an empowerment of Guru Rinpoche from these great masters, sitting together in a large converted barn in the French countryside. Afterward, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche was sitting in the shade and Sogyal Rinpoche brought his students, one by one, to receive a blessing from this great master. It was like being in heaven.

We were also brought to receive a blessing from His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, and this would be the last time I saw him alive. Feeling so much love for him, as I put my head in his lap, I felt as though I was saying goodbye to a beloved spiritual grandfather and, from the depth of my heart, all I could say was 'Ah'

With humility, Sogyal Rinpoche used to tell us that he himself was not a master. After years of translating for these great masters, he realised that most Western students do not know how to be with them, or how to understand what they can offer. He felt part of his work was to prepare us to meet them, so we could receive what they were capable of giving. At the same time, I feel Rinpoche himself has become heir to the compassion and wisdom his masters embodied.

Over the years, Rinpoche continues to invite great masters from Tibet and other Buddhist traditions to give teachings at our centres and retreats. My gratitude for being in their presence and receiving teachings and empowerments from them is a gift I could never repay. The legacy and the blessings and the transmissions they have poured into me and other students of Sogyal Rinpoche are incredible.

Perhaps it is like meeting a living saint, one who lived in a former time, like Francis of Assisi. They are coming to visit your town and you can actually meet them and receive teachings and blessings from them that could transform your whole life. Even though you cannot stay with them forever, through your spiritual practice you slowly find that the blessing of their presence never goes away, but always remains part of your heart and mind.

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## The Potential and the Pain

One thing that perhaps is the hardest part of the Buddhist path for us in the West is that, even though we are shown glimpses of this glorious potential that is within, we are also left to do the work ourselves. Nobody can magically take all my pain and suffering away, nobody can remove all my negative habits and past karma for me. Teachers and masters can inspire and help to awaken me and, through the teachings and practices they can show the way, but in the end I am left to do the work. This is the 'long-term' vision of engaging on the spiritual path, and it's not easy. I found I had to be very careful to acknowledge and let go of my high expectations of instant change, and instead be re-nurtured and renewed by continuing to meet the teacher again and again, through the teachings and in my practice.

The difficulty is in making peace with these two sides of my mind. One side is my conditioned habits and negativity, my grasping and fear. The other side is this sublime nature that is always there and that I can tap into again and again. When I get a glimpse of that openness, I feel free. Yet I get discouraged with all the time I waste looking for temporary happiness and going up and down with emotions and pain and disappointment.

In my early years I had become frustrated because of my unrealistic hope to serve perfectly the whole future of the teachings by trying to bring benefit to others and relieve suffering. In organising the work, one of my main expectations was that other people would be as inspired and grateful and wanting to give all their time and energy for this vision. My frustration was between what I felt was possible and what was actually possible. And I feel sad when, even after joining a spiritual community, I find I am still holding on to old unconscious habits - ways of thinking or speaking that may bring misunderstanding or pain to others. My tendency was to want everything to be perfect, valuing the work more than the people. So my difficulties have been feeling split even in this 'spiritual work': serving the program in the midst of all my faults and stubbornness, and at other times tapping into this vast appreciation of the tremendous hope and light that the Buddha's teachings can bring to a troubled world.

### Taste of freedom

Rinpoche used to give this example for the feeling of relief and freedom you have when you are able to bring your mind to rest in its true nature. Imagine your negative patterns and emotional suffering are like being stuck outside on a terrifically hot and muggy day, and the atmosphere is so hot and oppressive that you cannot bear to be in it. Meditation practice is like going through the glass doors of an airport and then 'Whoosh!' you are in this wonderful air-conditioned hall. You feel the cool relaxation and ease - all your cares just fall away in this vast and open space. Then suddenly you find yourself back outside again, suffering in your old stuff, and it's easy to get discouraged. The teachings remind you, when you solidify your sense of self and your suffering again, to bring your mind home through the practice of meditation. Through the practice you get another glimpse of your true nature and 'Whoosh!' you come through the airport doors and experience that spacious, open sense of relief. But why don't we stay there?

Well, I keep falling back into my old habits, even though they end up bringing me fresh suffering. It's easy to get discouraged and put myself down. Yet even that is a trick of the ego, an old habit of mine. The point is to start fresh each time, and realise it's time to practise, to come back to the teachings and find the relief and spaciousness of my true nature once again.

Rinpoche points out that this is the reason that we do the preliminary practices - called Ngöndro - 100,000 times. Students sometimes wonder if all this is really necessary. We have to do them so many times because we're trying to break the habitual mechanism that sends us back into our patterns of suffering and negativity. The commitment we make to regular practice is so that we keep entering the airport doors until we finally break the mechanism and stay in that state of ultimate freedom and peace.

### Understanding the relationship

I've had many different kinds of teachers in my life, and have learned

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many kinds of skills that have helped me in my development and in my work. Different teachers have their own knowledge and levels of mastery, and I continue studying with them according to what else they can offer that helps me. In relationships with all the other mentors in life, my motivation is usually based on acquiring something that will enhance me.

Those sorts of relationships are fine. However they are in the realm of what we call 'samsara', a habitual cycling in and out of suffering, based on the ego's schemes for grasping at our desires or avoiding discomfort and pain. Even though we sometimes get what we want, eventually we experience disappointment and grief because whatever we have does not completely fulfill us, and because everything changes.

I've seen two common misunderstandings that can come up in looking for a spiritual teacher. One is to approach the relationship with the motivation to make ourselves feel good, or to acquire something for our CV - better to learn computer programming, I think! The second is to transfer the view of the teacher-student relationship - its purpose, how it works and so forth - from one spiritual tradition to another. This simply doesn't work, even within one religion, such as Buddhism or Christianity. For example, most Christian traditions have the role of a priest or preacher, yet not all of them define that person as one's personal spiritual teacher. There is such a role in some parts of the Russian Orthodox tradition, for example, between the 'starets' and their disciples.

### **The inner prayer of the heart**

Reading about the Continuous Prayer of the Heart, taught in the Russian Orthodox tradition, rekindles my devotion. The devotional quality of this practice reminds me of the Tibetan Buddhist practice known as Guru Yoga [mixing one's mind with the teacher's mind]. The Prayer of the Heart is described in a book called *The Way of a Pilgrim*, by an anonymous author, and it originates in the contemplative practices and writings of the early Desert Fathers. Reading about the practice lights a fire inside me, and I begin to understand the whole purpose of Guru Yoga on a deeper level. Really understanding the benefits and the power and result of doing such a continuous prayer gives me fresh inspiration and

motivation for my daily practice.

In the first part of the Guru Yoga practice, we invoke the presence of a Buddha and recite thousands of mantra. The mantra strengthens our sense of the 'presence' we've invoked and is the means by which we pray and request purification and blessings from this enlightened being. After concluding the practice, we train ourselves to keep this presence always with us, and continue reciting mantras or prayers lightly under our breath, or mentally, in our heart. We are taught to do the practice as a formal meditation and to train so that it becomes our constant experience throughout the day.

Training in the Continuous Prayer of the Heart is similar. The Christian teachings say that, through prayer, we receive the grace of God. This author describes, from the Orthodox perspective, that prayer can also bring us to the 'presence of God'.

'One way to think of prayer is as a solemn request to God, a formula issued in praying, something expressed in words. Specifically prayer can be thought of as an act of asking God to confer some benefit, but this is an external level of inner prayer. The second definition that comes from the Russian masters of the last century, is far less exterior: 'The principal thing is to stand before God with the mind in the heart and to go on standing before him unceasingly, day and night, until the end of life.'

This is the essence of devotion. Once on a video I saw a Catholic Cardinal and an atheist debating about the existence of God. After forty minutes, the atheist turned to the Catholic priest and said, 'I am becoming increasingly uncomfortable arguing about the existence of God with someone who is so clearly standing in His presence.' This is where devotion brings us - developing such a deep connection to the absolute truth, our fundamental goodness, what we might call the 'divine within', that it becomes our own presence. This presence blesses our mind and our being, and from that we can become a source of tremendous benefit and blessing to others.

Do not forget the lama - pray to him at all times.

Do not forget death - persist in Dharma.

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Do not forget sentient beings - with compassion, dedicate your merit to them.

His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

*(continued next page)*

## ANALYSIS OF The DATA

My intention is to look at the common themes that emerge from these interviews and to explore whether devotion has any relevance to Process Work and in what way. As I have personally combined the two paths for twelve years and from my understanding of what devotion is, my original ideas, as stated in the introduction, when starting this paper were the following;

Devotion is a tool, on the relative level to assist students to become more open and receptive. Devotion is connected to the third type of trust we have discussed similar to the trust and deep faith that a process worker develops over time and training to trusting and following the Tao, no matter how inexplicable or mysterious it seems. The vehicle used within Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism is to use the teacher as the external object of devotion. This particular approach is not for everyone and because of the tendency in the West to see everything outside of ourselves, then this particular way of working is open to misunderstanding. However students come to understand different levels of devotion and don't get stuck just with the outer level of the teacher. The inner level is recognising that the outer teacher is a reflection of our inner teacher. Recognising that all life and situations are always teaching us is another level. The teacher plays a vital role in helping to create the opportunity or making space for us so that we can get a glimpse of who we really are. When we understand that is what the teacher does, then we naturally and spontaneously feel profound joy and gratitude.

*`What the teacher is giving you is the direct teaching ... the teacher is the teaching ... through that you discover the teacher within; then you're never separate. There comes a time when you come to realise the master within, realise the universality of the teacher. There comes a time when even the trees can teach you, the wind can teach you, then everything can teach you, circumstances can teach you. But to really discover the inner teacher, we need the outer teacher to*

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*show us the inner teacher.* <sup>75</sup>

Devotion is also a deep feeling of gratitude, love and awe and is a source of strength and confidence. When we realise that devotion is an expression of our own true nature, then it helps in understanding our emotions and relationships. If we remain true to that which is deepest, it is similar to the sentient state of being. Our deeper feelings that are not so based on external circumstances, have a stability and truth that is timeless. The essence of who we are is not conditioned by time or space or other people. Devotion for a teacher helps put us back in touch with those deeper levels of ourselves and helps us deepen our love for ourselves and others.

Although I recognise that there are fundamental differences between a spiritual path and traditional psychotherapeutic models, also discussed, I am working on a hypothesis that Process –oriented Psychology is one of the models that comes closest to being a spiritual journey, especially with its roots in Taoism and recently, its association with Zen Buddhism. I feel that the amount of hard work, dedication and strong feeling towards following the process, the idea of mentorship, metaskills and the sense of community and openness to whatever is happening in the moment is very similar to devotion in Tibetan Buddhism. So let's see if these thoughts were actually demonstrated or not within the interviews.

In looking at the data, I also followed the six steps described earlier as a way to analyse interviews. Steps one to four were completed with each person. Step five of reinterviewing was completed with each person being given their interview to change or edit. The last step where subjects begin to act from new insights gained from the interview is yet to be discovered.

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<sup>75</sup> Sogyal Rinpoche. *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Harper Collins.. San Francisco. 1992. P.134

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## Meeting the Path

Three of the four participants state that when they first met the path they ended up following, that they were not initially that interested. Julie states that she was dragged to Zurich by friends and initially was very resistant to therapy. Ross says that he was more taken with Zen Buddhism and didn't like all deities and teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. Christine says she wasn't interested in meeting Sogyal Rinpoche because the hospice where she worked was already having a difficult time being accepted by the medical profession, inferring that having a connection to Buddhism would be even more unacceptable! Jytte, although not saying that she wasn't initially interested, indirectly talks about her struggle with the psychological model and was more drawn to Max as a person initially rather than Process work.

It could be said from these examples, that just because people do not immediately feel a connection to a path, that they will not get involved and committed. Devotion or commitment therefore does not have to be instantaneous and spontaneous, although it sometimes is. Having resistance or doubts does not necessarily mean that people turn away but often leads to a deeper examination and exploration of what is being presented to them. This has implications for both models, in terms of encouraging new people to discuss openly their questions and doubts. In fact, both Process work and Buddhism do encourage much debate and discussion. The Buddha himself emphasized that people should ask as many questions as they needed and not follow blindly, but to trust in one's own experience. Process work as a theory as well as a method is committed to following the unknown processes and experiences. Doubt, resistance and questioning are a doorway into deeper and more profound knowing and experiences.

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### Relationship to the teacher

All participants talk about the very strong relationship they had with their teacher. For Jytte, meeting Max was the vehicle for bringing her into Process work and changing the direction in her life from a clothes designer to being a Process worker. The qualities that he embodied changed her worldview and her basic attitude towards life. For me, this is significant, as it is often what is described within Tibetan Buddhism when a student meets their guru. It is the intrigue with the teacher and what he or she stands for that brings the person onto the path. Julie says that she stayed in Zurich to study because she adored Arny and that being with him was like being on a magical mystery tour. She describes him as wild and irrational and living in the dreaming world. Arnie, for her, embodies following the dreaming process. She also describes Max as one of the most unique people she has ever met and his combination of being radical, brilliant and non-linear led her to adore him.

Ross describes his relationship to Sogyal Rinpoche as having an extremely strong heart connection with him and that from the moment Rinpoche touched his arm and said, 'I think you belong here,' he had a supreme confidence and deep knowing. He, as well as Christine also expresses gratitude for being introduced to Rinpoche's teachers and describes how that also deepened their relationship to Rinpoche. Christine describes how her relationship was strengthened over the years by working closely with and observing Rinpoche's limitless kindness, compassion and motivation. He helped her reawaken the connection to her inner wisdom as if lighting a light inside of her. She sees the teacher as a mirror that reflects back her own true nature.

It is interesting to observe, that if I had not known who were Process workers or Buddhists, that in their descriptions of their relationship with their teachers, I would not have been able to distinguish either. The similarity with which they describe their admiration and love for their teacher and their qualities are alike. The way in which they all talk about their teacher, whether identified with, or not, has a devotional aspect to it, in terms of their love, respect,

admiration and openness to their teacher and what they have been taught.

Therefore the conclusion is that for all the participants, the relationship to the teacher is paramount and vital. The implications of this for the training of teachers in both paths, means that a rigorous training needs to be undertaken before students can they, themselves become teachers. It is often the person who embodies the example of what is being taught that will draw people to the subject matter and it is also that person who will enable the student to maintain their study and learn and grow and change over time.

### Dreams and the Dreaming process

In Process work, as in Jungian psychology, dreams and visual material plays a large part in therapy. Our dreaming processes in childhood can shape our lives and provide a blueprint of our adult experiences connecting to our central life myth. Dreams are also important within Tibetan Buddhism. For example, the night before students take major initiations, their dreams are always examined and there is also dream meditation. Dreams and visions are also utilised in finding a reincarnated teacher for clues as to where he or she may be reborn. Visualisation practices are part of meditation and the Oracle is consulted for major decision making. He goes into a deep trance state and sees visions.

Two of the four interviewees talked about dreams that they had, one discusses visualisations and one talks about the dreaming process. Ross tells of what he calls an almost prophetic dream of going to Tibet and seeing religious things falling apart. He also describes a vision that he had of all the teachers appearing in the sky before him that had a big impact on him while trying to make a vital decision in his life. Jytte dreamt that she was having sessions with Arnie before she met him. She also had a dream that led her to completing her studies and her PHD. Christine discusses how the story of Sogyal Rinpoche's aunt dying inspired her to completely change her thinking about the meaning of death and led her to train in dealing with death and bereavement. Julie says that if her dreams told her to do something else, she would need to follow that, even if it meant that

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geographically she was away from Arny.

So, in different ways, the visual channel is included by all four, which leads to a conclusion that dreams are an important part of all their processes. None of them were specifically asked about their dreams, so it is clear that they do play a vital part in both traditions. How does this link to devotion? I would maintain that it is not possible to connect and maintain an ongoing and deep relationship with a teacher, mentor or therapist unless a person's dreams or dreaming process are pointing in that direction.

### **Other observations**

Participants mention the alchemy of relationship and also were asked and talk about the various difficulties and inspirations they have journeyed through. Interestingly, Ross, as the only man says he does not think he has experienced many difficulties, even though he describes some obstacles. As I did not interview any male Process workers, in depth, it is difficult to say whether this is a gender issue or not. However, I did observe in interviewing male and female Buddhist students that the women were far more ready and open to discuss their difficulties, while the men found it hard to identify that they had experienced real problems. There is therefore an awareness of gender in both paths, quite clearly in Process work as a worldwork issue.

In Buddhism, there is a recognition of cultural differences and Ross and Christine specifically mention great female teachers. This is perhaps an area for future research, whether women do have more problems or whether they are more in touch with recognising them and being open to discuss them.

The two Process workers seem to have more awareness about rank and discuss it, whereas it is not really mentioned by the Buddhists. On the other hand, both Buddhists spontaneously talk about death and dying. Christine's interview particularly talks about death and letting go. Arnold Mindell says that the ability to drop our personal history is a form of dying to our primary process. Dying to who we are or who we think we are allows us to realise that we are just the role in the larger community. Picking up the role of being an elder means that we can be

there for the whole group and all the different roles.

All participants have a larger view that includes community and the importance of the group. Recognising that we are also not this physical body can also facilitate the death of the body when it occurs. Ordinary thinking, mind and body are of value, but they are not the only significant thing, but rather one of the players in the field.

In terms of mentioning other spiritual paths apart from Buddhism and Taoism, Christine refers to early Christian traditions and Jytte talks about Arny's work being very 'Christian,' in terms of love and acceptance. All discuss having a spiritual basis and journey and the realisation that we are not separate from one another. All discuss awareness directly or indirectly. Jytte says that the only thing we have is our awareness in the moment and it is awareness that keeps us to our dreaming process. Learning actually becomes an awareness project where ultimately there is no teacher or student. Just simple awareness.

Likewise mindfulness is paying attention to what we are doing and what is happening. We use our second or dreamlike and third attention or lucidity about our sentient experiences (as outlined in Process work) to notice what is happening. Our attention becomes a flow of awareness. Both paths appear to not only have an interest, but actively encourage the exploration of altered states and accept synchronicity And numinous and mysterious experiences.

The Buddhists both describe in some detail, meeting the teachers of their teacher and how significant that was for them. I think that the concept of lineage is more prominent in Buddhism. However, most Process work teachers still maintain close contact with their teachers and have ongoing training and therapy. I am also aware that when Arnold Mindell told stories of one of his teachers on the Oregon coast in 1999, the response from the students present was, in my experience, extremely similar. There was an awed silence in the room and then people were fascinated and intrigued and asked many questions, wanting to know more. Perhaps, this is a development to yet come in Process work.

## **ANAYSIS OF DEVOTION**

So where can we see the process of devotion described within the data and what is the result of that process? As already discussed, the relationship to the teacher has great significance. Ross describes devotion as having a heart connection towards his teacher and other students and that this produced a coincidence that grew over a period of time. The experience of devotion allowed him to access and express his deeper feelings and helped him 'leave nothing unattended' including his feelings and his visions. His sense of belonging supported him in making a commitment to following a path of learning and contributing to the spread of Buddhism within Australia by being the Coordinator of the Rigpa organization for the last 12 years. The process of devotion also helped his gratitude to emerge particularly in acknowledging the wisdom that helped him tie his understanding together. He also describes what devotion is not. It is not blind faith or doing what you are told. It is not being subservient or giving the responsibility of yourself to someone else.

The process overall for Ross, seems to be that in the presence of his teachers and the devotion he feels towards them, facilitated him to open his heart and access something very deep within him.

Christine says that devotion was a feeling of immense gratitude and appreciation for how the teacher and the teachings were helping her. It was a feeling of close connectedness and interdependence. Devotion is the highest, deepest and most profound level of love which is not dependent on conditions and ordinary levels of relationship. Devotion is the doorway into who we really are. It is beyond birth and death. It is not giving love to the teacher because they need it or that they should be worshipped. Devotion benefits the student, rather than the teacher. Devotion is also described in a way of embodying what they have learnt and now teach. Christine says that devotion helps us develop a deep connection to the absolute truth or our fundamental goodness, so that we are divine within and that becomes our presence that we can become a tremendous source of benefit to others.

So, for her the result of feeling devotion is the connection to the absolute, to

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divine, limitless love, to absolutely know the goodness within all of us and how we can then use that wisdom, knowledge and experience to help others, in her case, particularly in times of great loss. This is evident in her work worldwide in hospices and hospitals with people who are dying and supporting families who have lost their loved ones and in training staff in doing the same.

Julie talks about devotion in slightly different words, yet there is a similar atmosphere. She says that in Process work, the word devotion is not used, because it is connected to the teacher, but in fact there is a devotion to the dreaming process. It is all dependent on people's dreams which are different. She says Arnie does embody following the dreamin<sup>g</sup> process, yet, although he is the identified teacher, so to speak, people still have to follow their own processes. She uses the word mentor-ship, rather than devotion. She says this is a spiritual idea which encompasses a direct and personal relationship with a teacher /mentor who engages deeply in who you are. Again the result of this process is similar to the devotional process in Tibetan Buddhism, but as she says, to say that we are following someone that we are devoted to, is not a popular mainstream idea.

In her saying that she stayed in Zurich because she adored Arny and the work and then describes what was happening at that time, we can feel her excitement. She says 'it was really special, fun, an era of discovery.' This is the atmosphere, the sense of inspiration, something we know we cannot leave, a passion and specialness and preciousness that emerges when we have found 'our path of heart' or the thing that we become devoted to. She also says Max is also an important teacher for her, that she adores him and then talks about his good qualities, eg. being heartfelt, brilliant etc. This is no different to when Ross and Christine talk about their Tibetan teacher in a devotional way. In other words there is a loving, inspired and respectful attitude when talking about the teacher.

However Julie says that she is not really identified with devotion either to Arny or process work and that it is unexplored for her, but then she says that of course she is devoted to process work. She talks also about the difficulty of using the word devotion and the associations with it. This is where I can identify how many of the comments made by process workers are in fact, 'devotional' attitudes

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and expression, but they are not identified with. Devotion is seen as an external phenomenon, rather than an internal one. However, when both Julie and Jytte reframe the conceptions of what devotion is into eg, dedicated to follow their dreaming process and the irrational, the term and concept is fully identified with and accepted.

Julie states quite clearly though that there are huge, deep spiritual components of the teaching and learning of Process work, without calling it devotion. Therefore, it becomes apparent that it is the word itself and the ideas that come with it in the West, rather than the actual process of devotion that forms the stumbling block.

Jytte describes devotion as connected with the relationship to your own dreaming and following that. Devotion is having awareness in the moment and being open and awake to, and supporting all the different processes that are happening. The result for Jytte was that she discovered that 'process work will support you, in where you need to go. She explains that\_in process work the most sacred and holy thing which is beyond everything else is following your own dreaming. This is the process of devotion and it is awareness that keeps you to your dreaming process. The result of this and being in a community where people are supporting this, is that you are not perceived in a static state, but 'as an everchanging thing '

Therefore where these ideas all seem to meet is that when we are being open, awake and aware of what is happening, whether to the Tao or a teacher, who is embodying Nature, then we are being devoted. The difference is that Buddhist students, in viewing their teacher as always awake or enlightened, choose to engage in an alchemical devotional relationship, which is a fast path to themselves waking up. Process work students seem not to identify with the word devotion, even if it is being devoted to following the Tao. They also do not view their teacher as enlightened, in terms of a static state, though they may feel that everyone has moments of enlightenment. Although the word devotion may not be identified with, within Process work, it is clear from these interviews that the teacher, who embodies following the Tao, or having free and spacious mind, is

the person that students, who then become teachers themselves, love and have respect for.

To return to the original hypotheses, we can now examine whether they have been proved or not, from the data I would maintain that the first is partially proven. We can see that devotion is a tool, on the relative level to assist people to become more open and receptive to the truth of what is. Within Buddhism, the teacher is definitely the vehicle through which this process occurs. However, within Process Oriented psychology, there is concern over the word, devotion, itself and the teacher is only seen as the vehicle if that is the Tao of what the student is following.

The second hypothesis is proved, in that devotion enables a trust to develop and deepen, so that eg. a Process worker can follow the Tao, no matter how inexplicable or mysterious it seems. This is the true ability and skill to not only step into the unknown, but to follow and 'hang out' there, trusting the process until temporary resolution is reached, or not, as the case may be.

Prom the comments made, it is apparent that devotion, or being open to the Tao helps us recontact deeper levels of ourselves which are normally out of our everyday awareness. Also with its roots in Taoism, spiritual warriorship, shamanism and 'other realities,' Process — Oriented Psychology is certainly a therapeutic modality that itself is a spiritual path. People may not be aware of this aspect or choose not to follow Process work in this way, but it seems clear that it can be utilized in this way.

## **CONCLUSION**

There seems to be two main differences between the concept of devotion in Tibetan Tannic Buddhism and Process Work. It is the actual use of the word itself and devotion to what? The word devotion, when examined simply, means to dedicate oneself and be open to the truth and the absolute nature and reality of what is. We can do this by connecting with and following the path of the heart.

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When stripped of all its negative connotations, we can see that to engage in both Buddhism or Process work in an ongoing way, the qualities of devotion are certainly required. Devotion in Buddhism is associated with a teacher figure, albeit representing or embodying the teachings. Devotion in Process work is aligned with following the Tao or the process of what is happening. In Buddhism, the teacher is in more of a fixed role, whereas in Process work, the teacher or leader is the one who has more awareness in the moment. Although in Buddhism, the role is more static, as there is agreement that the identified teacher has enlightened mind, when examined, enlightenment is still seen as a process.

Tetsugen, a Zen Master said that there is no such thing as complete enlightenment. *'Zen is your life — it is life itself! — and you must always go further and deeper.'* 76 Sogyal Rinpoche says that *if* there is a good student, sometimes he or she may become even better than the teacher. Even though the student is better, the *greatness* of the student and the tradition does not mean that the student then says, look, I am better than you! The student still has devotion and respect for the teacher.

From these interviews it is clear that both paths encompass a deep and meaningful spiritual and psychological journey for the student. They are both intimately connected with working with the mind on different levels which requires a great inspiration about what is being taught. Both include love, respect and openness towards their teachers. Both are definitely in the realm of the spiritual as well as the relative world. Both work with the projections of the mind. They employ different methods, yet awareness is, paradoxically the goal.

From this research, I would conclude that devotion, in fact is not, per se. an intervention or tool that can be used within a psychological setting. However, I do think that it is a new metaskill for the therapist, because it is a very particular state of mind or process that allows the process worker to feel incredibly inspired, open and receptive to the truth of what is happening now. It is a state that, although not continuous, can be constantly reaccessed using certain tools and is beyond conceptual mind, similar to 'mu' in Zen Buddhism. Dropping or letting go of the conceptual thinking mind, allows one to open to the Tao, without preconceptions or expectations, 'should's and shouldn't's.' 76 Headed Dragon River. Peter Matthiessen. Shambhala

This then facilitates the process worker to be aware, mindful and heart open to what is needed moment by moment, similar to shamatha meditation, coming back to the breath. This state of openness or devotion is somewhat similar, in process work terms, to being in a high dream and can produce a strong commitment in the individual to embark and continue on a journey that can be challenging and difficult as well as ecstatic and heartfelt. It is the state that allows you to access divine and limitless love. The client also can access this state, which is observed when eg, the client becomes passionate about studying process work.

So, I would submit that the concept of devotion is relevant to Process work as a metaskill. It is the openness to the moment, whether that be our process or the teacher and awareness of what is happening. The tools or methods of noticing and following are different in each model and yet they are both devoted to NOW. Devotion to process, to Nature, to life, to the teacher are ultimately not different, in the sense of devotion being willing to be open and receptive to what is, without preconceived ideas and limitations. It is beyond the ordinary mind. Even to be open to being closed or ungrateful or angry or negative is still being devoted to what is happening, whether positive or negative. Allowin<sup>g</sup> that to be and simply noticing and having a willingness to explore unknown areas is devotion.

The following are all ideas in Process work that are mentioned that are not so dissimilar to concepts in Buddhism. Picking up all the roles, being fluid, not getting stuck in an identity or caught in any one thing, seeing everything as a dream, negotiating at the edge, detaching, following irrationality and engaging in deep and personal relationships. In Buddhism the concept of the sangha or community is paramount. When you become enlightened, so does everyone else. The community is the mandala and all become enli<sup>g</sup>htened together. In Process work, the group field is essential. Individual enlightenment is also a group phenomenon. We know that if you can't pick something up, someone else in the community can and will. Enlightenment is a group experience.

In Buddhism, it is our perception that is central. How we perceive the world affects what we see. In Process work, we recognise that whatever we see out there is also a part of us. Whether we see the world or universe as not external to us, like the Buddhists, or we experience all the parts out there in the world as ourselves, like Process workers, the result is the same. These interviews show that we can experience our sentient essence or Buddha nature, acting out of spacious, free and original mind. Everything depends on our perception and awareness in the moment.

*'Like a flickering star, a mirage, or a flame,  
Like a magical illusion, a dewdrop, or a bubble on a stream,*

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*Like a dream, a flash of lightening, or a cloud —  
See all compounded things as being like these.'*

Instead of fighting against the darkness, we can simply light candles of devotion. There is so much light, there is no more darkness. We can simply switch on the light of devotion and the darkness disappears. In Process work, we are interested in fully being the darkness, and in doing so, the darkness disappears. Enlightened mind may be realising we are beyond both darkness and light. Perhaps it is our individual freedom and fate to choose which path we engage in. For those of us who are interested in awareness, I would recommend both!

THE END or MAYBE JUST THE BEGINNING!

