

**Right Feeling
Doorway to Transformation**

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RIGHT FEELING DOORWAY TO TRANSFORMATION

Feelings provide us continual opportunities to use any human experience as a vehicle for transpersonal awakening and transformation. Feelings open the door to our ability to make our spiritual truths real, to make them live and breathe in our human hearts and relationships.

In this article, I intend to begin to shovel away the distortions about feelings which have impaired our facility to be present to the legacy of transformation each moment offers. I will describe the practice of Right Feeling and demonstrate how it provides a missing link in our evolutionary journey.

Spiritual teachings which have been very clear about how to work with mind and breath to reveal transpersonal understanding have often left followers in the dry dust of denial or out in the cold iconography of transcendence when it comes to feelings. How often our careful equanimity crumbles when faced with estranged mates, parents, children.

How can we on the spiritual path handle our human rages, grief, fears, desires without separating ourselves from friends, family, lovers... life incarnate? How can we use feelings as a pathway to presence, both personal and transpersonal...the purpose for which they were designed? What does our relationship with feeling look like as we intensify our meditation practice and explore transpersonal experience more deeply?

We need to penetrate the fog surrounding feelings to see clearly the crucial role they play in translating spiritual truth into human action.

Buddha described the Eightfold path as a guideline to assist in reaching and maintaining enlightenment. The path consists of: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration.

Some may protest, "Right Mindfulness already includes feelings, proper practice is all we need". I agree. What I speak of here is what proper practice looks like with regard to feelings.

Thich Nhat Hanh in, The Miracle of Mindfulness, describes mindfulness as, "While washing the dishes one should only be washing the dishes, which means that while washing the dishes one should be completely aware of the fact that one is washing the dishes. At first glance, that might seem a little silly: why put so much stress on a simple thing? But that's precisely the point. The fact that I am standing there and washing these bowls is a wondrous reality. I'm being completely myself, following my breath, conscious of my presence, and conscious of my thoughts and actions."(emphasis mine) (p.4)¹

Notice that he does not specifically mention consciousness of feelings...a subtle point, perhaps, in a graceful description of the simplicity of being fully, mindfully present moment by moment. I believe, however, this kind of omission reflects a deeper antipathy toward feelings pervasive in many spiritual teachings.

IMPEDIMENTS ON THE PATH

Although Right Mindfulness definitely includes feelings, indeed Buddha included specific instruction on mindfulness of feelings in the Satipatthana-sutta², subsequent seekers have perpetuated distortions about this realm. As a Psychotherapist specializing in Psychosynthesis, I have met many committed spiritual seekers with eyes shining, backbones aligned...whose jaws were clenched, shoulders tense and hearts shut. I have met mediators who could sit for hours and hours in deep meditation who could not stand for very many minutes of deep contact with another human being... or with their own humanness.

A woman came to me for therapy, desperate for help as she plummeted into depths of depression and dysfunction. Naturally, this interfered with her ability to maintain her job as a nurse in a large

hospital, as well as her ability to care for her nine year old daughter. Marjorie was a single parent, divorced for a year from an alcoholic husband, Ben, who was not contributing any financial support, nor sharing in the care of their child, Jessica.

Since the divorce Marjorie had been studying with various spiritual groups predominantly influenced by western occult teachers. She had been trying to maintain an attitude of forgiveness, detachment, and purity of thought in relation to Ben and life as she frantically scraped to make ends meet. She found herself continually shortchanging Jessica's need for loving contact (not to mention totally ignoring her own needs for leisure time, social life, and self-nurturing).

Marjorie was well on her way to a breakdown (and she knew it) when she came for therapy. During the first session she could barely speak a coherent sentence as a result of a continual self censoring process...trying to avoid thoughts or feelings which were not "spiritual". As the internal pressure built her thoughts became more and more disordered and she began to withdraw saying she was so confused she didn't want to talk at all.

Marjorie had lost her connection with the truth of her own experience. She was filled with unexpressed grief and rage she couldn't allow herself to acknowledge because she then wouldn't be in contact with her "Higher Self". She was filled with distorted ideas about feelings. She was filled with bewilderment about the role feelings play in spiritual awakening. One significant area of confusion was whether the purpose of spiritual life is primarily transcendence or transformation... a distinction with major implications for how feelings are received and handled in daily life.

TO TRANSCEND OR TRANSFORM... THAT IS THE QUESTION

We know that people are often drawn to spiritual paths in times of great pain and confusion...and many people are helped beyond

measure by the teachings they encounter. What is it then that prevents spiritual truth from consistently providing clear and effective guidance for human dilemmas? What prevented Marjorie's spiritual teachings from providing adequate support for her predicament? Part of the problem is certainly that it is easier to talk the talk than to walk the talk. It is just not easy to manifest truth in daily life. It is also not easy not to manifest truth in daily life...and there's the rub!

Ken Wilbur maintains that different kinds and levels of human problems: psychological, existential, spiritual, require different kinds and levels of interventions, both in terms of types of psychotherapy and types of spiritual practice.³ Unfortunately most spiritual teachings (or psychological teachings for that matter) have not made these distinctions and often further perplex the troubled seeker by presenting generalized guidance inappropriate for the problems at hand.

Another, and I think more significant, part of the problem lies in the confusion about whether one's impulse for spiritual growth reflects movement toward transcendence or transformation. Webster's defines transcend as "to climb over, to be separate from the material universe".(p. 1509) Transformation, however, is the result of a focus on "altering the basic nature or form of" (P. 1510) the material universe.⁴

Most spiritual paths contain elements of both impulses often without identifying and/or giving clear guidance for managing the tension between these polarities. It is assuredly easier to work toward transcendence when one observes a life of meditation, and renunciation of material goods, sexual and familial relationships. What does the transcendental impulse look like in a life that is still "in the world"?

I believe it sometimes looks like the kind of bewilderment Marjorie exhibited. The essence of the transcendental impulse is to separate, leave human life behind and unite with spirit.⁵ This quest does not support the integration of spiritual truth in daily life necessary when one is on the householder path, living in human relationship as parent, lover, child, co-worker. The householder path (indeed any path

involving full participation with the material plane) requires a shift from transcendence to transformation if one wishes to embody spiritual truth.

Does this mean we must disavow the transcendent in order to transform? No. There is an essential aspect of the pull toward transcendence we need to include on the transformational journey. That aspect is non-attachment. Non-attachment means letting go of the tight grasp we have on the notion that any person, object or condition will fulfill us and bring us peace (especially if it never leaves or changes).

Attachment means to be stuck, fixed, and immobile. Non-attachment means we can accept impermanence as a basic principle of human life. Non-attachment means we can flow and move with life's ever changing circumstances. Non-attachment means we can be "in the world, but not of the world". Non attachment means we are willing to "die" into the moment, and to let others "die" around us. Being willing to "die" here means being willing to face the fact that moments and others change, leave, grow, and fail to live up to our expectations constantly.

Facing this constant flux requires the organism to be able to feel deeply, to flow with the contraction and expansion of feeling energy this daily "dying" requires. Right Feeling is an essential feature of this process.

FEAR OF FEELING

In the 25 years I have been traveling in East/West spiritual circles I have found the apprehension about feelings to be endemic.⁶ Prevailing proclivities in many spiritual traditions East and West pronounce emotions and the body as hindrances to be transcended, as obstacles to spiritual growth because of the inherent connection between them and passion, desire and the chains of illusion. Feelings have been seen as dangerous, an aspect of life to be transcended or denied.

For Alice Bailey (writing for the Tibetan) "...truth lies beyond the world of feeling altogether, unaffected by it, and can only be sensed in its purity when feeling is transcended and transmuted"⁷ Bailey, 1950, p. 111.

For Chris Griscom, writing in Ecstasy is a New Frequency, our emotional bodies (which are separate conscious entities) control our minds and are addicted to anger and fear.⁸

Tarthang Tulku, writing in 1977 states, "Emotions have the power to lure us into an artificial realm of sensation that is able to gain control of our positive energies. People seem to need emotions, like they need salt for food. But emotions are dangerous and unstable, for what begins as pleasure, often ends up as pain."⁹

What is the common theme uniting this sampling of Western occult thinking, popular New Age theology, and Tibetan Buddhism? What kind of help would Marjorie or any spiritual seeker find here for coping with the powerful movement of anger or grief or desire in the human experience?

Granted these are but a few sentences snatched from volumes of invaluable guidance. It would not be fair for any reader to judge the contributions these important teachers have made on the basis of just a few words (representing a subtle yet pervasive fear of feeling in many spiritual teachings east and west). However, I believe it is important to consider the ways in which they may be contributing to setting up a context of separation and anxiety in regard to feelings.

The implicit message here seems to be that we need to defend against, protect ourselves from, or leave behind the feeling aspect of life, an aspect considered intrinsically dangerous, unnatural. While I don't believe that separation is the basic intention, this climate of fear creates a hothouse for distortion and may lead to the practice of denial, unconsciousness, and ultimately physical and/or mental illness...all possible results of the blockage of the organic movement of feeling energy in the human organism.

We need feelings in the same way we need to breathe...both arise, I believe, from indelible imprints in our psycho-biogenetic programming which define human experience. Feelings are, they exist as a natural part of the human package just as thoughts do.

Emotions are not "dangerous and unstable". They are at essence energy...natural manifestations of life force currents, the paradoxical purpose of which is both embodiment, bringing spirit into matter and unity, i.e., releasing spirit from the exclusive confines of the egoic container. If our spiritual insights do not both live in our bodies and feelings and also transport us beyond our narcissism we become cardboard models of "shoulds" rather than incarnate beings of light...the Word made flesh. When those "shoulds" become too restrictive, the model will collapse...the organism can no longer maintain the facade.

Marjorie's model was collapsing. Her belief that anger was bad and that purification of her thoughts was the answer to her dilemma was leading her to dis-ease and breakdown.¹⁰ Marjorie's beliefs were separating her from the truth of her experience, preventing her from being fully present with herself, with anyone else, with life itself.

If "truth lies beyond the world of feeling altogether",¹¹ through what means is truth experienced? All mental states have corresponding bodily sensations, which are accessed through sensation, and feeling. The zen writings of the experience of sudden enlightenment, "kensho" often describe the demise of dualism occurring with a rush, an onslaught of feeling... tears... laughter...uncontrolled and unobstructed.

Interestingly enough in Tulku's next book, Openness Mind, written in 1978 he writes very differently, (and in my opinion very clearly) of emotions e.g., "Concentrate on the feeling, not on thoughts about it. Concentrate on the center of the feeling: penetrate into that space. There is a density of energy in that center that is clear and distinct. This energy has great power, and can transmit great clarity."² (italics mine)

Marjorie's thoughts about her feelings led her away from the truth of her experience. Chris Griscom's work, while bringing a needed spotlight and many important insights into the whole arena of feeling, in my opinion adds to the anxiety by depicting feelings as addicted entities waiting to ensnare us. Thoughts about feelings might trap us into dead end distortions and dysfunctional patterns, but feelings themselves have simple, natural rhythms and predictable patterns of movement and rest.

FLOW OF FEELING

The experience of unobstructed feeling blazes a trail to the senses, to a healthy, vital organism, to an open, loving heart, and to a profound sense of unity with life. Allowing and cooperating with the **natural** cycle of emotional response deposits one ultimately on the doorstep of expanded, all inclusive consciousness...in Boyesen's terms "the oceanic wave of the universe"¹³

Bioenergetics and Biodynamic Psychology and Biosynthesis have brought to our attention the importance of restoring the free movement of feeling energy to the human organism. Boadella states, "...every neurotic or psychotic person has lost or never developed the full range of movement possibilities of which any healthy child is capable. In some degree or other **motility** is disturbed. A neurosis then is equivalent to a system of blockages which prevent the free flow of feelings through the body."¹⁴

Tsultrim Allione, an American born Tibetan nun who wrote the book, Women of Wisdom,¹⁵ describes a Tantric form of Tibetan Buddhism known as Dzog Chen as one in which allowing energy to unfold (**flow**) through all the chakras (energy centers of the body) is more important than directing and **focusing** that energy toward only the higher centers (heart, throat, third eye and crown). Each chakra is valued for the particular quality of energy it contributes to the organism. This view is an important component of the practice of Right Feeling.

THE TWIN DISTORTIONS: DENYING AND WALLOWING

As with Marjorie, most of us have little experience with the **organic** ebb and flow of our emotional response cycle. In my observation we spend our feeling life at either end of a spectrum which runs from denying to wallowing: being so chronically shut down that feelings rarely even arise in our experience; or shutting down soon after we sense feelings moving (by thinking about them or analyzing them); or discovering ourselves caught in an explosive outburst wondering "Now, where in the world did this come from?"; or finding ourselves continually re-stimulated, lost in a storm of seemingly never ending emotion.

Neither wallowing nor denying (nor any of the above) are intrinsic functions of feelings, they are all actually functions of mind. These distortions of the emotional cycle represent a break in contact between an organism and its life energy. **They are the result of our attempts to direct experience from the mind rather than allowing and cooperating with organic movement.**

It is commonly accepted that the practice of denial is the result of mental identification and mind attempting to control feelings. It is not so commonly known that the practice of wallowing is also a result of mental identification and control. Denial occurs when the mind directs the organism to shut down or off the flow of feeling and keep the location of focus in the mind rather than in the truth of the present moment... body, feelings, mind, spirit. Denial is a disruption of the process of **embodiment**. Marjorie's dilemma was exactly this.

Wallowing occurs when the mind projects image after re-stimulating image on the inner screen even though the organism has completed an emotional cycle and is at peace, ready to release into an experience of unity. Again mental direction keeps the location of focus

in the mind rather than in full presence. Wallowing is a disruption of the process of **unity**.

When the mind is not controlling experience we then have the occasion to experience what Southwell, writing of Boyesen's Biodynamic Psychology describes as the "inherent healing force of the emotional cycle"¹⁶ when allowed to stream through the stages of buildup, discharge, relaxation and reconciliation at the vegetative, muscular, and psychological levels of the organism. Fear of feeling cuts us off from our organism's ability to heal itself.

Fear of feeling cut Marjorie off from the very aspect of her being which could restore her to balance. Let's leave Marjorie temporarily and explore the reasons feelings have been so stigmatized.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

How is it that feelings have gotten such a bad rap? I believe the answers are rooted in the evolution of consciousness, the fact that the experience of the **movement** of feeling energy in the human organism is very different from the experience of the **movement** of mental energy, and in the rise of patriarchy.

Perhaps every experience of feelings throws us back symbolically to a time in our human evolution when physiological reactions and sensations were heard as imperative commands... without a sense of subjective inner space, or an "I", within which actions could be pondered, chosen freely.

Julian Jaynes writing in The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind,¹⁷ describes that phase of development (epitomized by intellectual Greece) as one in which feelings took "on the godlike function of seeming to initiate action themselves." p. 238. (Similarly when the first thoughts burst through the haze of early human unconsciousness, they too were experienced as external voices, admonitions from the gods.)

Feelings connect us directly and immediately with the pounding of the heart, the pain in the gut, the welling of tears in the eyes, the moans in the throat, the contractions in the muscles...**whether we want them to or not.** The movement of feeling energy brings us face to face with momentary sensations of loss of control, loss of boundaries, loss of the experience of what we call I, the self.

Notice here in this description of the movement of feeling energy how the seeds for distortions can be sown. Loss of the sense of self-control may grow into projection of a desire for control on the part of the emotions. Making emotions "entities" can be seen perhaps as a remnant of that time when emotions were not only "beings" but gods.

The fact that feeling energy runs its own course seems to invite this "power struggle" and distracts us from the simple truth that **feelings are at essence energy searching for release and resolution.**

MIND OVER MATTER

So why don't thoughts have the same bad reputation as feelings? In one sense they do. The negativity heaped on the linear mind and its thinking has lead to the distortion of anti intellectualism in many spiritual movements. The difference is that the experience of the movement of thoughts takes place in an historical context of choice because of the existence of the construct of self...the experienced interiority. We can consider both sides of any question, we can ponder, reflect, obsess, consider options and opinions with a sense of (or illusion of) "I'm in charge here."

We have all learned that we can effectively suppress our feelings at least in the short run and avoid that unpleasant experience of feeling "out of control." The effects of pushing down feelings, resisting and constricting emotional energy may not manifest for years as the organism attempts to adapt to blocked energy. Allione states, "This

clinging to the fantasy that the ego needs to control its territory and protect itself from threats is the basis of all suffering and neurosis."¹⁸

We become accustomed to chronic anxiety, muscle tension, headaches, digestive distress, menstrual problems, disrupted sleep patterns, depression. We consider failed relationships, sexual dysfunction, apathy and lack of integrity as 'normal' side effects of civilized living. The organism needs increasingly stronger support to keep feelings in check and we turn to alcohol, drugs, food, TV, sex, gambling, or restrictive religious practices.

Ultimately either the body or the mind breaks down (or both)... all this rather than allowing and cooperating with organic movement. We can not underestimate the depth or power of this fear.

Perhaps fear of feeling is ultimately a fear of death. Because the feeling cycle is characterized by rhythm and movement, and loss of mental control, there is no **familiar** location in which the "I" can stand during the process. The challenge here is for the "I" to become process. For the ego then, allowing feelings is somewhat like allowing death.¹⁹

It is exactly because allowing feelings can be like allowing death, that feelings provide us opportunities (through varying intensities of death/rebirth experience) for incarnation and transformation. Stanislav Graf, pioneer of perinatal psychology and the death/rebirth experience maintains, "Experiences of death and rebirth are instrumental in the individual's philosophical dissociation from an **exclusive** identification with the egobody unit and with the biological organization."²⁰ (*Italics mine*)

Certainly, acknowledging and allowing the ripples of grief or anger that might accompany missing out on a minor stroke of luck or love, is not going to provide as powerful an opportunity for transpersonal awakening as recalling and re-experiencing the loss of a parent or child, or the pounding waves of feeling accompanying the original birth trauma. Yet, I believe they are on the same continuum.²¹

THANK YOU, FATHER

For several thousand years our spiritual traditions have been dominated by masculine psychology and a zeitgeist reflecting masculine comfort with the control offered by mental identification. Spiritual practices have been located primarily in activities dealing with mind: prayer, meditation, concentration, etc. Spiritual awakening was considered by many a strengthening of the mind-spirit bond.

Unfortunately this was often based on a rejection of the rhythmic, earth, body, feeling orientation of matriarchical times. Riane Essler in The Chalice and the Blade²² describes the denigration of the values of sensuality, feelings, nurturing, and earth consciousness with the rise of patriarchal rule. Patriarchal consciousness, in both East and West²³, was run through with fear and disgust of bodies and bodily processes... and feelings connect us directly and immediately with the body.

Women have traditionally been more comfortable in the realm of emotion than men. The sensitivity to subtle changes in feeling states has been a psycho-bio-genetic program supporting the survival of the species. Mothers have needed to decipher the nuances of feeling in the cries of their children, distinguishing between real pain and illness and minor discomfort. Mothers have needed that exquisite openness to subtle levels of connection and feeling communication necessary for bonding, nurturing and teaching primarily nonverbal infants and children.

For similar reasons, I believe, women have historically been less defined as separate selves, less concerned with protecting and controlling personal territory, rather programmed to an acute awareness of others needs. Losing oneself momentarily in a flow of feeling does not pose as much threat to women as to men... there has been less sense of self to lose. (Thus, women are more likely to be caught in the distortion

of 'wallowing' in feeling, while men are more often caught in the distortion of denial.)

The kinds of psycho-bio-genetic programming needed to raise children is very different from that needed to hunt mammoth.²⁴ Women need not pat themselves on the back for these qualities handed them by destiny. This is not a matter of 'better than' but rather of evolution.

Digressing for a moment²⁵, I would like to make it clear here that while I believe we need to vigilantly root out the separative, judgmental, female denying, body denying, feeling denying, earth denying, life denying attitudes pervasive in patriarchal consciousness, we need to accept compassionately, patiently the process of evolution of human consciousness. We need to see the value that years of patriarchal domination has brought us.

Ironically (and blessedly) technological advancement, the hallmark of patriarchal civilization has brought with it the means finally to end the human suffering caused by ignorance, poverty, starvation, disease...and to end the subjugation of women trapped in endless cycles of child rearing without choice.

The fact that I, a woman, am sitting writing this essay (with the aid of an incredible extension of consciousness called a computer) rather than endlessly nursing my children (at the expense of my own bones), scrubbing dirty clothes by hand, grinding cornmeal, drawing water, building and tending fires,²⁶ spending every waking moment in pursuit of survival is in large part a result of the push of patriarchy for development... doing... becoming... Thank you, Father.

To paraphrase Ken Wilbur²⁷, patriarchy is not the problem, it is half way to the solution! The exclusive focus on the mind spirit connection, albeit reactionary, has been a necessary step in the movement toward an awaiting androgyny... a synthesis of masculine and feminine qualities and values in both human and spiritual realms. Right Feeling is a part of this synthesis.

RIGHT FEELING

So what then does the practice of right feeling look like? What can Marjorie, or any of us, do to renew contact with feelings in a way which honors spiritual practice, supports synthesis of our masculine and feminine qualities and opens the door for transformation? Right Feeling requires the same vigilance, stillness, observation and commitment to the truth of the present moment any meditative practice does.

Right feeling requires the **willingness** to witness fully the buildup and release of emotional energy in the organism at all levels... described by Southwell as, "vegetative (includes metabolic, digestive, and respiratory processes and the circulation of fluids in the organism), muscular (movement in the voluntary muscle system), psychological (memories, choices, feelings, perceptions)"²⁸ **And, I would add, the spiritual level, which includes qualities of energy such as love, clarity, will, wisdom, and unity.**

Southwell continues, "The force of the emotion (the charge) is born, according to biodynamic theory, in the alimentary canal, which Gerda Boyesen refers to as the 'emotional canal' or 'id canal'. We express our feelings at the upper end of this canal, through the voice and mouth, by our words, smiles and grimaces. Then according to Boyesen's theory, the intestines, the lower part of the canal, digest the remaining emotional stress. Through this function, which she terms 'psycho-peristalsis' we clear out of the body -ultimately through excretion- the vegetative after effects of the stress"²⁹

This is not a matter of thinking about feelings, or analyzing feelings at these various levels. This is a question of staying fully present to witness and experience the tightening of the jaw, contractions in the biceps and quadriceps (and any other muscles), the increased beating of the heart, sinking stomach or pain in the gut, tears in our eyes. This is a matter of noticing and observing the thoughts, feelings and images which accompany bodily changes... even when those thoughts

and images are not "nice" or spiritual...and even when those thoughts and images are very nice and very spiritual.³⁰

OPENING THE DOOR

I have abridged Boyesen's emotional vaso-motor cycle diagram to include the transpersonal level. See Diagram below. The doorway to spiritual experience opens at the critical point when the organism, having completed the cycle, is at rest. This is a vulnerable moment where mindfulness is most important. The defenses are down, the boundaries have softened, the life force is streaming subtly through the body...the organism is open, available for deepened contact with transpersonal energies.

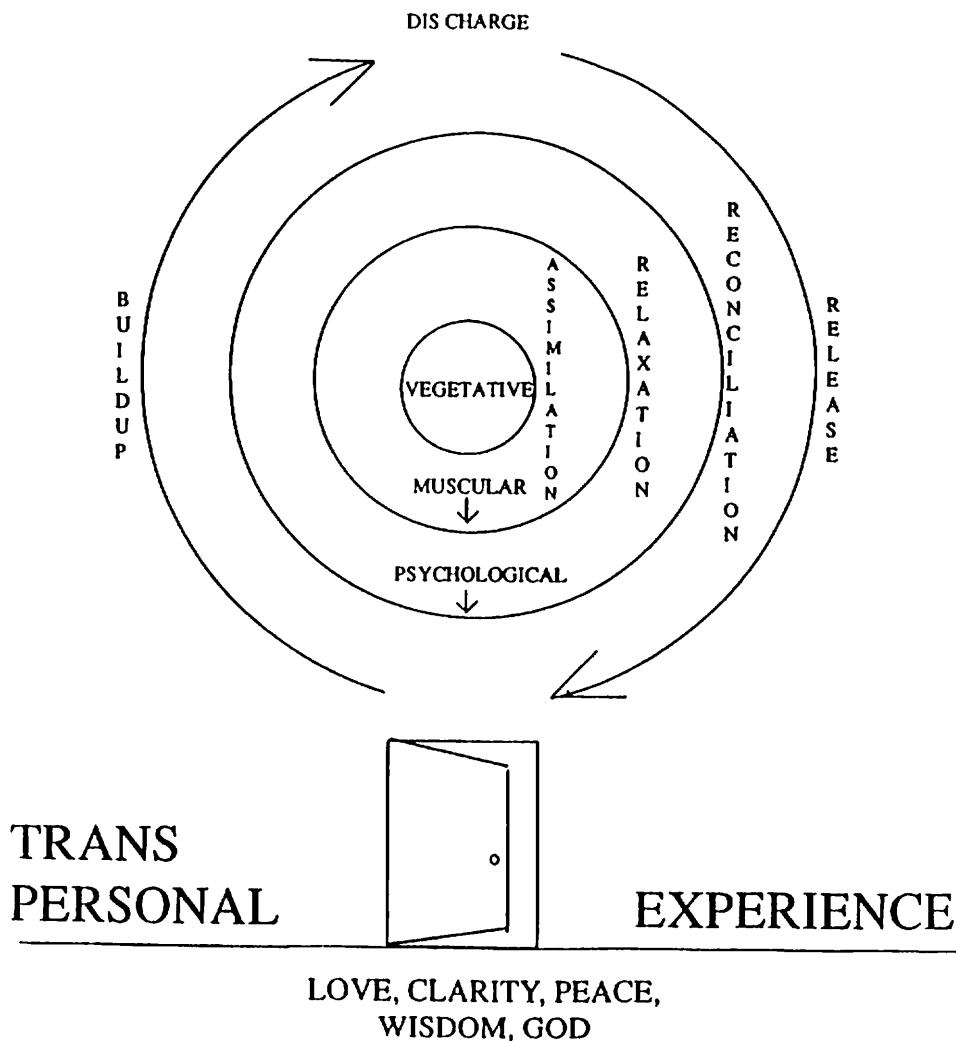
Because these pulsing, streaming sensations at this point are often unfamiliar, different from the more dramatic movement of emotional energy during discharge, it is easy to miss out, to pass by this door without even noticing. The small mind, ever vigilant, is just a thought away ready to protect its territory and maintain its boundaries.

The process of deepening our contact with these energies does not always just happen by itself. Although the initial opening is natural, is indeed ubiquitous, what is often habitual here is the control of the small mind...the movement away from life's pulse into abstraction. **These first fragile streamings need support**, if not to facilitate the deepening, surely to facilitate the grounding...the ability to take that experience back into daily life in a meaningful way.

Wilhelm Reich maintained that the fear of the pulsing stream of the life force (epitomized for him by the 'complete genital orgasm') is the cause for most human dysfunction. He saw a major part of the therapists job being to help clients handle and transform the fear in order to maintain contact with the energetic flow. Many clients run from this streaming and deny it (with their minds) even as their

BIODYNAMIC EMOTIONAL CYCLE

Right Feeling



musculature, breathing, heart rate, and coloring reflect a deeply fulfilling experience.

When we sense this super conscious energy poking through contracted mentalized reality, we need to learn to recognize, identify, and stay connected with it...and this requires exquisite mindfulness. When one is streaming and pulsing with life energy, one should only be streaming and pulsing with life energy!

These currents of energy, imbued with qualities of love, peace, unity, and wisdom are one of the universe's gifts to us...one way of rewarding us for pulling back from our attachments to the material realm and facing our fear of death. This is a gift of bliss, a bliss that has nothing to do with any desire or addiction ...nothing to do with accumulating, possessing, acquiring any status, person, or thing on the planet. It has to do with letting go, opening and allowing ecstasy.

The "repression of the sublime"³¹ is a very strong force in our work-ethic culture. Time and again clients will allow themselves just a taste of fulfillment, just an instant of **being** and then think they must jump up and **do** something with it.

I believe we need to open ourselves to the notion that we are entitled to and deserve to nourish ourselves in this way, not just for one or two minutes, but for as long as we need. We need to learn about the value this kind of experience holds in supplying us not only the essential fuel needed to continue our journey...but its value in giving us an **embodied experience of a new way of being.**

The experience of this energy **itself** is transformational... enabling us to bare ourselves to a shower of spacious, infinite, ecstatic energy, **while maintaining contact with and awareness of our organisms.**

COMMITMENT TO FEELING

How do we get there? How do we support and encourage our ability to experience a new way of being? **Commitment.** What is needed here is the **commitment** to allowing feeling energy to move in our bodies. This is a matter of cultivating mindfulness. Right Feeling begins with the intention to **let go** and include, acknowledge and allow the buildup and discharge of feelings to be a part of our awareness, cooperating with the flow of movement and then **let go** into assimilation, relaxation, resolution and transpersonal opening when the cycle is completed. This is easier said than done. Oh, no! Does this mean we have to scream at our boss or mate when we sense anger or break into tears every time we feel sad? Does this mean we will run amok in social situations and act inappropriately... observing all the while? If we let our feelings out how will we ever get anything done?

Oh no! Does this witnessing and observing mean we will not have our feelings available to us? Does this mean we will shut down a feeling before we have finished feeling it? Aren't you really talking about suppression here?

None of the above. The practice of Right Feeling will look different for you depending whether your tendency is to deny or wallow in feelings. Whichever your tendency is, Right Feeling begins with an inventory of the dysfunctional beliefs you hold about feelings, (some of which are described above) which prevent you from making the commitment to be entirely present to the organic flow of emotional energy in your organism.

If you tend to deny, you will need to pay very careful attention to observing the energy in your organism at the beginning of the emotional cycle, the buildup phase, so you won't get caught in your habit of pushing down and cutting yourself off from the experience. Whether you choose to cooperate with this process or not, the energy will be building up and will not go away just because you push it out of your

awareness. Remember, for you, feelings support your ability to let go of mental control and come alive in your body.

If you tend to wallow, you will need to pay very careful attention to the end of the emotional cycle, the completion phase, so you won't continually re-stimulate yourself with upsetting thoughts and images thereby missing the time for assimilation and rest. Remember, for you, your focus on the natural feeling cycle supports your ability to let go of mental control and experience the profound peace and unity awaiting after emotional release.

Let's go back to Marjorie for a moment. When we left her she was trapped in her dysfunctional beliefs about feelings which were about to drive her "crazy". The first therapeutic intervention I made with her was to begin to talk with her about feelings and beliefs and distortions. As we spoke, just the idea that it might be okay for her to acknowledge her anger began to relieve some of her considerable tension.

The first three weeks of therapy were focused in this way (supported by books I suggested which all addressed these issues) On the fourth week she came into the session and said, "I've decided I need to experience my anger and I'm ready to do that." She had made the commitment to trying a new way of being.

RIGHT PRACTICE

Right feeling means we will be aware when we feel anger arising in us at our boss or mate...in our thoughts and images, in our muscles, in our intestines, lungs. We will allow the energy to move **without necessarily doing anything about** it at the moment.

If the movement is strong enough we might excuse ourselves, find a private place and allow it to flow more fully in sound or gesture. (Writing in a journal can be very useful here, especially if the commitment during the writing is to record whatever thoughts, images, feelings are coming through without censorship.)

When the movement is powerful and there is no place to escape to, we can, using our powers of suppression, focus on maintaining outward control while still allowing an awareness of the psychological, muscular and vegetative responses... and **promise ourselves we will return to focus on the completion of the cycle at the first opportunity.**

This is tricky. Although we will definitely be eased and softened by just the awareness and acceptance of our organism's reaction to the anger (or whatever the feeling), if we don't keep good our promise to redress the suppression we will be in the same old boat of building up energy blockages in the organism.

Right feeling sometimes means that when the movement of feeling energy is very powerful we find a safe place (with a friend or therapist) and are willing to stay with it and go more and more deeply into it...even if it feels as if we can't bear the experience...even if we feel scared...even if we feel desperate to maintain control...we choose to die into it...and find ourselves reborn. I have been with countless clients as they entered this vortex crying out, "I'm dying, I'm dying" and within minutes found themselves laughing through their tears saying "No I'm not. I'm alive. I'm here!"

It has been my personal and professional experience that the typical amount of time needed for an organism to move through what we consider the "painful" part of an emotional cycle, **when the energy is unobstructed by the mind**, falls somewhere between 2 and 20 minutes. Two and 20 minutes. It breaks my heart to see people live out patterns of terrible destruction, addictions, illness and denial to avoid an unsettling experience which is usually only 2 to 20 minutes in duration...and leads directly to healing.

Undoubtedly during times of great upheaval in life one might need to move through such a 2 to 20 minute experience every several hours or days...but remember, at the end of every cycle is a period of healing, resolution, and ultimately, transpersonal nourishment.

When Marjorie made a choice to experience her anger, she made a commitment to go to the center of that experience (not everyone does this or needs to do this when first venturing into the world of feeling). She chose a safe space (the therapy session) and allowed herself to fully experience the rage she felt about the end of her marriage, her feelings of betrayal by Ben, and her anger toward her father for never taking care of her. The anger turned ultimately to grief and she sobbed and sobbed about her incredible loneliness and fear. As the waves of feeling crashed down after months, years of suppression, she became more vital, more alive.

When the emotional energy began to wane, I encouraged her to soften into the assimilation stage. She lay on the mat, her body relaxed, breathing easily...every so often her stomach would make a resonant gurgle. Both she and I could feel the coursing, pulsing life force resonating within her. I helped her keep her focus on the experience in her organism, even as her mind tried several times to snap her back to judgments about herself or others, or to restimulating images.

Right Feeling also means we will be aware as the energy begins to dissipate, to melt and gush down through the organism. We will listen for the peristaltic gurglings that inform us the emotional energy is being assimilated, completed. We will allow ourselves to soften and surrender and focus on this healing, peaceful experience.

This is also tricky. As I have mentioned, at the completion of an emotional cycle, the organism is soft and vulnerable. The mind can very easily jump in and re-stimulate with upsetting images and thoughts. We need to keep our witness focused on the energy vibrating in the organism (allowing the restimulating thoughts to just move by like clouds) being fully present to the soft, warm, streaming pulsations which accompany the completion... and which are the gateway to transpersonal opening.

Southwell states, "It is the 'dynamic updrift' of this repressed life-force with which we work. We watch for any tiniest movement from

the Primary level, and help it grow stronger and clearer, till at last it goes where it needs to go, and says what it has to say. While regression and catharsis may occur, this is not an end in itself. Healing, in the biodynamic view, comes in the completion of the cycle, with special emphasis on the down-going phase, when the upsurge of the released life-force turns and 'melts', to stream down through the body in a healing flow, as we digest and assimilate the experience.¹⁸²

In order to facilitate the transpersonal opening and the experience of unity, it is important during the assimilation phase to help the mind focus on the **quality of the energy** which is pulsing. This can be done by beginning to articulate (either inwardly or outwardly), rhythmically and slowly... the simple words which will deepen and expand the experience.

In the beginning was the Word. The use of single, simple words at this point is essential. This is the beginning of the bringing together of spirit and matter **in consciousness, in the organism**. Without this incarnating process, this grounding, the transpersonal energy tends to remain a jewel in a dusty box to be taken out only on special occasions, rather than a living, transforming presence in daily life.

We are most accustomed to verbalizations controlled by the linear mind. After completion of an emotional cycle, there are a few moments when we have access to right hemisphere, non linear modes of knowing. If we keep the verbalizations simple, slow and rhythmic we can break new ground for articulation which is not dominated by left hemisphere linear gridlock.

I have been concerned to notice in some body/energy therapies the common practice of helping a client move through an emotional cycle and then leaving the client alone, silent, at the end to "allow for assimilation". Too often the client is left to the clutches of the small mind which blows in and begins to take the client away from the present experience, into analysis, list making or re-stimulation.

Certainly the client needs help in translating this experience so it is relevant to the life issue of the moment...how does this help us accept ourselves more fully, speak more assertively to our mates, ask for the promotions we deserve, parent our children more effectively, stop abusing food, drugs; stop blaming our mothers, fathers, brothers, and lovers for our problems, etc.

Marjorie needed help to keep her awareness focused in the present moment and not get lost once again in her mind. For some time in this breakthrough session I gently helped her keep attuned to the undeniable experience of streaming and pulsation in her body.

Finally, I asked her what was the quality of the energy she was experiencing. Softly, she said, "Acceptance". I encouraged her to experience that acceptance in every muscle and every joint, in every organ and tissue, in every cell and atom of her organism. As I did this guiding, the pulsing became stronger. I asked her if there was another quality of energy she was experiencing. She said slowly, "Love". It wasn't easy for her to speak as she was so connected to this experience.³³

I was experiencing a profound shifting of energy in her, in myself and in the room. I asked her what the source of this energy was and she slowly replied, "It's me. It's God". She was radiant (and I was radiant). Here I agree with Wilbur who states, "It is one thing, however, to recontact the body so as to reintegrate it, quite another to recontact the body and stay there. Unless the released body-feelings are taken up and made a part of the higher stream of **communicative exchange** and **intersubjective sharing**, they reinforce an isolated I-ness".³⁴

Although articulation of the transpersonal experience was difficult for Marjorie (as it is for most people at this point) I believe this is an essential effort if the released body-spirit feelings are to move into the realm of communication and sharing in daily life.

GROUNDING

To ground Marjorie's session (and Marjorie before she had to head out into the world of traffic lights, work and mothering) I asked Marjorie to bring forth an image of herself as she was when she first came to therapy, confused and pained. As she did this I encouraged her to begin to **dialogue** and make a connection between the acceptance, love and God she was presently experiencing and this wounded part of her self.

Wilbur continues here with a statement with which I disagree, "it is **only** the mind, via symbol-exchange in communicative discourse, that reaches intersubjective and interpersonal bonding. The body as body is merely self-referential; it cannot take the role of other and thus cannot enter community. It merely senses and emotes over its own separate self-existence. The body is merely subjective; the mind is intersubjective; spirit is transsubjective..."¹⁰⁵

He does not mention feelings. It is my experience that feelings are also both inter and transsubjective. I believe Right Feeling provides the vehicle for connection, bonding and unity between person and person and person and spirit.³⁶

Back to Marjorie...I suggested she bring forth an image of Ben and then her father and begin to dialogue with them from this experience of love and acceptance. She said she wasn't ready to talk to Ben but she wanted to talk with her father.

I asked her to tell the truth about her experience to her father. If there was still anger present to acknowledge it, if there was forgiveness present to acknowledge that...if both were present to acknowledge and express that.³⁷

Marjorie was beaming as she spoke of her love for her Dad, her awareness of his pain, her understanding that he had done the best he could, and yes that there was still anger and pain present for her about the ways he had mistreated her. I asked Marjorie to check whether Dad

could forgive and understand her anger. Weeping softly with relief, she said, "Yes, my Dad understands". The healing energy in the room was palpable.

The Biodynamic and Bioenergetics therapies have helped us tremendously in seeing and tracking the movement of emotional energy in the organism... enabling us to see and experience the important but subtle shifts in the gastric peristalsis as emotional energy is digested.

We need to learn to see and track the opening of the heart as this feeling energy moves and is assimilated. Unfortunately we do not have a mechanism such as stomach rumblings by which to gauge our progress. We can describe the relaxation of musculature, the deepened breathing, the slow steady rhythm of the heartbeat, the flushed face... and then we have to turn to the subjective observation of the therapist and the subjective report of the client.

I observed what seemed like, looked like, sounded like, and felt like Marjorie's heart opening, not only to herself, but to her father and to a profound experience of union with God. I was inspired and healed by my proximity and participation in this experience.

Marjorie reported then and later that this was a life transforming experience, a major breakthrough, a moment of profound spiritual significance.

After this session her depression lifted never again to return with the same force. She experienced more anxiety, more emotional lability as she struggled to practice Right Feeling.

Marjorie took this breakthrough back to her real father and family. In subsequent sessions she worked through many previously unacknowledged and unexpressed feelings for her mother, sister and brother as well as for her daughter. In each case she experienced healing and was able to take her recovery back to the other individuals involved, open communication and share the transformation. Opening communication did not mean dumping years of anger on these people.

It did mean telling the truth about some of the anger and hurt and about some of the love and understanding.

After four months Marjorie had a relapse. She began to be depressed again (not as severely as the first time) and we discovered another level of anger and grief she had been resisting. As soon as we uncovered that and she allowed the energy to move to completion, she was on back on track.

After eight months of therapy Marjorie was promoted to Supervising Nurse with a large salary increase and was able to hire more household help, spend more time with her daughter, with herself and with friends.

Marjorie also reported that her sense of presence and connection with what she called God and with other people was continually deepening. She returned to her spiritual studies with greater clarity, perspective and a commitment to give every teaching she encountered the acid test of how it measured up to **the truth of her experience.**

CONCLUSION

Feelings are essential aspects of our evolutionary journey. Feelings have natural, predictable rhythms and are at essence simply energy seeking release and resolution. When we respect and fully include feelings in our mindfulness practice by cooperating with the cycle of buildup, discharge, and resolution we will find ourselves deposited on the doorway of transpersonal awareness... able to nourish ourselves with the gifts of peace, love, wisdom, ecstasy.

Proper practice of Right Feeling sustains us as we work to integrate body and spirit, heart and mind so that spiritual truth pulses, breathes, and streams in our experience as friends, lovers, mates, parents, co-workers, brothers and sisters in our shared human family.

I often encourage people to see the movie "Starman" as a way of easing attachment to labeling experience while preparing to take the

plunge into experiencing experience. The movie recounts an extra-terrestrial being's adventures and misadventures with earth life and explores what it's like to be human without preconceptions.

Everything is a wonderment...hot, cold, tastes, smells, a first experience with the "common cold", and most poignantly a first experience with human love and loss.

When Starman initially feels the loss of love, he looks down at his chest and pounds at the pain in his heart in bewilderment ...the tears rolling out of his eyes surprise him, confuse him. He is having feelings, sensations, experiences without preconception. He moves through these feelings simply, elegantly and ultimately he and those around him are transformed. We need to imagine we, too, are star people, explorers in the vast mysteries of human incarnation. Let's not label pain as pain before we experience it and discover how often we mistake excitement for anxiety, resistance for drive, dying for living. Let's not shut down our hearts in fear before we have the chance to die into the immense pleasures that await us...Have courage. Feel. Be mindful. Breathe. Trust. Let go.

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1. Hanh, Thich Nhat, The Miracle of Mindfulness, Boston, Beacon Press, 1975.
2. Rahula, Walpola, What The Buddha Taught, N.Y., Grove Press, Inc. 1959. P. 109.
3. Wilbur, Ken, "The Developmental Spectrum and Psychopathology: Part II, Treatment modalities" in The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, Vol 16, No.2 (pp.137 - 166) 1984.
4. Guralnik, David B., Editor in Chief, Websters New World Dictionary, Second College Edition, N.Y. Simon and Schuster, 1984.
5. It is not difficult to see why our spiritual forebears threw up their arms and opted for transcendence in the face of the facts of early human life on earth. Poverty, disease, and short meaningless lives were standard fare for most of our early family. Raging passions could be blamed for all manner of misdeeds (whenever the Devil couldn't). Even the wisest Sage couldn't see a way to alter the reality of human misery.
6. Interestingly, in the humanistic psychology movement the distortions about feelings take the opposite pole and tend towards continual re-stimulation and recapitulation, commonly known as wallowing. More about this later.
7. Bailey, Alice A. Glamour: A World Problem, N.Y., Lucis Trust. 1950.
8. Griscom, C. Ecstasy is a New Frequency, Santa Fe, N.M., Bear & Company, 1987.
9. Tulku, Tulku. Gesture of Balance, Berkeley, Dharma Publishing, 1977. p. 79.
10. Breakdown isn't always bad. On the contrary it is nature's way of providing us opportunities to open to greater levels of consciousness and integration at every step of our development. When the structures of our lives, selves, psyches fall in pieces at our feet, we can, if guided and supported, contact the essence of our beings...and emerge strengthened and whole. Unfortunately our society has not learned to incorporate this death-rebirth process into its institutions so that "rebirth" is facilitated. People having "breakdowns" are all too often pumped full of medication, hospitalized, dehumanized and stigmatized...missing completely the opportunity for "breakthrough".

Marjorie had a psychiatric consultation before she came to me and was informed she was severely disturbed and needed to be medicated and most probably hospitalized.

11. I suspect what Bailey meant here was that truth lies beyond identification and preoccupation with feeling, a state I call "wallowing".

12. Tulku, Tarthang, Openness Mind, Oakland, Dharma Publishing, 1978. p.52.
13. Southwell, Clover, "Biodynamic Psychology -- Gerda Boyesen's Theory and Methods", unpublished preliminary draft of chapter for Innovative Therapies in Britain, Harper and Row. p.3.
14. Boadella, David, Lifestreams, An Introduction to Biosynthesis, London and New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.p.4.
15. Allione, Tsultrim, Women of Wisdom, London, Boston and Henleyk, Arkana Paperbacks, 1984.
16. Op. Cit. Southwell, p. 15
17. Jaynes, Julian, The origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.
18. Op. Cit. Allione, p. 26
19. Feeling work with people diagnosed as psychotic and borderline needs to take this "death" of ego into account...and proceed with greater caution. I believe, however, that as long as focus on developing and strengthening the will and sense of self is primary; establishing a free flow of feeling, encouraging the disintegration process and skillfully supporting re-integration can be an essential part of healing of these dysfunctions. This usually requires an intensive therapeutic community experience. (I am thinking here of John Weir Perry's and Ronald Laing's work in particular).
20. Grof, Stanislav, Beyond the Brain, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press. 1985.p.191.
21. Here, I tend more to agree with Ken Wilbur than with Stanislav Grof that dying to a developmental level is similar to biological death in the sense that the organism's identification with each level is intense and exclusive and when threatened becomes a matter of at least metaphoric life and death.
Even a recalled experience of genuine threat of biological death is just that...a recalled experience, at some level metaphoric (which is not to say that either of these "deaths" is not vividly, kinesthetically experienced).
22. Eisler, Riane The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future, New York, Harper and Row. 1987.
23. Although there is some disagreement about whether or not Buddha or one of his disciples wrote the "Sutra on Changing the Female Sex" it is clearly anti-women: "The female's defects -greed, hate and delusion and other defilements - are greater than the males...Because I wish to be freed from the impurities of the woman's body, I will acquire the beautiful and fresh body of a man". Diane Paul, Women in Buddhism, Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley, 1979 p. 308 as quoted in Allione's Women of Wisdom, p. 6.

24. I am grateful to Jolinda Marshall for this observation.

25. All of my editorial advice has been to put this comment in a footnote.* I have resisted this because, while this is a digression, I want to swiftly deflate the swelling of righteousness which often arises at any mention of patriarchy..and make clear, in the body of this text, my feelings about the damage a "blame" context creates.

*I am grateful to Lynn Ragar, Dr. David Cornsweet, Dr. Jeremy Geffen, Dr.Ira Bindman, Dr. Karl Maret, and Mark Berger, for their editorial suggestions and support.

26. I do not think any of these activities is inherently odious. On the contrary, I loved nursing my son and found it hard to stop when he was 18 months old. I find simple living, gardening, grinding meal, fire tending very nourishing and try to incorporate as many of these activities into my life as possible. I am speaking here of the time in our history when we had no choice about those activities and had to work from dawn to dusk or die.

27. I am referring her To Ken Wilbur's notion put forth in "The Pre-Trans Fallacy": "ego is not the problem, it is halfway to the solution". in Eye to Eye, The Quest for the New Paradigm, Garden City, New York, Anchor Books, 1983.

28. Op. Cit. Southwell, p. 9

29. Op. Cit. Southwell, p.10 .

30. In my years of working to integrate body and spiritual approaches, I find the resistance to the sublime goes both ways. Many practitioners in the body/energy movements recoil with visions of suppressed feelings and sexuality whenever the word spirit is mentioned. Some of the vehement anti-religious attitudes prevalent among founders of the main schools of bio-energetic understanding which have contributed to this ongoing mistrust must be seen in political and historical context rather than used to negate the energetic reality of transpersonal experience.

31. This phrase taken from Frank Haronian's article, "The Repression of the Sublime", Psychosynthesis Research Foundation, N.Y.1967.

32. Op. Cit. Southwell, p. 17.

33. It is not easy to articulate the ineffable. This is new ground and we need to be very gentle with ourselves and our clients as we attempt a way of languaging in which the right hemisphere is included, and the form and content of the communication are the same. I often suggest clients make sounds, tones, or ask if there are colors or images present...all ways of keeping the right hemisphere engaged.

34. Op. Cit. Wilbur, Eye to Eye, The Quest for the New Paradigm, p. 222.

35. Ibid, p. 222.

36. Who has not had the experience of feeling someone's pain or joy, sharing a bond of energy without speaking? Granted there is usually some form of communicative exchange occurring, through eyes, or touch or breath...but the medium of exchange here is feeling! Anyone who has ever made love with another person has had the experience that bodies communicate without words.*

*I am grateful to Dr. David Cornsweet for this comment as I am to him for helping to clarify many of the ideas in this paper, his ongoing love and support and for keeping me humble.

37. One of the most pervasive, dysfunctional belief systems I encounter daily as a therapist is the idea that if I love someone, I can't be angry and if I am angry with someone, I can't love them. Most often the truth of life is laden with paradox, brimming with complexity and polarity. The affirmation I suggest as an antidote to this kind of limiting belief is, "I am big enough to include all aspects of my experience."