

**Whispers of the whole:  
Tending to the system by the system for the system**

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*“You are not in the body, the body is in you.”*

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

This chapter explores some of the subtle processes that determine the dynamic fabric of organizational life. The purpose is to extend the conceptualization of well-being in organizations within the frame of the group relations approach by taking into account latent and manifest, mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual processes.

Group relations can be seen as an evolving framework for exploring human behavior in organizational systems. Revisiting some of the assumptions that underlie group relations practice, surfaces questions as to how these assumptions may both serve as well as limit the work of the consultant and of the organizations with which they work.

The material presented here is based on the dissertation “Body, Soul and Role: Towards a holistic approach to well being in Organizations”. The approach looks at metaphors from group relations theory, mind-body disciplines, and different spiritual traditions to offer an integrative framework for understanding and cultivating health and vitality in human systems. In this chapter I assume the reader’s familiarity with the group relations approach and suggest that integrating the complementary perspectives available in spiritual and mind body traditions can contribute to the evolving discipline.

### A metaphoric approach

The approach taken in this chapter is explicitly a metaphoric one with the intention of offering fresh and useful metaphors for thinking about how group relations and its derivative approaches can contribute to well-being in organizations. The process of abstractive seeing embodied in metaphor entails describing one thing in terms of another in order to evoke new ways of seeing and knowing. The juxtaposition of group relations, mind body and spiritual disciplines invites new metaphors to emerge in an integrative context.

A metaphoric stance is one that suspends the notion of reality and asks “what if” questions about possible links. What if the organization has a “psychic matrix” in which all the individuals participate? What if the organization has something like a “dreambody” – a dynamic psyche-soma in some ways similar to that of an individual? What if the organization has a “soul” and an “essential purpose”? What if...? And what

are the ways that these pictures can enrich or enhance understanding of the different dimensions of organizational well-being?

The creative potential of a metaphor lies, to an extent, in the willingness to maintain an explorative attitude toward it. No matter how encompassing and comprehensive a metaphor, it is necessarily limited in that it offers only one of many possible prisms. The seductive quality of a particular metaphor may lead to the temptation to reify it. The faded metaphor can then become a prison rather than a prism, an exclusive and excluding “truth” that limits creativity.

Group relations was conceived in the 1960's and was inspired by psychoanalytic and systems thinking of that time. While these fields have since evolved significantly, some of the premises from that time still guide group relations practice. Core to the group relations approach is the practice of exploring ways in which conscious and unconscious pictures or metaphors of organizations held in the mind not only reveal but also determine the experience and behavior of the people in the organization. In applying this methodology reflexively towards group relations as a system, it is helpful to ask which metaphors may have become reified or faded and to look at the way in which some of the “collective enough” pictures in the minds of practitioners may color the nature of group relations work in unconscious ways.

In this chapter I present some of the complementary systems concepts from group relations spiritual and mind body perspectives. The purpose of the discussion is to offer a glimpse of what a dialogue between these fields may look like and to offer a reflective work/play-ground for generating an integrative understanding and practice of organizational well-being. I look at how these systems concepts may be reflected in the concept of primary task that is central to group relations and the implicit and explicit paths of healing and wholeness through which the field can contribute to society.

### **Group relations**

First time members of group relations inspired conferences are often awed by the very palpable experience of being unwitting participants in collective unconscious processes of which they have little awareness and over which they have even less control. As the conference proceeds they learn about the way in which emerging patterns of behavior of individuals and subsystems offer insights into the dynamics of the conference institution as a whole. They may notice how seating arrangements, the time when specific individuals speak, the length and tone of interventions, metaphors that are used, the clothes people wear, punctuality and lateness, and even changes in the environment, such as hotel staff entering a working session or the incessant buzzing of a bee all become part of a curiously interwoven drama around emergent common themes. Early in the conference they may wonder at patterns that surface and brush them off as unlikely coincidences or curious synchronicities. However, often an unfolding apprehension that something else is at work develops - a deepening sense of being part of a larger dynamic in which they find themselves unconsciously taking up their own roles in often surprising

ways. Engaging with the possibility of a group unconscious, some kind of subtle transpersonal informational field of which one is part, can be an enticing yet somewhat uncomfortable undertaking. Learning about the workings of such phenomenon within and between systems and the way in which one is activated by unconscious matrixes, confronts one not only with the limitations of one's own autonomy, but also with profound questions regarding the nature of perceived boundaries and of reality. It is at this junction of the nature of perceived boundaries that modern science and ancient spiritual wisdom are today meeting.

One of the basic precepts of group relations work is that there is a group or system mentality that is largely unconscious and determines the behavior of the group as a whole. This can be described in terms of the matrix postulated by Foulkes and Anthony who in their work on group psychoanalytic therapy differentiated between the occupation, which is the manifest declared activities of a group, and the preoccupations which are the latent occupations that a group may have.

The network of all individual mental processes, the psychological medium in which they meet, communicate, and interact can be called the matrix. ... In further formulation of our observations we have come to conceive these processes not merely as interpersonal but as transpersonal. (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957, p. 26)

Through the psychoanalytic systems prism, organizations were seen by group relations practitioners as open systems in relation to their environment and to the interdependent subsystems within them. A purposeful human system is viewed as having a primary task – “a task that it must perform if it is to survive.” (Miller and Rice, 1967, pg.25) The functioning of a system is generally explored through its capacity at any moment to effectively further that task. Miller and Rice described the primary task as “a heuristic concept which allows us to explore the ordering of multiple activities... (and) to construct and compare different organizational models of an enterprise based on different definitions of its primary task” (Ibid pg.25)

The existence and survival of any human system was seen as depending upon continuous interchange with its environment, whether of materials, people, information, ideas, values or fantasies. The boundary across which these “commodities” flow in and out both separates any given system from, and links it to, its environment. It marks a discontinuity between the task of that particular system and the tasks of the related systems with which it transacts. Because these relations are never stable and static, and because the behavior and identity of the system are subject to continual renegotiation and redefinition, the system boundary is best conceived not as a line but as a region. That region is the location of those roles and activities that are concerned with mediating relations between inside and outside. In organizations and groups this is the function of leadership; in individuals it is the ego function. (Miller, 1989, p. 11)

“In this view, emotional experience is not bounded by one’s own individual skin, and is not the property of the individual alone. Rather it is bounded by the system or systems in which individuals interact in collaboration or in conflict with each other and with their context” (Armstrong, Bazalgette, & Hutton, 1994, p.4).

In viewing groups as open systems, practitioners paid attention not only to the tangible transactions across boundaries within and between systems of an organization and between the organization and the environment, but also to the intangible transactions across the boundaries -- to the transfer of emotions, attitudes, images, and fantasies and to the essential interrelatedness of emotional experience. The unconscious emotional transactions across the boundaries were understood primarily in terms of identification, projection, projective identification, introjection and other psychological mechanisms. A guiding question derived from this metaphor is: What are the so-called boundary regions of a group/system matrixes, what is the nature of the psychological movement across these boundaries and what does this mean about the functioning of the system? In this sense group relations practice may still be bound by a “boundaried” picture in the mind of human systems that looks primarily to psychoanalytic theories to understand how these transactions occur across these hypothetical boundaries.

With the evolution of science over the last century, we have witnessed significant transformation in the way systems are conceived. There has been movement from a mechanical analysis of components of a whole to viewing phenomena in terms of the interaction between system and environment; from a search for fundamental building blocks of matter to the exploration of the organizing patterns of a whole considered as an entity beyond the aggregate of its parts. The emphasis has moved from a view of causality as linear to one that is non-linear and even to the possibility of co-dependent arising. Whereas atoms were seen as existing independently in empty space there was a shift to viewing space as full, as force fields with transitory areas of coherence, entrainment and pulses with relatively stable manifestations. The view of disorder and dissipation of energy as destructive and leading ultimately to entropy has been replaced by a belief in the essential role of disorder and chaos in bringing about higher levels of order. Living systems are no longer considered predictable or as functioning according to deterministic laws, with change being somewhat reversible. Instead, specific events are seen as unpredictable and as such, the source of creativity and generativity within systems - concepts that had no place in previous models. A separation between form and meaning, and between structure and process allowed new concepts to arise. Systems were understood to be energetically open while organizationally closed, and a holographic model was put forth as an alternative to the hierarchical one. An either /or view of conflict between opposing theories was replaced with the belief that opposites are essential and integral to systems, and paradox is an inevitable aspect of human beings’ necessarily partial view of nature. Even the notion of boundaries, so fundamental to the earlier view of systems thinking, has been put into question by quantum physics. In biology and physics the concept of global coherence due to iterating patterns across networks emerged as did the idea of non-local causality based on the whole being more than the parts and the structure of the whole as an ongoing embodiment of implicit

enfolded organizing patterns. These new insights about systems offer fertile ground for continuing to explore the way in which mental, emotional, physical and spiritual dynamics play themselves out in human systems.

From Taylor's time management studies, through cybernetics and system engineering to concepts of complexity and creativity in organizations, scientific theories about systems have provided evocative metaphors and practical tools for thinking about organizational systems. The messages of popular management theorists (Wheatley, 1992; Zohar, 1997; Lewin & Regine, 1999), who draw on the new scientific theories coincide with and reinforce some of the latest trends in organizational theory. These trends emphasize patterns of relationships within the organizations, free flow of information, embracing change and the creation of flexible organizations, promotion of diversity, and porous and changeable boundaries. Many organizational theorists are arguing for a holistic view of the organization and its environment. They advocate value-driven organizations that serve the environments of which they are an integral part, decentralization of authority and responsibility, and the active encouragement of play and risk-taking to stimulate creativity. Within organizations, hierarchical discrete organizational structures are being replaced by nimble, networking, project-based, re-configurable super-teams that claim to embrace chaos and complexity. Leaders are challenged to think of their organization not only in terms of what is manifest, but in terms of the unseen relational, emergent patterns, and in terms of the potentialities which need to be nurtured. They are encouraged to loosen their reins and lead with a trust based on creating shared values and visions through ongoing processes of dialogue and reflexive learning which promote the capacities of the organization for self-organization and self-renewal. These approaches, inspired by scientific theories are however often prescriptive in their analogies, and have not addressed the complexity of the human psyche and the unconscious human dynamics in organizations. They use the new scientific understanding of complex systems and quantum physics to infer what healthy organizations should look like. However advocating noble causes and explaining the rationale with scientific analogies does not in itself address why it is generally so difficult for organizations to function according to the impressive values they formulate. When group relations expands its psychoanalytic open systems perspective to include the new scientific theories, it will have a unique potential to explore some of the discrepancies between the new organizational trends and the difficulties in actualizing their values.

The desire and intention to "do good" or to "embrace complexity" is only a small part of actually doing it. From the psychoanalytic point of view, the wish for harmony and the fear of conflict can lead to a process based more on flight than depth of understanding. In fear-based flight to happy, healthy, conflict-free environments that embraces ideas of diversity, cooperation, respect etc. the very human struggles relating to power, sex, envy, competition, aggression and fear of mortality are often denied. In such a dynamic, fear is generally repressed rather than dealt with in a constructive manner. Slogans such as "embracing diversity", "family values", "stewardship", and so on, used without acknowledgement of emotional and unconscious dynamics may induce repression rather

than encourage introspection. The repressed material is then likely to fester beneath the surface only to later burst out in more violent ways.

It is revealing to work with an organization on exploring where the culture of the organization actually cultivates the very inverse or shadow side of the values they overtly uphold. This process is often evident in NGO's and non-profit organizations that suffer from the very issues they try to fix in the outside world. Examples of this are: conflict resolution organizations that fall apart from internal conflict, women's organizations that work to assist abused women and develop strong persecutor-victim dynamics among staff and welfare organizations where staff work in depleting, restrictive and joyless conditions. When issues such as those of power, competition, and sexuality are driven underground, repressed emotions are likely to erupt with greater force. They may manifest in a variety of mechanisms from scapegoating to scandal or irreconcilable division within an organization. Violence, for instance, can be denied within an organization by exporting it in the form of pollution, unethical behavior toward competing organizations, or the outsourcing of poorly paid manufacturing operations to sweatshops. Group relations offers a prism for exploring these and other forms of conscious and unconscious dynamics as a system, but until now has done so primarily through the open systems prism. Quantum theory and other new sciences offer metaphors for accessing additional levels of organizational dynamics and exploring alternative ways for understanding the source, location, potential and manifestation of emotion, fantasy and behavior in a system at any given time.

Quantum physics also provides a potential bridge for exploring the spiritual dimension in organizations. In the interface between studies of consciousness and science, there are increasing references to the concept of a non-local mind, or impersonal mind. The personal mind is seen as somehow part of and having access to the non-local mind, part of the spectrum in flow through which non-local mind is manifested. It is in these concepts that the new sciences revisit age-old spiritual wisdom about the nature of reality and the essentially systemic understanding of interconnectedness and oneness.

Quantum theory, says David Bohm, points to "the need to look on the world as an undivided whole, in which all parts of the universe, including the observer and his instruments, merge and unite in one totality. In this totality, the atomistic form of insight is a simplification and an abstraction, valid only in some limited context." (Bohm, 1990, pg.11)

"The proposal for a new general form of insight is that all matter is of this nature: That is, there is a universal flux that cannot be defined explicitly but which can be known only implicitly as indicated by the explicitly definable forms and shapes, some stable and some unstable, that can be abstracted from the universal flux. In this flow, mind and matter are not separate substances. Rather they are different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement. (Ibid, Pg. 11)

Given, he says, that measure is insight created by man. A reality that is beyond man and prior to him cannot depend on such insight. The immeasurable, he says, is the primary reality. “The illusion that the self and the world are broken into fragments originates in the kind of thought that goes beyond its proper measure and confuses its own product with the same independent reality.” (Ibid, Pg. 25)

These scientific insights are concurrent with our rapidly changing sense of social reality. We no longer live in discrete communities. From global politics to pollution, technology, travel, and terrorism, our concepts of boundaries of time and space as we knew them, are rapidly dissolving. The economy is moving from tangibles to intangibles in an increasingly virtual marketplace.

Psychoanalysis traditionally considered the oceanic feeling of mergence, and mystical experience in defensive terms. While this may be accurate in some cases, to frame the mystical primarily in this way, can also be a defensive strategy, in that it maintains a fantasy that the mind through study can master analyze and comprehend the mechanics of an ultimate truth. This scientific “picture in the mind” excludes the possibility of a level of reality that cannot be measured and can only very partially be apprehended in non-rational, intuitive or even mystical moments. Psychoanalytic thinking today is revisiting the nature of mind and consciousness and there is a vibrant discourse between psychoanalysis and spiritual traditions, in particular Buddhism.

It is challenging to speculate on how a spiritually and scientifically imbued understanding of interconnectedness can offer group relations new possibilities of exploring the nature of consciousness and human experience in organizations. Within group relations there has been reflections on the concept of a global mentality where inter-group (intercultural, inter-institutional, interfaith, interracial and international) dynamics are played out. How far are we willing to go in thinking about the limits of the global matrix? What about consciousness beyond human systems? In the past this was the realm of spirit and religion. Today it has also become the realm of science.

In group relations the guiding assumption is that it is the unconscious of the people inside and outside of a specific system that affects the behavior of the system. But what about the possibility that consciousness, or the non-local mind, the infinite field of intelligence or whatever we wish to call that dimension of experience, is the determining factor, and that psychological defense mechanisms are surface expressions of a far more encompassing informational pattern of which human consciousness and behavior are just one limited aspect? The discovery of the individual unconscious by Freud catalyzed a huge shift in paradigms. Its implication was that we were far less rational and in control than scientists or philosophers over the last few hundred years would have had us believe. The possibility that there may be a group unconscious necessitated an even greater shift in our willingness to contemplate the limitations of our autonomy or sense of separateness. To think in terms that consider human consciousness as just one aspect of a larger consciousness that goes beyond human beings, demands letting go of far deeper assumptions. Group relations conferences can provide an opportunity to explore this

question through experience, but in order to do so it requires integrating that which group relations has itself excluded. It necessitates letting go of some of the pictures in the mind regarding the nature of reality, the cosmos and God or no-God that group relations, given its scientific and psychoanalytic roots brings to these questions. Quantum theory and spiritual perspectives for instance imply that human consciousness is interwoven with the consciousness of non-human aspects of creation. What are we as group relations practitioners willing to explore around these question in conferences and in our work in organizations?

There is still an inherent tension in group relations between the older scientific worldviews of which open systems theory is a part and the potential for exploring the infinite aspect of interconnectedness beyond systems theories. Gordon Lawrence suggests that with the evolution of social thinking, the ecological spiritual worldviews are now a more accepted domain of study. The microcosm of the large group he says can be a powerful space to explore the “imagos or no-imagos of the cosmos” that we carry with us. I would suggest that this is true also for experiences of the transcendent as they unfold not only within the large group but also within other events of conferences.

### Spiritual systems perspective

There is a form of engaged Buddhism called the Tiep Hien Order, the Order of “Interbeing” founded by Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam during the war. The term Interbeing he said is a new word in English which conveys “The many in the one and the one containing the many”. ...“I am, therefore you are. You are, therefore I am. That is the meaning of the word ‘interbeing’. We ‘interare’”. (Nhat Hahn, 1987, p. 87)

The sefirotic system is the basic kabbalistic framework and language through which reality is perceived. ....The sefirot are powers or potentialities inherent within the Infinite light which traverse from infinity to the finite creation. (The universe described by the sefirot is relative to, and is affected by, the viewer, as explained in relativity theory and in quantum physics.) The two infinity points of the microcosm and the macrocosm unite in their one genesis, the primordial tzimtzum (constriction – *my translation*). ....A man who looks into his psyche sees the same universal structures and processes that are active in the physical world. This is the basis for the power of man to understand the Cosmos and to achieve communion with all levels of existence. (Afterman, 1992, p. 96)

All that we see is a reflection of consciousness, and to see requires pulling the veils from the eyes, pulling away the illusions that limit us in time and space, the illusions that say we are separate. We are not separate. We are all together. (Ywahoo, 1987, p. 73)

The Native American worldview sees cycles of life and death and the individual always in relationship with family, clan, nation, and planet. This relationship is



biological, mental, emotional, spiritual, economic. The circle is inclusive. By virtue of being on Earth, being a member of the family of humanity, we are included in the circle of life. (Ibid p. 139)

We are in a very delicate balance within ourselves and with other people and our environment. We are all vibrating together, we are one resonant field, one field of mind. If there is an excess of unclarified emotion in the heart of the people, then there is unclear emotion expressed by the nation. There is no way to separate yourself from your nation and planet. This is your home. (Ibid p. 179)

The predominance of the scientific and rational paradigm in Western society, established credibility on the basis of what could be seen and measured, with little value placed on knowledge attained through intuition. Soul, spirit, and symbolism were relegated to the realms of the arts and the mystical. The arts had a more socially accepted function than mysticism, which was generally placed at the fringes of society and, at worst, invalidated as irrational and mad. In this fragmented mode of existence in organizational life, the high value placed on the rational led to a large degree to the repression and even splitting off of the spiritual from the organizational context. In other words the spiritual dimension was the repressed, excluded aspect.

Today, in the wake of the predominant scientific worldview, the spiritual dimension, or perversion thereof is surfacing in global awareness in different ways. This includes on the one hand the new age spiritual movement that looks towards a reawakening of the universal essence of spirituality. This movement however is often in danger of not dealing fully with the darker aspects of human experience. On the other hand we see the perversion of the spiritual in wars and terrorism in the name of religion, and exclusive ownership of God and truth. To understand these dynamics and access and work with the spiritual dimension in group relations conferences entails expanding our own experience and mapping of the transcendent with faculties and worldviews beyond the psychoanalytic systems prism. Healing the split created over the last few centuries between the rational and the spiritual involves de-demonizing the concept of spiritual and reintegrating it into its natural place (alongside and not instead of reason and science). The shift of the scientific stance out of an omnipotent one, opens the way back to the spiritual in the everyday.

Albert Einstein was asked one day by a friend ‘Do you believe that absolutely everything can be expressed scientifically?’ ‘Yes, it would be possible,’ he replied, ‘but it would make no sense. It would be description without meaning - as if you described a Beethoven symphony as a variation in wave pressure.’ (Einstein, quoted in Suzuki, 1997, p. 29)

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the universe. A part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to

affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures. (Einstein quoted in Suzuki, 1997, p. 37)

While I will draw on different texts and personal experiences to explore the spiritual dimension of organizational life, I do so as an outsider of any formal tradition and therefore run the risk of misunderstanding certain concepts or taking them out of context. Spirituality is such a broad construct that for the purpose of this chapter I choose to focus on one aspect of it: the deep recognition common in many spiritual traditions that each individual is a unique but integral, and in some ways undifferentiated part of a larger system with a unique evolutionary path and purpose in service of the whole.

From this perspective, spiritual wisdom is inherently systemic, pointing to one infinite system in which all is interconnected. It views the diversity of all as reflecting the infinite within the finite, and emphasizes the integral relation between spirit and matter and between thought and what human beings perceive as reality. The new scientific paradigm describes interconnectedness in ways surprisingly similar to spiritual insights over the centuries. In the book “Einstein and Buddha” (McFarlane, 2002) presents parallel statements about the nature of reality by modern scientists alongside others from ancient and current spiritual texts.

From the systemic understanding of interconnectedness, the spiritual approach derives principles of meaning, purpose and values as to the implicit evolutionary path of human beings. Spiritual growth entails moving beyond the prisms of duality and separation towards the growing recognition that each aspect of existence, human and non-human is a unique but integral, and in some ways undifferentiated part of a larger dynamic and constantly evolving and transforming divinely imbued system. From this perspective, spiritual development is the evolving connection with one’s unique core in the context of contribution to the larger system, the belief in a higher wisdom and the acceptance of the inevitable paradoxes and challenges life brings. Interconnectedness and its behavioral implications cannot be apprehended by the rational mind, and spiritual language is one of metaphors. The paradoxes of separation and unity are transcended in the language of stories, poetry, koans, and ritual and point to an experience of transcendence that can never accurately described in words.

The level of reality where things are perceived as separate is not denied. In the spiritual view described here, there is a pervasive attitude of celebration of the manifold diversity through which ‘the one’ expresses itself. Each aspect of creation is seen as holding a unique aspect of “the one” and a unique path back to “the one” or to the dimension of unity. The prism that is aspired to is one that is able to contain the diversity and the oneness simultaneously.

When one sees Eternity in things that pass away and Infinity in finite things then one has pure knowledge.

But if one merely sees the diversity of things, with their divisions and limitations, then one has impure knowledge.

And if one selfishly sees a thing as if it were everything, independent of the ONE and the many, then one is in the darkness of ignorance. (Bhagavad Gita XVIII, 20-22, Quoted in Mascaro, 1965, p. 19)

Spiritual contemplation in which all is interconnected and imbued with divinity is considered to have clear behavioral implications for “right action” and to offer pathways for transcending suffering. If all is inseparable, any action that affects another living or non-living entity necessarily affects also the one who perpetrates it. From this view, most suffering results from the alienation caused by dualistic prisms of everyday perception. Spiritual contemplation attends to the unique place of every aspect of creation through a prism that is non hierarchical and non judgmental and thus fosters the ability to contain paradox and ambiguity. The prism of separateness and value-laden hierarchy leads to frameworks such as ‘us and them’, ‘good and bad’, ‘win and lose’, ‘plenty and scarcity’ and arouses fear, greed, envy and aggression to self and others. Transcending these habitual prisms through understanding interconnectedness is thus considered more likely to promote well-being on the individual and collective levels.

The idea of the purpose inherent in the dimension of diversity is central to the spiritual perspective. In his book, The Soul’s Code: in Search of Character and Calling, James Hillman put forward “the acorn theory” in which he revisits the idea that each individual is born with a special calling. “You are born,” he said, “with a character; it is given; a gift, as the old stories say, from the guardians upon your birth” (Hillman, 1996, p.7). In the book, he tries to bridge between psychological and spiritual concepts of ‘calling’.

The call to an individual destiny is not an issue between faithless science and unscientific faith. Individuality remains an issue for psychology – a psychology that holds in mind its prefix, “psyche,” and its premise, soul, so that its mind can espouse its faith without institutional Religion and practice its careful observation of phenomena without institutionalized Science. The acorn theory moves nimbly down the middle between those two old contesting dogmas, barking at each other through the ages and which Western thought fondly keeps as pets. (p. 11)

The idea of the unfoldment of innate potential is reminiscent of Jung’s approach to the unfolding of life. Stevens suggests that Jung’s psychology actually became a cosmology, because Jung saw the journey of personal development towards fuller consciousness as occurring in the context of eternity. Jung, he said, saw the psyche as an objective part of nature and subject to the same laws that govern the universe.

The infinite, the eternal, the imperishable were ever present and imminent for him as the bedrock of reality, all the more fascinating for being hidden (occult). “Life has always seemed to me like a plant that lives on its rhizome,” he wrote. “The

part that appears above ground lasts only a single summer. Then it withers away – an ephemeral apparition.... Yet I have never lost a sense of something that lives and endures underneath the eternal flux. What we see is the blossom that passes. The rhizome remains.” (MDR)<sup>1</sup> The great secret is to embody something essential in our lives. Then, undefeated by age, we can proceed with dignity and meaning, and, as the end approaches, be ready “to die with life”. For the goal of old age is not senility, but wisdom. (Stevens, 1994, p. 29)

Jung’s spiritual approach to psychology drew attention to the unique creative potential of each individual. His term “individuation” refers to the lifelong developmental process through which a person gradually works toward developing his or her consciousness, self-awareness, self-expression, and uniqueness. Tapping into the creative wells of the unconscious and the illumination of the shadow aspects of the self, furthers the process of actualizing one’s potential. It entails recognizing the operation on the archetypes, as well as the inherent conflict of opposites.

For Jung, aging was not a process of inexorable decline but a time for the progressive refinement of what is essential. ‘The decisive question for a man is: is he related to something infinite or not?’(p. 28)

The spiritual perspective holds that what is essential or core, is the unique potential linked with, nourished by, and in service of that which is transcendent. To achieve individuation, or to actualize one’s essential, special, or implicate purpose may thus entail peeling off non-essential layers of personality, letting go of ego, transcending false perceptions and negativity, as well as tapping into one’s infinite creative resources in service of the larger system.

The idea of calling can metaphorically offer a more holistic understanding of the concept of primary task on the group level or organizational level? In integrating the spiritual perspective it may be appropriate to use the terms ‘essential purpose’ or ‘calling’ rather than primary task of an organization. These terms add the element of refinement of the core potential of the organization that has the potential to be unfolded and refined in service of the larger system and in the context of infinity.

What about the possibility of a calling or essential purpose beyond the individual level? What about the possibility of a calling or essential purpose of an organization? The idea of a collective purpose beyond the individual is not a new one and can be found in spiritual literature. In some Native American traditions, each clan and each nation is seen as having unique collective purposes in relation to the whole. (Ywahoo, 1987, p.184, Simine Forest, 2000)

Simine Forest’s discussion of the four inherent walls of the ancient Medicine Wheel can be interpreted in this way.

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The ancient Medicine Wheel teachings show that there are four inherent walls, each specific to a race. Every race must move through them and the wall that is faced is not necessarily the inherent direction a race may represent. These veils demand to be faced, learned, and transcended by every one of us. For the Red people, the wall of past and shame in the South appears as a dark hole within, where hope is often buried deep in the shadows and nights of our hearts. .... In these times, the Black people, the Africans and Afro-Americans, share the same wall of shame as the Native American, while the Eastern people must meet their wall in the East. This wall is called the wall of religion or dogma, often translating into their religious system as an obsession for illumination or as a bloody fanaticism that we have observed, for example in the last decades, bringing terrible clashes between opposing the religious beliefs.

Ultimately, the White people have two walls to penetrate: the western wall of arrogance, self-importance, and illusions, and, afterward, once the lesson is learned, the northern wall of conditioning and lack of true wisdom. (Simine Forest, 2000, p. 17)

Similarly, in Jewish tradition the idea of the collective purpose is also common.

An individual's destiny certainly includes the unique mission he or she has in his or her particular life. But as Jews, our ultimate mission is to play our part as members of "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19.6), ruling over the angels through our prayers, Torah and mitzvot. When we rise to this mission we become true b'ney Adam, children of Adam, the pinnacle of creation. This is the ultimate healing. The takhlit of the Jewish People is the starting point of "Sound of the Shofar – Dominion. (Greenbaum, 1995, p. 235)

In human being's anthropocentric way, we tend to view people as creating the organization. However, we can perhaps see the collective, in this case an organization as a manifestation of an energetic core principle around which people collect and disperse. From this perspective, the core energy or 'soul' of the organization could be seen as the organizing principle magnetizing and organizing its members no less than members impact the organization. In the same way that Jung saw the process of individuation as a "progressive refinement of what is essential," the principle underlying an organization could follow a similar process of ongoing refinement in discovering and expressing its essential purpose. As people join and leave the organization, they would contribute to or hinder this process. The idea that an organization may have a consciousness of its own, that the people within it are somehow a part of, is likely to arouse resistance... but what if..?

The apprehension of unity achieved through spiritual contemplation is neither an intellectual understanding of interconnectedness nor a moralistic device. The full

apprehension of unity, however, can be seen not as thought or behavior based on rules and regulations but, rather, as a deep comprehension, insight, or awareness which, when experienced necessarily changes one's perception and mode of engagement. The mystical experience is often described as one that apprehends the place beyond paradox. It is in the spirit of enquiry that the psychoanalytic and spiritual paths can meet. For this to happen it is essential to look at those psychoanalytic prisms that limit the full exploration of the transcendent realm.

Gordon Lawrence in his paper *Signals of the Transcendent* (1993) addresses in new ways the exploration of the transcendent within the large group in conferences.

When people participate in the large group and come to know the text, as I am calling it, in a hermeneutic-spiritual way, they lead in to bringing into being the unspoken—what is behind, below, beyond the text. This is parallel to the transcendent becoming immanent. ...In particular, consultants offer working hypotheses from their experiences of being-with the group in their roles to address the significance and signification of the psychic, political, and spiritual relatedness present in the context of the large group. ...Psychic and political relatednesses are well-enough recognized. The term "spiritual" I want to use in this context as being evacuated of all conventional religious meaning, and to use it in the sense of linking, being connected to whatever is the Other beyond ordinary sense data. Since conferences began, participants are more aware of ecological issues, for example, which is a view of the world that is ultimately spiritual. "The connections between science and spirituality is through the ecological world view of science" (Wijers & Pijnappel, 1990, p. 67). To have talked about the spiritual, except in a conventional religious sense, 20 years ago in working conferences, would have been to enquire into aspects that, then, were not part of the accepted domain of discourse. (Ibid)

Using the new scientific theory, Lawrence goes on to suggest that the large group provides opportunities to explore the "imagos, no-imagos" of the cosmos, and suggests that in the large group the "contained contains the container" and that the "implicate order of the large group, if you will, contains the implicate order of society, etc." Lawrence describes his work with nuns in Ireland as alerting him to the transcendent dimension in the large group in new ways. He describes a situation when a nun mentioned they should pray for the work of the group.

It took me some time to catch on that she was using prayer in her sense of working at the primary task, paying attention, coming-to-know the life of the large group with its implicate realities. Attention involves an act of concentration and a submission to what is there that is not of oneself alone. It implies a withholding of ownership, wishes, desires in order to experience reality as the Other. It is "hearkening." Prayer I now take to be an invitation to the act of reverie that makes possible a different mental disposition, which, as yet in the history of

the group, is not available to participants in the group. What the nun's leadership resulted in was a thoroughgoing exploration of realities.(Ibid)

He describes the feeling in a large group in Zagreb, when people were reflecting on personal tragedies that the feeling in the room was one of intense listening, patience, but not despair. He mentions how he had to resist to interpret with a premature metaphor in order to order his disordered feelings. Such a metaphor he said would "destroy the possibility of being with the incomprehensible."

I did have associations to Turquet's Oneness, but the oceanic feeling was not there, for the tenor of the group was of being committed to work. The group knew that we were in a mental space none of us had experienced before. At the time, I felt that there was an element of sacredness in the spirit of the place, the room in which we were working. On reflection, I felt myself to have been at some personal interstice in history, in the sense that one was posed with the perennial questions: How come things come to be what they are and what future is there for us? (Ibid)

To describe the feeling he uses Peter Berger's concept of "signals of transcendence," in the sense of "transcending of the normal, everyday world". This experience he said was a turning point in that

"It has made me try to come-to-know what may be present spiritually in groups, as well as being alive to the psychic and political phenomena; to attempt to be available for Thinking 2; to value reverie and attentive hearkening; to be available for any connections between the transcendent and the immanent; to be neither lost in the Self nor the Other."(Ibid)

Chattopadhyay looked at the implication of seeing boundaries as illusions in organizations (1999). While ideas of reframing boundaries are not new in organizational work, psychological and spiritual prisms contribute different emphases. The group relations perspective highlights the emotional coloring and tendencies, and the way boundaries often serve as social defenses against anxiety. Within the spiritual context, the idea of boundaries as illusions is not just an intellectual practice of deconstruction but an experiential awareness of the interconnected, infinite and transcendent context of the boundarylessness. Questions that would accompany the exploration of the boundaries in the mind, would thus include those that explore which illusory boundaries serve the well being of the larger system, and which create a sense of fragmentation, alienation, isolation, and hostility. What aspects within the self are denied by the creation of boundaries and how are those aspects in their exclusion exaggerated and perverted so that they become even more fearful? To what boundaries do we cling and why? What are the fears behind releasing those illusions? What is our sense of relatedness to those who we perceive as on the other side of the boundary we have created in our mind? What are the qualities of the bounded concepts we have reified? To what extent do they promote a

sense of co-creation within a larger context, or to what extent do they feed fear, war, conquest, acquisition, and neediness? What kind of organizational practice can be used to develop the organizational consciousness (consciousness implying a sense of compassionate interconnectedness and awareness of all boundaries as illusions including those of the self and the organization)? How does this understanding suggest practices that serve the organizational essential purpose and well-being and those of the people within it?

Group relations conferences offer a unique opportunity to study the transcendent in the everyday and the finite within the infinite. They provide a space for exploring the processes related to the actualization of the essential purpose and core potentials of individuals in an organization with those of the organization itself. To do this, practitioners need to be available to explore this dimension. As in the psychoanalytic stance, the position is one of enquiry rather than prescription. The spiritual stance suggested here is an explorative one that is willing to look at and through the infinite manifestations of dark and light that confront us individually and collectively in the here and now of our experience.

### **Holistic Approaches to Mind Body Health.**

The mind body approach to health and healing is also essentially a systemic one and linked in some ways to a spiritual perspective of the deep interconnectedness of all of creation.

Heal, whole and holy all have the same root and (that) holistic healing requires that the way we achieve wholeness not only makes us more complete as individuals, but also reintegrates us into the whole of nature. The unique value of medicinals made from natural substances is that they weave us back into our place in the body of the earth. But there's an even more profound dimension to the deepest healing: it's also spiritual. The same root that gave us heal and whole gives us holy, too. (Ballentine, 1999, p. 5)

The state of wholeness that heals us must be extended to include the spirit, and reconnecting to the whole means freeing yourself from the narrow consciousness of the constricted ego. Letting go the fear and isolation of the narrow ego allows you to open up to a larger sense of who you are, to identify with a more encompassing consciousness -- the universal matrix that sustains us, the healing force or higher power of the great spiritual traditions. (Ballentine, 1999, p.10)

On an individual level, holistic approaches to health and healing take into consideration a person's lifestyle, emotional and attitudinal links with his/her physical symptoms, as well as environmental influences. Likewise, a holistic approach to organizations takes into account general life and workstyle of members and the relationship between individual



and collective well-being and organizational cultures, structures, processes, products, and problems. Metaphors drawn from the developing disciplines of mind-body studies and alternative medicines also suggest holistic ways of looking at the relationship between latent and manifest processes and structures as well as the link between mind and body and between consciousness and matter in organizations.

The conceptual separation between mind and body attributed most notably to Descartes impacted the evolution of modern medicine. The development of mind/body medicine reflects a return to previous knowledge of the inseparability of the two. On the notion that mind is distinct from the body, Candace Pert, a neuroscientist said:

Well that just goes back to a turf deal that Descartes made with the Roman Catholic Church. He got to study science, as we know it, and left the soul, the mind, the emotions and consciousness to the realm of the church. It's incredible how far Western science has come with that reductionist paradigm. But, unfortunately, more and more things don't quite fit into that paradigm. What's happening now may have more to do with the integration of mind and matter. (Pert in Moyers, 1993, p. 180)

According to Pert, her research indicates that emotions are manifested biochemically in neuropeptides that transmit information throughout the body as a kind of "psychosomatic communication network."

The mind is some kind of enlivening energy in the information realm throughout the brain and body that enables the cells to talk to each other, and the outside to talk to the whole organism. Study of neuropeptides and their receptors furthers the understanding of the integration of mind and matter. (Ibid, p. 189)

There is a current revival in the West of age-old healing techniques developed through intuition, study, and experience within a wide range of cultures. These include among others, acupuncture, shamanism, herbal and flower remedies, and healing through energy fields. Common to all the practices is an understanding of the interconnectedness of body, mind, environment, and lifestyle. Physical symptoms are viewed as expressions of systemic imbalances, the cure for which must take into account the whole system (the individual, his/her mental, emotional, and in some approaches spiritual state and the environment in which he/she lives). While the more scientific and psychological approaches focus primarily on understanding the connection between mind and body, approaches based on age-old traditions generally integrate attention to spirit and nature in wider holistic conceptualizations.

In their application to organizations, metaphors from these disciplines evoke a holistic view of well-being, which draws attention to the multiple factors at work in organizational life that need to be taken into account. For instance the repressed, excluded, or split-off parts of the organization can be seen as manifesting themselves in

physical processes and behavioral symptoms of the system as a whole. Diseases which plague a society at a certain time can be seen as reflections of emotional or spiritual challenges facing that society. McWhinney suggested that tuberculosis, a disease of the breathing mechanism predominant in the industrial age, can be seen as manifesting “the loss of spirit in the fetid factory environments” (McWhinney, 1990, p. 12), Myss linked the polio epidemic in the United States to the “crippling” economic depression. (Myss 1996, p. 105)

In his book *Radical Healing*, Ballentine reviews different alternative approaches to healing. Many of his descriptions lend themselves to rich metaphors for thinking about health and vitality in organizations. He explains how natural remedies use an understanding of the subtle informational patterns that exist in the universe and that are found also in human beings and in nature.

Natural remedies are made from any number of substances plucked out of the complex web of nature: leaves, roots, flowers -- even mineral deposits or insects. Each such component of the natural world has some basic quality or essence that sets it apart and makes it unique. Analysis of humans also reveals groups of similars, groupings of functional likeness...

In the Western mind, however, classes of plants and classes of humans belong to separate universes. If I asked about a similarity between the daisy and the hyperactive child, I'd be regarded as confused. One of the least known truths of natural science, however, is that there are basic organizational patterns that cut across our commonly accepted categories. A given quality or essence can underlie both the flower and the hyperactive child. This is based on the fact that both are functional components of a larger, encompassing natural order...

Two classes of “cells” in the organism called Nature -- a particular plant and a specific person -- can share a certain pattern of function. When they do, their congruence creates a resonance that can be used therapeutically. Such patterns may be obvious in the physical appearance of the plant. Their expression in the person, on the other hand, is likely to be subtler, coloring physiological functioning perhaps, or even the way thoughts flow in the mind. For example, the aspen tree has leaves that tremble or “quake” in the wind. Its flower essence is frequently used to calm the anxious mind. Something of the nature of that plant is echoed in the person's neurophysiology and in his or her mental processes. Although this principle is quite foreign to what has until recently been considered scientific thinking, it may become a key element in the science of the future. It is certainly a fundamental part of the medical wisdom of the past. (Ballentine, 1999, p. 26)

Diagnosis and intervention take place to a large extent on the energetic or informational level:

It may be helpful to conceive of this reorganization as occurring first at a level within the body-mind complex that is more subtle than the physical. You might think of this as the “energy level.” Just as the acupuncturist's needle will redirect the flow of energy or chi in a specific channel or meridian, so might an herbal remedy reorganize, in a more general fashion, the overall pattern of energy flow. The result, the energy shift, then has an impact on the physical body and how it functions. (p. 27)

The healing approaches described by Ballentine pay particular attention to the way in which subtle informational patterns cut across human consciousness, emotion and physiology and nature. The implications for organizations are manifold. This perspective involves broadening and deepening observational skills and knowledge relating to informational patterns of states of mind and emotions within the organization. It explores the links between these and the manifest physical disease or dysfunction in individuals and groups within the organization as well as in the organizational processes and structures relating to the primary task of the organization. It also raises questions regarding the relevance of informational patterns that cut across man, nature, and inanimate objects and the workings of energy in organizations.

While the group relations approach provides some insight into the kind of emotional and attitudinal patterns that influence behavior in organizations, it does not deal adequately with the spiritual or somatic aspects of organizational life, nor with the physical, natural, and man-made products and environment of the organization. The following discussion about a homeopathic, miasmatic approach to disease and its implications for organizational diagnosis and treatment is just one example how metaphors from the theory and practice drawn from mind-body and alternative medicine disciplines can be used to throw light on aspects of organizational dynamics.

Ballentine wrote that Hahnemann who articulated the principles of homeopathy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century noticed that there was a tendency of diseases to return after they had cleared up. Hahnemann then postulated that there was an “underlying pull towards the state of illness -- a sort of undertow that operated beneath the calmer waters he had been dealing with in treating the sick. He called this underlying derangement a miasm.” (Ballentine, 1999, p. 99)

The miasmatically affected body is, like a culture plate, the soil the germ grows in. Finding the gonococcus or the scabies mite thriving in a patient showed the homeopath which miasm was present. This is confusing for those of us who are used to thinking of the germ as the cause of the disease. The concept of miasms approaches disease from a perspective that might be considered more spiritual, since causality is seen as operative on a higher or subtler level, not merely

physical. The organizational state of the system creates vulnerability to microbial growth. And it's on the subtle organizational level where the high-potency homeopathic remedies work. (p.103)

Ballentine sees “ miasms as the manifestation of unconscious belief systems and archetypal psychological structures that furnish the underpinnings of our thoughts and ideas.” (p. 100) A metaphor of organizational miasms invites attention to the miasmatic climate of an organization that provides a culture in which certain diseases may flourish. Organizational miasms can be seen as the beliefs and assumptions that operate much of the time outside awareness yet shape patterns of thought and direct and circulate subtle energy in organizations. From this perspective, one asks: What is the “characteristic ordering of thought energy and physical function” responsible for chronic symptoms and problems in an organization? At the level of group consciousness, this approach complements the spiritual approach and group relations theory by highlighting the energetic link between consciousness and matter. Intervention can occur on both levels. One may either promote awareness about the limitations of the belief systems that block the flow of energy, or one may intervene in a behavioral way that is directly linked to the relevant aspect of consciousness. The following discussion about psychic miasm could apply equally to organizations.

Ballentine presented the three basic miasmatic patterns underlying chronic illness defined by Hahnemann. They are:

**Scabies:** (the itch): The disorder is focused on the skin. While it is the most obvious to the eye, it is also the least serious. The underlying pathologic process is one of deficiency.

**Sycosis:** (gonorrhoea) are disorders of the mucous membranes -- the linings of the passageways that lead into the body (sinusitis and bronchitis, mucous colitis, middle ear congestion, and gonorrhoea). The underlying pathological process is one of excess.

**Syphilis:** which destroys innermost aspects of the body. Diseases involve vital structures such as the brain, heart and bones and often entail erosion and destruction of those organs. The underlying pathological process is one of destruction or erosion.

Ballentine noted that we might wonder what is being said in the language of disease by each of these processes about the mental and spiritual state of the person affected.

In a similar way, I suggest that metaphors drawn from this framework can inspire new ways of thinking about chronic illnesses in organizations and alert us to different qualities of organizational miasms in the mind and their typical manifestations, for instance:

**Disorders that are skin deep** - based on deficiency or neglect of human and material resources (e.g. Unattractive or neglected facilities, poor public presentation of products, etc.).

**Disorders of the passageways** that lead into the organization, the processes, and structures that connect with the outside world and are diseased by excess (e.g., waste or hoarding based on greed, unmitigated competition, etc.).

***Disorders that destroy the innermost aspects of the organization***, such as the basic ability of the organization to function as a unity (e.g., power or envy-based conflicts often fuelled with fear, greed and aggression which lead to organizational splits or dissolution, irreconcilable differences among central figures, etc.).

In the same way that this miasmatic framework can be applied to exploring wellness and imbalance in organizational life, so can other frameworks such as the chakra mapping of energy centers provide insight into ways of understanding energetic processes and processes related to well being in organizations. (Ostroff, 2000)

Ideas of group mentality, collective consciousness and the collective unconscious are relatively common and accepted within certain disciplines. They do, however, in some ways reinforce the conceptual split between mind and body. Mind-body medicine and alternative approaches to healing emphasize the integral link between consciousness, emotions, and physiological processes. Some of the mind-body traditions work with the idea of a subtle body that can be seen as the informational field linking mind and spirit and the physical body.

On the individual level, the concept of a subtle or dream body is evident in a variety of spiritual traditions and psychotherapeutic and body work techniques.

The gaseous, fluid and rhythmical nature of dreambody experienced by the yogi contrasts with the conscious concept of the body as an amazing machine with a hidden spirit. The flow and rhythm of the dreambody constitute a “field” experience to use a term from physics. The field is a definite sensation of one’s self as a process with only vague extremities in time and space. In contrast, the real body can be defined as an object with a certain weight, temperature, etc.

Instead of particles we have relatively high field densities at certain areas in space and time. These field densities and their associated discontinuities and intensities correspond to what classical physics calls matter. According to Albert Einstein, “We may regard matter as being constituted by the regions of space in which the field is extremely intense...There is no place in this new kind of physics for the field and matter, for the field is the only reality.” (Mindell, 1982, p. 15)

Later Mindell added:

The concept of the dreambody as a relatively high field intensity also corresponds to Taoist concepts. In Taoism the world is permeated by dragon lines of force ... which coalesce so to speak, in certain objects. The Tao is a force field permeating the universe. The human being in a certain place and time picks up a certain Tao and lives this in his own way. (p. 16)

What is the implication of the metaphor of a dreambody for groups? Is it possible, for instance, that there is also a collective psyche-soma or collective dream body which can be explored when looking at groups, organizations, or even nations? The metaphor of a

collective dream body evokes the idea of a relatively cohesive dynamic energy field that links a group, organization, or nation as a whole. The field would probably influence and be influenced by the energetic purposeful core, soul, or spirit of that individual or collective entity as well as its changing consciousness. This would imply that individuals are part of numerous collective dreambodies including those of their families and the groups and organizations of which they are members. The impact of these energy fields on the individual will depend on the varying degrees of intensity of the connection between the person and the larger collective systems to which he or she is linked.

The mind/body perspective suggests a symbolic link between a symptom and the nature of the specific thoughts and feelings. Family systems theory and group relations raises questions as to the link between specific dynamics of a system and the way in which individuals unconsciously choose and are chosen by the system to take on a role at a certain time. The way in which a member of a family may symbolically translate family dynamics into physical symptoms is an area that has begun to be explored. Pictures and accompanying emotions prevalent in the system are translated symbolically by members into somatic symptoms. It is likely that a person who embodies a symptom somatically has a special relationship to the particular issue that is being symbolically expressed through him and an emotional/physiological predisposition to the symptom he develops.

What is going on somatically for people within an organization has not been studied in terms of its systemic meaning. The argument put forward previously is that the thoughts and feelings held by individuals are not only of the individuals themselves but of the system as a whole. As mind/body studies make clear, thoughts and emotions have physiological components. Therefore, thoughts and feelings of the system held by an individual have a physiological component as well. If a manager has a heart attack or a back problem perhaps it reveals a dynamic of the organization as a whole that is located within the person because of what he represents within the system as well as because of his own personal predisposition. The physical symptom may be explored as messengers of unconscious dynamics that are otherwise intangible and hidden.

Once again, parallels can be drawn in thinking about organizations. Various organizational phenomena such as chronic neglect of the building, or lateness in delivery, faulty products or incessant staff conflict can be seen as symptoms which symbolically express some unexpressed issues of the group matrix, the unconscious informational pattern in the organization. The symptoms need to be understood by exploring the possible symbolic messages expressed by them and by taking into consideration the unique history and characteristics of the particular organization.

It is not unusual for writers to use body imagery when talking about organizational dysfunction or health. Tom Peters used images such as “merger indigestion”(Peters, 1987,p.38) and describes how “During the last fifteen years, most big paper companies have been hemorrhaging badly”(Ibid. p.68). In their book, The Healthy Company, Rosen and Berger used numerous metaphors of this type. “If American business is not yet in the coronary care unit, it certainly suffers from a severe case of structural

arteriosclerosis.”(1991, p. xvii) “Values”, they said “are the center of the enterprise; they circulate through every cell and artery of a company”( p.10) and they spoke of “a vital business that lives and breathes a healthy philosophy”(p. 11). Moss Kanter wrote that “increasingly the desire for ‘fat’ organizations, which relied on redundancy, encouraged overstaffing, and could afford to waste people on nonessential tasks, has been replaced by a preference for ‘lean’ organizations with focused efforts.” (Moss Kanter, 1997, p. 140). In another book, she said “some companies assume that if a little cutting is a good thing, a lot must be even better. They starve themselves into a state of organizational anorexia, the disease that occurs when companies become too thin” (Moss Kanter, 1989, p. 98).

In these metaphors writers seem to be tapping into an important archetypal dimension of the way in which we tend to project onto the corporate or collective body of the organization. Perhaps they also imply the possibility that there are similar information patterns in dysfunction in individuals and organizations with parallel symptoms. Indeed, an organization with anxiety around the issue of adequate staffing may develop something like organizational bulimia. The dynamic would probably involve fits and spurts of hiring and firing during stressful periods. The preoccupation about organizational leanness may develop into something like “organizational anorexia.” This might be manifested in the organization constantly working at cutting down staff and the preoccupation with leanness taking precedence over and sabotaging the work.

We will not be able to ascertain whether this way of looking at organizational health and disease is just a useful metaphoric link, or whether there exist parallel processes whereby similar patterns of thoughts and feelings on the individual and the organizational levels are translated into physical phenomena. The ways in which diseases are described in medicine are also only limited approximations of reality -- names, metaphors, and descriptions of phenomena rather than accurate and comprehensive accounts of cause and result. Thus the question as to the relevance of this metaphoric way of looking at organizational phenomena must rest on its usefulness and the richness of information that it can provide. The proposal presented here is that exploring the organizational dynamics through mind/body prisms may offer diagnostic insights as well as possible opportunities for healing interventions. By identifying processes in organizations that are reminiscent of certain diseases, one may look to the mind-body disciplines to explore what the typical thought patterns are that are associated with such symptoms as well as processes for restoring health and well being. It is then possible to explore the implications of this knowledge for transforming those thought processes and images within the organization.

Many approaches to organizational development have emerged from the same scientific system as modern medicine. Like medicine, management theory has often reflected symptom-based, highly specialized approaches and analysis and intervention based on concrete measurable data about what is considered relevant aspects of the system. The psychoanalytic approach has similarly been criticized for focusing on pathology and symptom rather than a proactive approach to holistically nurturing optimal development. The holistic approach means not only working on healing what is diseased but also promoting and maintaining optimal well-being.

A parallel can be drawn with approaches to organizational development. The holistic approach emphasizes the need to attend to the preventative and health-promoting aspects of the organizations, rather than focusing primarily on a crisis intervention approach.

Until now, I have discussed some of the complementary systemic perspectives in the three different disciplines. The following are some reflections on the primary task and other aspects of healing and wholeness that may emerge from an integrative approach that draws on group relations, spiritual and mind-body areas of knowledge.

### The Primary Task or Essential Purpose and Methodology

In order to contemplate an integrative approach it is useful to look at the framing of the primary task of group relations. On the group relations web page we see:

Group relations conferences are designed to provide opportunities for learning by taking part in all the sessions and interacting with other participants and staff members of the conference in a variety of groups and settings. The conference is seen as an institution in its own right and the sessions are destined to mirror real organizational settings.

Most group relations conferences focus on issues of authority, leadership and organisational life. For example, the aim of the Tavistock Institute's Leicester Conference is to bring together understanding of the conscious and unconscious processes of work groups in human systems, in order to be more effective in working with the underlying dynamics within and between organisations and between these and the wider, indeed global, society. Some other group relations conferences have themes of contemporary social issues. (Available online at <http://grouprelations.com/index>. (accessed 16 August 2005))

As reflected above, the primary task is generally framed in terms of providing experiential opportunities for learning about different aspects of organizational life. Traditionally this learning is about leadership and authority in systems. Because of its roots in psychoanalysis, the learning task is often explicitly differentiated from the task of therapy. The purpose of the learning is not always explicitly stated. When the purpose is stated as above it is generally framed in terms of learning for greater effectiveness in leadership.

What pictures in the mind are contained in or evoked by the primary task defined in terms of learning? Does the concept of learning for greater effectiveness reflect a scientific, pragmatic paradigm where knowledge is seen as a value in itself and as serving greater mastery of the world? While "learning" in itself appears a seemingly neutral (value free) task it may in fact reflect implicit values of pragmatism and objectivity. The reasons for differentiating the learning task from a therapeutic one are clear, however, this explicit differentiation may also create an artificial split and



delegitimize or repress the possibility of learning for *individual and collective healing* that is an inherent potential of the conferences.

There seems to be an implicit wish on the part of practitioners to contribute in healing ways to society through the learning, yet there is an inherent tension between this wish and the pragmatic, seemingly objective framing of the learning in the primary task. This tension is reflected in the vignette about Ken Rice, described by Lawrence Gould.

“In 1969 - the last conference Ken was to direct before he died - the *I.G. 2* once again became the focus of powerful current social dynamics. Namely, race relations and racial equality. In that year there were a substantial number of black colleagues in the membership including Rhetaugh Dumas, Ophie Franklin, Rachel Robinson, Leland Hall and Claude Thomas. You will not, however, be surprised to hear, that there weren't yet any black members on staff, nor were there any other minority groups represented. Nor, excepting Margaret, were there any women on staff. In any event, Ken had sent around an interpretation in the *I.G. 2* that the issues around race were so important and compelling that they could not be constructively dealt with within the boundaries of the conference - that is, interpretively - and as such, a focus on these issues made the task of learning all but impossible. Little did we imagine that with this message, Ken was already formulating a plan to engage these issues, which he announced to us at our staff meeting later that evening.

Namely, he had decided to meet with the group of black members - alone - outside the working session boundaries of the conference, to engage them in an exploration of their relatedness to the conference institution, both in the here and now, and in the future. Well, we once and future revolutionaries bleated like stuck pigs. How, we demanded, could he even consider doing that? And why couldn't we join him in such a meeting if he did? And how about the impact on the rest of the conference membership? And didn't this violate everything that he taught us about primary task and boundaries, and sticking to them? And wouldn't doing this destroy the conference? And so on, and so on, and so on. Ken heard us out, quite respectfully at first, but with increasingly ill-concealed irritation. After patiently trying to explain his reasons, to little avail, he told us in no uncertain terms that the issues raised were more important than the conference itself, that alienating and insulting the black membership by only responding to their quite real concerns interpretively, would have long-lasting and destructive consequences for the future of group relations work in America, and that finally, on the point of bringing us along to such a meeting, he felt that none of us were sufficiently clear-headed about these issues to constructively play a role. This lecture left us, all at the same time, furious, chastened, ennobled by Ken's example and in deep admiration of his extraordinary courage. It was a lesson in leadership none of us present would ever forget. And, as in my previous anecdote, the proof of Ken's extraordinary sensibilities was that virtually all the members of that group subsequently took staff roles, and recruited, directly or indirectly, a large number

of the next generation of black members, who themselves stayed with group relations work.(Gould, 2000)

The way in which Rice worked with an intentionally healing intervention in relation to a painful societal issue outside the boundaries of the conference, and the indignant response of the staff members is telling. It seems to reveal some of the implicit pictures in the mind held by practitioners. It raises questions such as: Are the healing and learning tasks mutually exclusive? In what ways do the collective pictures in the mind of staff serve and limit their ability to fully take up the healing potential of the conference within the current understanding of the methodologies?

As the spiritual and ecological worldviews becomes more mainstream within global politics, today's organizational leaders are gradually integrating social responsibility into the *raison d'être* of their organizations. The "spiritual" dimensions of meaning, purpose, healing and values and their contribution to the larger system are increasingly being integrated into the explicit framework within which corporations work.

What would the integration of meaning, purpose healing and values into the primary task of group relations look like? In what ways would it impact the field and how would it necessitate a transformation of basic methodologies? What is the unique potential of the group relations enterprise in proactively serving the well being of the larger whole? Is the task to provide opportunities for inquiry into the dynamics of groups and organizations? Or, is the task to contribute to the well being of society by providing opportunities for learning about these dynamics? What would the difference be between a conference with a task defined as "to learn about leadership and authority in systems" and a conference with a task "to learn about how processes related to leadership and authority contribute to the health and vitality of human systems?" In what ways would conferences holding these tasks be similar or different?

Drawing on the spiritual idea of the unique purpose of each individual, I suggest that the terms *essential purpose* or *calling* described above expand our way of thinking about primary task. The term "essential purpose" reflects the relationship between the manifestation and evolution of the essence of an individual or collective, and the purpose of unfolding or expressing the unique essence in service of the larger system. The emphasis is on relationship - the relationship between the core of each aspect of the system and the larger whole.

The idea that an individual, team, organization or any collective has an essential purpose, a unique gift/, that is its life path to uncover and manifest, has implications for the way in which we conceive of leadership. From this perspective, leadership is not located in any one person but in every part of the system.

Leadership can be seen as a process that serves the essential purpose of the whole and of the parts. It is a process of aligning the core of the subsystems and the larger systems, the parts and the whole. Leadership can be seen as the process of revealing and offering an

aspect of one's uniqueness to the whole so that others are able to link with or discover that aspect within themselves. This can be true for the individual, organizational or any other collective level. For instance, one organization may play a leadership role by stimulating other organizations to express that same aspect within themselves. Healthy leadership thus contributes to the evolution of the self and the system. Leadership is not located in any one person but moves and alternates among the individuals in the system by highlighting the aspect held by the person that can most serve the system at any given time. If as in the holographic model, the whole is reflected in the parts, then all the ingredients are within all, albeit with different intensities. In any system at any given moment a different part may need to take the lead in illuminating or revealing its essence in order to awaken that aspect in the whole.

Over the last ten years questions relating to the meaning, purpose, healing and methodologies of group relations are emerging among practitioners. Sometimes more traditional conferences may integrate themes of spirituality or healing processes within the conference. In other instances, conferences inspired by the group relations tradition use significantly different tasks and methodologies. As the open system of group relations integrates new knowledge from other disciplines the identity, task and boundaries of the field are shifting significantly and requires questioning some of the basic assumptions with which practitioners work.

An approach that synthesizes the group relation, mind body and spiritual perspectives will look at a system in terms of the way in which it furthers its essential purpose. The essential purpose will be defined in terms that give expression to the core potentialities of the system within the context of service to the specific environment in which it exists. This approach encourages learning about unconscious processes and limiting pictures in the mind, in order to be able to liberate and redirect energy for work on the essential purpose. Identifying these processes also enables individuals and groups to take up their roles with the optimal authority and creativity rather than being unconsciously activated by what is being projected into them.

The spiritual perspective highlights the need to explore the quality of the task itself and the quality of the *intention* of the individual or group in the way they take up their role in relation to the task derived from the essential purpose. This involves discovering and aligning the essential purpose, potential and values of the individuals in the organization with that of the organization as a whole. It emphasizes the need to find ways that the functioning of the organization will contribute to the well being and holistic evolution of those within the organization as well as in the wider community. It will look to foster the capacity to work with a sense of love, service, and spiritual growth through learning about, managing and transforming conflict, pain, and dilemma.

Mind/body traditions, which deal directly with the concept of well being on an individual level provide a wide variety of metaphors for thinking about the optimal functioning of organizational systems. Many mind/body disciplines integrate wisdom from psychological and spiritual fields, and their contribution is particularly in linking the

emotional and psychological with the physical realm. This is done, for instance, in looking at the possibility of energy flow and blocks that impact organizational functions, the link between the emotional, mental, and spiritual processes and their impact on the subtle body of the organization, and on the concrete and behavioral dimensions.

How would integrating these dimensions into the task impact the methodology? Group relations focused primarily on the mental emotional aspects of human behavior. In conferences, most of the learning occurs by sharing of feelings, thoughts, insights and images. This is generally done while members are seated. Every modality offers certain learning possibilities and inhibits others.

In the early 1990's I initiated the use of art materials in conferences suggesting that events using art materials may offer additional opportunities for learning about organizational behavior. At the time I wrote in an unpublished paper

“The work with art materials expands the framework’s parallel to that of a working institution by providing an additional medium for expression, exploration, creation and transformation. The activity involves the active use of personal and external resources, including material resources, in the processes of creating tangible products. The art materials are materials of activity, creativity, and productivity. During the activity with the materials the system enacts metaphorically its struggles with its creative drives and inhibitions as well as the evolving relationships and relatedness between systems.

Like speech, the work with art materials and its symbolic visual imagery, is both an arena of action as well as a medium for exploration. The primary and unfamiliar nature of the visual symbolic images that is less given to rational censoring than the verbal medium provides an additional window into the unconscious. With verbal exploration, the events are generally sequential. The processes involved in the physical activity with the materials, bring to the fore a wide range of simultaneous verbal and non-verbal behavior as modes of expression typical of the complexity of action and interaction within an institutional setting. The dynamics of movement around resources and activity in time and space are made available for reflection - both in the process of the activity as well as in the product.

The verbal mode of input is not necessarily the dominant mode in all individuals. Individuals in an organizational setting have different styles of functioning and can express leadership and authority and can innovate in a variety of ways. (Ostroff, 1990)

In mind-body disciplines the somatic experiences and symptoms are crucial messengers of the person’s emotional and mental processes. The body is constantly learning and processing information and has its own ways of knowing. In traditional conferences

attention is paid to non-verbal behavior most commonly in terms of seating arrangements and acting out around the physical boundaries of time, space and structure (the chairs). By virtue of the fact that most learning happens while people are seated in particular structures, and by sharing verbally thoughts and feelings, the access to the spectrum of somatic experience is necessarily limited.

In the Body, Soul and Role conferences<sup>1</sup> members are provided with an opportunity to explore health and vitality at work. The events are designed to surface issues related to mental, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of their experience in institutions. One example of such an event for instance is the social sensing matrix, inspired by the social dreaming matrix. The social sensing matrix invites attention not only to dreams and reveries but also to the somatic experience of participants as a way of exploring experiences of interconnectedness and of developing an understanding of the psychic, political and spiritual pictures of the evolving system in the mind. The assumption is that the physical sensations reveal symbolic aspects not only of the individual but also of the collective system. In the same way that a thought is not only of an individual, the concept we are working with is that often times the physical sensation belongs not only to the individual but may be held by one person on behalf of the collective. In other events of the conference, using art materials, movement, sound and other modalities members and staff are able to explore, express and reflect a wide range of experience in organizations. In the ‘Gaia and Group Relatedness Conference<sup>2</sup>: A Conference on Nature and Creation at Work’, participants are able to explore the way in which relationship and relatedness to internal and external nature impacts the way they individually and collectively take up their roles. A number of the events in these conferences take place outside in natural surroundings.

For many years Gouranga Chattopadhyay has integrated a yoga event into the conferences he leads. The ‘FLAM’ conference held by IFSI on Femininity, Leadership, Authority, Masculinity, inspired by Jacqueline Ternier David and David Gutmann, integrates movement and sound of members and consultants as essential parts of the methodology. At the conference ‘Being, Meaning, Engaging: Resistance and Transformation in Systems’ sponsored by the Grubb Institute this year, the values are made explicit. In the conference brochure the director, Bruce Irvine states “The conference provides the opportunity for participants to use their full human capacity, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and experiential as a resource for transformation.” In the opening plenary the director presented the opportunity to explore the possibility learning from experience about interconnectedness and oneness within the conference institution.

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<sup>1</sup> Body, Soul and Role: An International Pilot Conference on Health and Vitality in Organizations held in Israel 1998. The conference was sponsored by The International Forum of Social Innovation, IFSI (France) and Tmurot (Israel). Numerous Body, Soul and Role conferences have since been held in different countries in Europe some under the sponsorship of IFSI, France and FIIS Belgium and one was also held in India co-convended Gouranga Chattopadhyay and Shelley Ostroff.

<sup>2</sup> In 2000 a new conference was developed called “Gaia and Group Relatedness: A workshop on nature and creation at work”. It was held for the first time in Israel and co-convended by Gouranga Chattopadhyay and Shelley Ostroff

Faith and belief were core concepts offered as resources in understanding institutional life. These are a few of the many examples of the dialogue at the boundaries of group relations and institutional transformation (IFSI) with the explicit integration of the physical and spiritual dimensions within the task and methodologies of conferences.

### Concepts of healing and wholeness from an integrative perspective

In all the group relations, spiritual and mind body approaches, the way in which thoughts and emotions are held in the body-mind are core to understanding well being. The group relations approach provides a way of looking at the symbolic, systemic aspects of thought. It explores the nature of collective projections based on common enough experience, especially in the way that they activate behavior. Spiritual perspectives focus on the illusive nature of habitual relating resulting from ordinary perception. Work is directed toward liberating individual and collective attachment to concepts and cultivating a deep understanding of interconnectedness in a way that enhances love, community, and service. Mind/body perspectives offer metaphors that draw attention to the link between thought and physiology and to the way thought is symbolically translated into physical symptoms. Applied to organizations, one may explore how thoughts are symbolically represented in physical manifestations in terms of organizational structure, behavior, and even architecture and design, and in turn affect the feelings and thoughts of the people. An integrative approach works flexibly with metaphors from these different realms where appropriate. Such an approach recognizes physical sensations similar to thoughts and emotions, as being “of the system” and steeped in common enough collective experiences, pictures in the mind and attachments to concepts. It recognizes that pictures in the mind, are accompanied by emotions and also by somatic experiences, behaviors, and manifestations in the subtle energy field and physical matter and opens new opportunities for addressing this level of diagnosis and intervention in organizations.

All three approaches use the experience of the “here and now” as a central tool for learning and also for growth. The emphasis of each is slightly different and one may consider how these different aspects are or can be utilized in a group relations conference. Group relations training involves creating spaces for learning through the here-and-now’ experience of participants. Members are provided with opportunities to learn about their own dynamics and those of the system by examining links between what occurs and what is expressed in terms of feelings, images, associations, and behaviors. The combination of action and reflection directs particular attention to the unconscious dynamics, and repressed and projected aspects in and of the system, and to the way in which individuals are given or take up roles in relation to these dynamics. There is an ongoing opportunity in the “here and now” to confront the relatedness with the actual relationships and thus transform the way in which one engages individually and collectively with the other.

A central concept of the spiritual prism described here, that is supported by the new sciences, is that all is flux, all is flow, nothing is permanent. This dynamic view of consciousness and matter has implications for well being. Spiritual contemplation of impermanence cultivates the capacity to let go of the pictures of past and future and the illusion of control, and in doing so fosters the capacity to be fully 'present' in the 'present'. "Reality", whether painful or pleasurable is seen as composed primarily of pictures in the mind. As human beings we tend to want to hold on to concepts, experiences, objects and relationships and even develop ideas of ownership towards ideas, people, things and even of land. This is an attitude that Buddhism often refers to as a 'clinging' or 'attachment' of the mind. The holding attitude may, on the one hand provide the illusion of control and of comfort in the known, however it also creates an anxiety around the issue of loss. Understanding and accepting the transience of all things allows for a greater acceptance of the principle of death and life in each moment. In each moment there is a death of that which was and a birth of that which is, that is embodied in the act of breathing. In the meeting of spirit and matter embodied in the breath there is a constant renewal that is the essence of life. The attitude of holding on or attachment is seen as obstructing the flow of the life force. The attitude of curiosity as to the present moment, and a relinquishment of the illusion of control allows one to greet the present more openness and wonder. Spiritual contemplation with attention to the breath allows one to get in touch with the nature of the mind-body and its tendencies to hold and to let go, to control and to allow, to fear and constrict or trust and expand, to take a position of knowing versus one of allowing and discovering. The breath is a tool to focus experience in the here and now and to expand ones experience of the infinite and the transcendent within the finite. All of the above are some of the healing and well being principles inherent in this particular type of spiritual approach.

Alastair Bain opens his paper "On Being Frozen in Time" with the following hypotheses and examines this concept in the area of group relations.

1. Everything else is a defence against the experience of the present moment.
  - 1.1 The failure to realize the experience of the present moment results in the creation of Time.
  - 1.2 When a group comes together to study the experience of the present moment, anxiety about catastrophic change is aroused.
  - 1.3 The catastrophic change that is feared is being one with creation (i.e. without time).
  - 1.4 The anxiety concerning catastrophic change causes a dispersal of group members into the past, the future, and what is 'known'.
  - 1.5 In this they can become frozen. (Bain, 1999,pg 127)

Numerous spiritual disciplines, in particular the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, also involve cultivating awareness of the here and now but with a different emphasis. The emphasis is not so much on learning about or analysing what is going on in the individual or collective mind. It is more on noticing how busyness of mind interferes with the ability

to be fully present with any task whether it be eating, reading, or working on a project. Rather than being preoccupied with future worries, past regrets, and the infinite pictures humans tend to project onto any situation based on previous experience, practices of mindfulness encourage what is known as “beginner’s mind” (Suzuki, 1970), the capacity to experience fully and freshly the uniqueness of any situation. The practice involves also looking directly, as an observer, at disturbing thoughts and feelings. It entails surfacing them in order to be able to encounter the way they limit and cause pain. Awareness is not repressing what is considered ugly, evil, or unharmonious. It is looking at these elements more objectively as the illusion that they are, so that one is less caught up and identified with the related thoughts and emotions.

Mind/body traditions also emphasize the cultivation of awareness of “here-and-now” experience as an important factor in well-being. Like spiritual practice, the breath is central to learning and healing. By being fully present to the most basic aspect of experience – the breath -- and by following the ongoing cycle of inhalation and exhalation, one is able to achieve deep levels of relaxation. (Benson, 1975) Attentiveness to the nuances of one’s psychosomatic experience is encouraged in order to notice and deal with subtle symptoms before they develop or become chronic. The body is also seen as holding important knowledge. In his book *Focusing*, (1978), Gendlin discussed techniques for tapping into the wisdom of the body and for using the knowledge the body holds as a resource for guiding one in choices and behavior. The learning about and through here-and-now experience by delving into less conscious aspects, attending to the body as a resource and guide, and cultivating being fully present in ones actions together contribute in complementary ways to well-being which can be applied metaphorically on the organizational level.

All three areas of knowledge emphasize the importance of being with what is, and of not repressing, splitting off or denying the painful aspects. The path to healing and growth is one of integration and is seen in the capacity to listen to the pain breathing into its physical sensations and thus letting it move. Sometimes it involves exploring its causes in the pictures in the mind and in so doing releasing the fears and thoughts that are its source. Breathing techniques are often used to transform pain both in birthing as well as in other healing techniques. The underlying idea is that fear creates constriction and does not allow for the energy to flow. Often pain will become chronic when one does not listen to it. The more one denies it, the more it has to shout. Listening to the pain does not mean immediately taking a pain killer. It means attending to its symbolic messages. Often if one just listens to the pain and breathes through it without necessarily understanding it, the pain will be able to move and leave the body.

The movement towards greater love is not one of denial or imposition but rather of owning what is in order to allow it to be reintegrated and transformed. It is the process of exclusion that is seen as the cause of fear, envy, hatred and greed. The process of integration and inclusion transforms the projections and opens the capacity for greater acceptance of self and other and for the growing apprehension of the oneness.

In conclusion



One of the central tools with which consultants come to their work are the paradigms of interpretation. Obviously there is no one or ideal paradigm that is totally integrative. This chapter suggests a movement towards incorporating a depth and breadth of knowledge and facility with the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions.

In the integrative approach to group relations it is also important to look at the place that is beyond interpretation, to the importance of listening without understanding. This would mean developing a capacity to allow spirit to move through the body of the organization without stunting its flow by overvaluing the need for understanding. The approach encourages exploring in direct ways the nature of the felt experience no matter how painful or pleasurable without rushing to defining meaning or evaluation. Lawrence pointed out the importance of allowing the transcendent experience in the conference to occur without prematurely conceptualising or ordering it. It seems worthwhile to examine the situations where allowing the experiences of both pain and pleasure to move through the group or organization with deep attentiveness and care-ful listening may be the most healing intervention of all.

Eisold (1995) maintains that given the multiplicity of schools in psychoanalysis and the internal questioning of basic precepts, it may be impossible to find a unifying theory of psychoanalysis other than that it may be recognized as a domain of study of irrational behavior. He suggests that skills in groping with irrational and baffling elements of human behavior may be worth more than an ultimate authoritative theory.

The dark side of interpretive engagement in these types of conferences is often evident in the use of hypotheses as a currency of power rather than of exploration and awareness. This shadow work promotes the fantasy that there is one accurate or ultimate hypothesis and leads to a situation where there is a vying for who can provide it. Following Eisold, it is perhaps the way in which we baffle rather than offer so called truths, that may allow for more understanding, especially if we bring to the work an openness to exploring the spiritual and physical dimensions of experience as well as the mental and emotional dimensions. It seems fitting to end with the following quotes by Thich Nhat Hahn.

From the viewpoint of ultimate reality, Right View is the absence of all views.  
(Nhat Hanh, 1998, p. 56)

The Buddha advised us not to be fooled by what we perceive. He told Subhuti, "Where there is perception, there is deception." The Buddha also taught on many occasions that most of our perceptions are erroneous, and that most of our suffering comes from wrong perceptions. We have to ask ourselves again and again, "Am I sure?" Until we see clearly, our wrong perceptions will prevent us from having Right View. (p. 52)

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