

A DIALOGUE ON HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS, SUBTLE SKILLS AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE OF WITNESSING

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1. Introduction: key themes, a triad exercise, and the witnessing practice

In the practice of Cultivating Higher Consciousness we use small and large group exercises, dialogue and inner work to nourish a space of inquiry into the subtle realms of life and our sensitivity to these, and into the impact of aligning ourselves with a strong stream of consciousness on individual and collective levels. The following dialogue explores the transformative effects of an inquiry into **witnessing capacities and skills**. It touches on aspects of **healing** as a by-product of a deeper movement of life: an effect of our consenting to **inquiry**, which we define as the practice of exploring questions by **feeling into the unknown spaces** beyond or between where we normally converse and speak from.

Three of us began with reflections on a recent exercise in which a group of 24 people in New York worked in triads using systemic and witnessing principles – i.e. through somatic awareness and their relationship to subtle space. Participants were asked to choose, but not reveal, a key personal topic, question or issue: one that they felt has crucial importance for them and has the quality of an ‘underlying thread’ running through their life. We framed this thread as an energy in life that seems to be of evolutionary intent and that manifests through symptoms, behaviours, attitudes or persistent surface issues, as if wanting our attention. It probably takes on different forms, for instance in relationships or work life, and is often of a cyclical or repeating nature.

We suggested that this sense of thread in our lives is something that underpins our more overt issues or questions rather than something that should or could be clearly articulated. It tends to remain in our background awareness and is hard to pin down. Given its unspecific nature we focussed instead - in the triad exercise - on the *relational field* rather than on the content of the person’s theme. This field is represented in the exercise by the other two people who stand for unknown aspects of the theme. The owner of the theme does not describe anything of his or her experience of its content nor specify it in any way. Instead, he or she simply sets up the field using the two others, intuitively positioning them while staying attuned to the theme.

The process unfolds through a practice of mutual witnessing which we cultivate first as a group through other exercises. The witnessing practice consists of **focussed external observation and simultaneous strong inward self-attention, noticing and sharing whatever is arising through subtle sensation or awareness**. This is often experienced as a kind of interior ‘stretching.’ When witnessing is explored through systemic principles then intuitive movements or insights into the field tend to arise, becoming more acute as the owner of the theme refrains from any attempt at overall understanding or resolution.

I’m in dialogue here with two senior students in the Higher Consciousness work: Erin Molitor and Michael Stern from Integral Alignment in New York (www.integralalignment.org). For more information on Cultivating Higher Consciousness see www.stephenbusby.com. All photos used here in illustration are taken from events held in the USA during my 2014 tour.



2. Working with the unknown

Michael: I really liked how we focussed on the relational dynamics in the field of the triad exercise as a way of deepening our inquiry into the theme or thread in our lives, and how, as we went on, this thread seemed to reveal more of its relational nature. Even that it *is* a relational field, so to speak.

Stephen: Yes, and how this focussing seems to consist mostly of cultivating curiosity, with as little intent or agenda as possible – while noticing nevertheless how intent and agenda tend to creep in, and where these come from in us or how they

arise. Working in this way requires a capacity in us to suspend our need or wish to tie things down, to 'know something about' whatever is happening.

Erin: And I love how this helps us to work outside of habitual structures where we know or want to know what things mean, to remove that familiarity...

Stephen: And how here we saw in some people a tendency to speed things up or to act from a less-attuned place - as if to compensate for the discomfort triggered by this 'unknown'.

Michael: Because the two representatives [in the triad] do take on quite clear and often distinct qualities very quickly, there's also a tendency [for the owner of the theme] to say 'oh yes this one is that part of me, and this one is this other aspect', and so on.

Stephen: To resort to labelling...

Michael: Or to begin inquiring into these apparent qualities, and in a subtle way to identify something as a thing...

Erin: I remember observing one representative in my own field and thinking: I really don't know what you are - at all! You're obviously very strong and very big, and I feel nervous about approaching you. Saying that out loud and acknowledging this enormous, strong, completely unknown aspect that I had been relating to with some anxiety opened up a new space where I could then relate to and be curious about that aspect. So much energy was released in simply seeing and acknowledging the strangeness and strength there - this very unknown and huge aspect embodied by that representative.



Stephen: And in the unknowing we might *expect* something to be uncomfortably strong or huge in its potential, and an attitude towards it that is at the very least ambivalent, otherwise it would already be here and being expressed in my life.

Erin: It was so important for me to acknowledge how big this space in me could be that I don't know, not to operate from this idea that I already know everything that's available to me and so to come at the world with 'what I have.' Instead to feel that I have no clue as to what your [the aspect being represented] possibilities are, and then finding that this leads through the field to more information - which does come to me. To touch on the edges of what I don't know. And to really be proactive in slowing people down in this exercise if they begin rushing through it, moving or manipulating things around - just stopping that. And then also as a representative - you have this total openness to the space: whatever's coming through your sensing - you speak to all of it, in its mystery, because you're not identifying it as 'you.' So as a representative I think: yeah this is also how I could be in life too, to trust that whatever comes through me is also 'not me' only, how that feels in my body... to trust that...

Michael: This feels radically simple and sometimes overwhelming... I can feel the part in me that wants so much to come from that place - and to relax into it while fighting it too: the tension in the possibility of that kind of relationship to life - instead of always trying to figure things out...

Stephen: What's overwhelming?

Michael: A kind of surrender, lack of control, and how much information would be there potentially if I allowed for that... And also this 'stretching' part that I aspire to practice more - to be aware of my inner experience while needing to be aware of what outwardly life is bringing to me, and including that, both of these: to hold that level of continuity and presence which can feel like an internal stretch... And how important the feedback, the mirroring, in the relational space is [*which we cultivated through previous exercises*].

3. Feedback and witnessing

Stephen: That feedback is of a particular kind, isn't it? If I'm receiving it from someone then I learn to discern the vibration of when the mirroring that I'm hearing is right, is on, and when it isn't. And when I'm the one who is mirroring to someone and am owning what I'm mirroring as my experience rather than 'about' them, then this opens the channel to a less personally identified space - it means that my mirroring can be heard by the person in a less reactive way.



Michael: And so how important it is to create a context where people are reminding each other to come from that place, regardless of the content of whatever is being reflected back.

Stephen: Yes, so it's more of a witnessing field, rather than thinking of it as 'feedback.' The witnessing space begins to *learn how to witness itself*, and therefore *its* capacity deepens, and then we have more the experience of *partaking* in a witnessing field, and - in the process - having our own experience - or what we interpret as 'our witnessing', whereas there's actually *a larger*

witnessing presence which is learning about itself, which is being nourished through our surrendering to that. If I'm focussed instead on just 'giving feedback' then I'm narrowly focussed, or maybe wanting to get something right, or produce resonance, and that's a pity.

Erin: And when I'm witnessing it's so beautiful to be in this space where I can pay attention to this part of myself, which has one ear out for the 'strangeness', allowing weird images or whatever to arise - to consciously bring these in rather than filter them out. The more we invite in, the more alive the field becomes...

Stephen: What helps you to remember that, to stay connected to it?

Erin: A receptivity...

4. Foreground and background

Stephen: A receptivity to the background, or undercurrent, while the foreground is playing itself out?

Erin: Yes...

Stephen: Which would be part of this stretching then – not focussing on the inner at the expense of the outer, or vice versa, and the connection to the larger more hidden whole canvas of the thread, on which the surface content of daily life is unfolding.

Erin: Relaxing those inner muscles that habitually process this information and that want to make something of it.

Stephen: Does it feel like a context or canvas on which things are arising? If I sense into that now then it feels like something that is in the background all the time, while we're speaking. And in our attentiveness here we're bringing it more into the foreground... and not losing awareness of the 'eternal background' just because something seems to be being brought forward and to be taking all the focus.

Erin: When I visualize it then this [in the foreground] is the reality that I can look at and see, and then there are all these other dimensions too... even embodiment – is part of this [other] world too. It's like the room becomes more populated the more I pay attention... if there's more going on that I can include.

Stephen: Would that have more of a quality of aliveness or depth to it than just the surface content? So the experience of living or acting 'online' as it is called – through and as the aliveness of the moment – seems to include more of this depth, which stretches back – into the background... So the experience of creativity, or of words of poetry arising, or whatever may arise, comes from that depth of focus, of field depth, rather than from the more two-dimensional breadth of what's just here in front. And then although we might jump on whatever has arisen it's more that the field has just been more embraced in its genuine depth. And then what we're saying about relational space is that there is 'this' [thing arising] which is here, in the foreground, and simultaneously there's this depth of focus in which this thing is just an obvious or more tangible part.

Erin: Right...

Stephen: So what could we say about what's required in relating then? What does it involve actually?

Erin: An openness to a whole world that is behind and around, and not just to what we're more obviously paying attention to...

Stephen: Which we can think of as a form of deep listening, although even listening feels like too small a word, as something limited to my ability to hear, whereas this seems to exceed that... If I translate that two-dimensionally it would be like second-guessing what's there to come, or what might come, or what's there as potential. But if I open up from this narrow definition then it feels more like a space which is available and speaking and relating, and we're available to that, rather than anticipating anything. Like you're saying: being more aware of a space in which deeper relating can come in the moment.

5. Knowing and embracing

Erin: It feels very much like embracing all of what's actually here, a genuine being-in-the-world with everything... and it's hard for me to speak to this because I feel very clear in myself what that feels like... It feels like my whole body comes into contact with it – as a sensing... instrument... Like energetic structures which are everywhere and I feel aware of it – but not like my brain knows something: rather a kind of vibrational intensity that I feel. It's hard to speak to it more than that, but it feels very real... [interruption]. It's like walking towards, or holding, our edge [referring to some exercises in which we'd cultivated relationship to a sense of meeting a personal edge in life] where the question came up for me – I took a step (towards the edge) and I felt a lot more... well the question came up: 'what if there is an invitation here?' And I felt... wow – what would it feel like to really believe that there's 'whole invitation', or permission, here? I felt like I stepped inside of this circle which then closed behind me – in a good way, and that felt like a lot of the inquiry that I'd been holding was coming through, in a lot of the different exercises we did. The distinction for me between how I react in the world when there is a yes - a sense of



a yes that is so big that I wouldn't see it at all, because I'm so geared towards a familiar and I think safe focussing on a no, that I would miss this huge yes that's all over here...

Stephen: What enabled you to listen and respond to that yes – to feel this huge invitation - in a way that you wouldn't normally do? What enabled you to not just default?

Erin: There was a kind of stretching that had already become apparent to me, a kind of holding the possibility of a different experience... It starts with noticing a habitual reaction and waiting it out – not making a habitual motion...

Stephen: What enables the possibility of noticing a habitual reaction, where normally you –

Erin: In some ways I might notice that a bit anyway but I wouldn't... I've been able to more clearly notice these moments over the intensive practice we've been doing here, because I've had it reflected to me that others are aware when connecting with me that just behind me and off to the side (within arms' reach) are my packed bags, emotionally, and that at any moment when it feels unsafe or like the other person might go away, I grab my bags and am out. I'm still sitting there and seem to be connected but am no longer fully emotionally present. This kind of hyper-vigilant 'fight or flight' emotional preparedness is an experience I can feel very clearly all the time. I'm always in interaction with the possibility of exiting, emotionally, though am very able to seem fairly present still - it can be quite subtle but once I became aware of it through these reflections the implications were clearly very big ... This opened the question for me of: 'so what would it be like to not grab the bags and not leave?' To find out what would unfold in the space of the uncertainty of not exiting, of staying present to find out. And that was really interesting and really scary too...

6. The larger canvas

Stephen: It seems to me there's something in the relational space which you are consenting to, which enables this not-exiting, between you and a partner in an exercise, and which then seems to open the door to a sense of a much larger invitation. And there's something too in the larger relational space (of the whole collective of practice) that is also being consented to, through this work – which is part of the larger canvas. And then that larger canvas would, itself, be of course part of something more immense too...

Michael: For me, one thing is very much the slowing down, either as an effect or a necessary part of the practice, a necessary ingredient, to enable this commitment or consent... There's like a shifting of the tension away from a destination or conclusion or an action - towards a real exploring or inclusion, like Erin is saying, of potentially all the information that is here. So there's less trying to get anywhere, and not stepping over what's here and now.

Stephen: So that's a slowing and a spaciousness...

Michael: And a deliberateness...

Stephen: An awareness of intent?

Michael: Yes, a shifting away from a 'what's next?' attitude more to a 'what's here?' inquiry.

Stephen: And that 'what's here' would need unpacking a bit more, right? Which I think you [Erin] were speaking to earlier: listening to the nature of relational space – the foreground and the background. Because 'what's here' is potentially vast... in terms of its information potential, and I remember you [Michael] speaking of this fear of overwhelm, and which would challenge our belief in our capacity to hold a certain boundary. I had an experience recently in which that capacity was hugely challenged: I was being invited to lift the boundary - despite my will to cling onto it... The me-structure felt very very threatened by that...

7. Holding and opening space



Erin: In my dream recently I was elevated into the air and could feel that my whole natural reaction would be to freeze up in my body, and in the dream I had the energetic experience of being frozen without actually allowing my body to do that, while being aware of that experience – holding a space to not contract my whole body, because my sense was that if I did that then I would... drop down, so it was like there was this delay between the tensing and the actual follow-through in my body... a moment of faith... to not actually react and to allow another possibility to come in. This is holding space... the tensing would mean I would automatically lose contact with so much energy that is available and instead my focus would become very narrow, and I would lose a lot of contact...



Stephen: So you're holding the whole experience and not only just holding something inside it...

Erin: Right... there's a witnessing happening. I need to not contract completely inside the experience or in my reactivity, while some part of me is on the edge of doing exactly that; there's a space – of holding something open a little bit, an openness... And I don't know what that space is for – I just feel a stillness in me that is 'doing' this. And it feels like that then opens up something, some kind of spaciousness again. To be present to all of what's here feels, to me, quite physical actually: a relaxing, or a surrendering – to an unknown. That the whole world might be a yes is totally unknown to me. I don't know yet how to deeply feel that possibility in my body, so the first step feels like holding open a space of simply not reacting in the old way. And into that space perhaps something new can come. But there's a feeling that I don't need to worry about that, or try to find that. To simply be still inside of an urge to react feels like enough in this moment.

Stephen: That's opening to all that could be here, and also to whatever I might experience as 'too much', potentially, in the stretching, or at least we might believe that through habitually shying away from the 'too much.' So you're cultivating a different relationship to what's awfully unknown. Sensing the potential for 'unknown' – with awareness.

Erin: Yes.

Stephen: And that's a stretch.

Erin: And what if the unknown is also this invitation? That there is a very big invitation in it, and that's one of the possibilities that I don't often see...

Stephen: That was your ambivalence in [*another exercise, with another partner*] – right? If that's the invitation – in or to the unknown, then I must of course be at the very least ambivalent about that.

8. The invitation

Erin: Yes, although what actually happened was that there was this wave of grief which came up, which felt like this incredible grief at having gone through the whole world without understanding that all the time there was this invitation waiting for me to recognize it. Beyond that it felt like a kind of universal grief being touched upon... a kind of grief and joy together. Grief at having been so long exiled, joy at a possible recognition of a kind of deep, warm belonging, at-home-ness in the world. Something that had always been longed for, that I was only just recognizing had maybe been here all along. The feeling of missing and longing for something that had never actually been lost - coming home to the welcome and invitation that is the world, to the love inherent there.

Stephen: And how was the personal structure responding when the grief arose? What was happening there?

Erin: A bit of a softening, like an opening, some new information...

Stephen: If this grief is being offered up then what or how is the structure responding, because now it has the space to... what or where does the grief come from? Not what is it, but how does it arise? What's the structure doing there? Like in the ambivalence you have a wave of grief arising...

Erin: It's like some new sense has come and there's a release of something, which is a bit beyond me... as if something is being held for the first time in a special way and it didn't know this was possible before. There's a blocking out of a whole lot of life and so when it suddenly becomes aware of how it's possible to have a different experience through being held differently then there's all this grief of how cut-off the structure had been from all of this... And it's not only historical – the grief...

Stephen: This is what we could refer to as healing movement, which is why I'm interested in what enables this arising, and from where...

Michael: I've been feeling it as a kind of release or recognition of what hadn't been allowed previously. But then the question of whether it's only historical opens up another dimension – of what still might be available that is also not being allowed... In this recognition you get how much more there still might be...

9. Allowing worlds

Stephen: If we suppose there's a whole world, or worlds, not yet allowed...

Erin: Yes!

Stephen: Then we're developing capacities here toward a way of collectively being together that would potentially begin to tap into that... So I'm also interested in the quality of the grief...

Erin: Yes because like I said: there's also a quality of universality and longing in it...

Michael: Yes...



Erin: ... Touching on something somewhere in me – like I knew this was here somewhere, like an answer to a long-held question in a way. The sense you have that it is... here...

Stephen: Could you even connect with this... arising, right now?

Erin: It was from one space of not really feeling very much, and taking a step... starting to feel like getting closer to something and then this familiar shutting-down wanting to happen, and then this question of: 'what if there really is an invitation here, or permission?' which came up through my body... It felt like a relief to feel this, like I had been waiting for something.

Stephen: So a recognition?

Erin: Yes, strong, like a signal, that marks the boundary of something I can't otherwise see, as invisible. But this is now a liminal zone, in a way. I've touched something, though I can't identify it, it's still a border-line...

Stephen: In the arising, were you able to hold awareness, in it, while also witnessing?

Erin: Yes, because I could feel the experience of really staying with it, really wanting to listen and to know what it was telling me.

Stephen: The witnessing is a part of what's making all this possible...

Erin: Yes that felt really important, and how I stayed with it.

Stephen: And there was something in the relational space which supported that.

10. Relational space



Erin: Yes I was very aware of there being a connection there. There was space to be with whatever was arising for me there, and a stillness and a spaciousness and I trusted that.

Stephen: I think the man in the exercise you mention can and does embody this quality of simultaneous inner and outer awareness: something very focussed and attentive and here, as well as connection to much that isn't immediately just here and obviously apparent.

Erin: Yes I could feel a space in him that was holding a lot of all kinds of everything – holding a space for me and for his own... whatever was happening there too for him.

Stephen: In my later exercise, also with this same person, there was a lot that was potentially there for me, I could feel, but I didn't feel that I touched more than the tip of the iceberg of it. And somehow that was also enough.

Erin: Yes that's what I felt in witnessing it and you and him working. There was likely so much more, and there was that which did come out, clearly, for you, and there were inner shifts happening as part of that.

11. Healing movement

Stephen: Isn't there then also a kind of secret knowing – that there's a very important process being engaged with here, and there's trust arising to meet that. This trust – which doesn't feel like it's mine, or that I have to find it - enables an ability to be okay with the stopping or the pausing, and to know that's okay for now. And there's something in this movement, which we're calling a healing movement – something being put or allowed into movement. Who knows when it started to move, because if we're speaking about grief then it could or would be eternal or universal or timeless, but something has been noticed and brought to the surface, in this eternal wave, and in this trust, which is available and arising, it's okay that it's the tip of an iceberg. There's a knowing in the stopping that isn't just a default or an evasion, which normally it could be. So there's something in the collective container which enables the trust and the knowing and the movement.

Erin: This is the mystery: to have this space open enough, and receptive enough, to allow this arising and to not need to look at all of these things, in having to pinpoint them. That secret knowing felt very strong, as I was witnessing it. Whatever the mystery in that which might unfold when it wants to.

12. Present space

Stephen: And in the moment of it being there it doesn't feel like it's just my knowing – it's feels to me like it expresses itself as... a kind of what we called earlier 'poignancy of the moment', or the distinct quality of the present space, which is shared. It's like: 'Oh this is happening now in the space and I know that



other people are tasting it too.'

Erin: Yes!

Stephen: We may notice it as poignancy, or electric; some deeper quality of the collective space which is palpably present to people, though perhaps not to everyone, as a sign of something emerging.

Erin: Yes and those are the moments... when I find the space very alive – I love the feeling of this...

Stephen: And if we focus more on this... essential aspect right now...

Erin: I know how it feels in my body experience, vibrating... a lightness in the space, a quality in the air... literally this feeling, like on a molecular level...

Stephen: Could we say that the silence behind what's being spoken or done becomes more pregnant – as if the background and foreground were being melded together? The background becomes not just so much a thin layer of background but has come more forward or penetrated into foreground awareness. And then whatever is spoken into that space takes on a certain weight or gravity – it's fuller, more complete. This is not so much in the content of what's happening, but more the space from which the content comes, or is perceived, or allowed to emerge. We are literally learning to birth the background more consciously.

Erin: As a mythologist and storyteller friend of mine says – it's like the energy which stands behind us. I can feel that strongly in my sensing awareness of the world.

Stephen: And it's here too in these dialogues: a certain intensity – where my body feels more alive and I'm more here and attentive.

Erin: Yes! And in the very first exercise we did in this group – in pairs, there was something about the quality of the space that I and my partner were both in which was... it wasn't just what we were saying, but I could hardly bear it - the air was so vibrant – so much light, and it felt weird... like threads of light in the air... and we were both – she and I were very aware of this. It became intense as soon as she began to report her witnessing of our space, when I'd been speaking. She reflected on a strong quality of me that hadn't been there before in my words, and which had more to do with what I hadn't said than with what I had spoken...

Stephen: It's sometimes discernible before the speaking begins, I find. So when does it actually come into being...?

Erin: It was there before we spoke at all, so much so that I was a bit nervous and not sure how to speak and include all of it in that exercise. And then we spoke and softened into that space... beautiful...

13. Coherence

Stephen: So in a practice where this is allowed for then it would change a great deal. If from the moment there's this perceptible flavour, or intensity of the space, regardless of whether any content has been admitted into it... And then yesterday we said that it was as if different layers, or parts of a structure, were being simultaneously collapsed. Coming at this from an inner space it's more like different levels or dimensions are falling into a more coherent arrangement, and the impression of time also collapsing – which reveals the complexity and embeddedness of the present moment – beyond its clock-time present-ness. Something collapses or aligns, to enable what might feel like historical grief for instance to come to the surface and to be felt. This isn't just as something old that's being felt again, or even for the first time more fully... there's something in this movement, which we're calling eternal movement, which wants to be allowed, in this collapsing. Then in the systemic work, where we touch into grief, it doesn't feel only historical – it's more... Grief [capitalised]. A more whole human experience of it, and which is where this quality comes of something being... transmuted, which we often experience in hindsight as transformative.



And that's why this work is far more than something individually fulfilling, which would be gratifying enough in itself. But when someone remarks only upon how the work shakes them individually then it doesn't seem to be paying full service to what's really here. These are *collective* inquiries and essentially *collectively* realised, and their impact reaches, I think, far further than the collective which is presenting itself through the practice. We are really tapping into and resourcing – and being resourced by – vast fields and depths of consciousness when we consent to life in this way. These are universal dimensions of human experience. And we should notice this tendency to default into 'this is all about me, or mine', or 'us and ours', and the temptation to even frame healing in that way.

Michael: Your words on coherence feel so interesting and important to me. Like what is the composition of these moments of poignancy? What is the mechanism at work here? And what is the significance of what is happening, which we experience as a kind of collapsing, or opening, or deepening? How can we learn to navigate our way through relational fields so that

more and more we can recognize that level of experience and develop an ability to bring it into conscious awareness? This seems to be a crucial part of the collective we-space practice too. That we would all be cultivating a sensitivity to this background context of our experience, being able to identify the underlying threads and structures of what is happening on the more gross levels of our experience, and actively inquiring into the unknown spaces and edges of our experience.

Erin: Yes and I think that the individual instrument needs to experience this first: its greater capacities, to get the poignancy – when we become aware of many dimensions recognising themselves, and there’s a level of energetic resonance and recognition happening... so the present moment is weighted, though not weighed down. Different levels of something have touched, and a new coherence has emerged and made contact all in one space, for a moment...

14. Right relationship

Michael: For me, in my experience of it, there’s a feeling of right relationship: that different aspects of what’s in the field of my awareness all of a sudden merge... that we can track, a kind of fluidity, as you say... something clicks. And my sense of this click is that something that is naturally moving is allowed to move because something keeping it a bit off or back has been lifted. A flow that is no longer obstructed.

Stephen: And when you say that then I have a sense of it as something that would be irreversible - and therefore structural. A change has become possible whereby something can’t simply revert or collapse back into its default position.

Erin: Something drops away and something else comes into focus.

Michael: And these are aspects of something – of which the healing movement, as you were saying Stephen, is a by-product, an effect. That there’s a kind of natural order to things which can be... I relate to it as a meeting between conscious awareness and information that brings things into right relationship, and then you can feel all of a sudden – that’s it! There’s an opening, or a collapsing. And something that’s not being said gets said, something true, real...

15. Conclusions and evolutionary implications



Stephen: This dialogue highlights several key aspects of the Cultivating Higher Consciousness practices for me. First, when Erin referred to a new coherence, there is the possibility of a change in the structure of what we’ve been framing as an ‘underlying thread’ in our life, that we tend to identify with personally as something only about ourselves. These are structures of consciousness - versions of self - that we’re learning to sense into, hold and embody in a different way, through subtle skills and relational fields. We are learning to attune to each other’s energy fields and relate differently - more fluidly and creatively both to others and to our own sense of thread in life, and to include a sense of the systemic in how we work. This means that the ways we work through inquiry align us with a level of our experience that is

supremely interconnected – through realms and dimensions that we can sense – to all of life.

Secondly, we are working within the universal field of human experience - with grief in the example of this dialogue, and are facilitating structural change. And structural cannot be only personal. It must tap into a greater human potentiality, for we are simultaneously whole as well as parts of a whole. These collective inquiries lead us *to a sense of the subtle that can potentially transform anything* – and everything. Could we be learning to transform energetic structures of consciousness in ways other than we’ve been conditioned to do through our evolution? In other words, other than through life experience? What we’re finding in this work is that through slowing and sensing there is the possibility of *an acceleration or expansion or intensification* of life experience that bypasses our default conditioning and the known channels of change.

Michael: That feels really important to me. I recognize this in my own experience, from having been in the field of Thomas’ work, where people are addressing aspects of their own personal experience in such a way that taps into the collective human experience, such that I would find myself connected to the energy of the experience simply by being attuned to the group field, and without having to actually encounter that energy in my own personal life experience. Simply the fact that this is even possible feels so exciting to me, in that it would be evidence for our deep interconnectedness and the possibilities for us to serve each other in our evolutionary process.

Erin: I find that I am slowly coming to a stronger and stronger sense of what it might be like, feel like, what it might mean for change to come in a way other than living it through my own body in my life experience extensively over time - that the more clear and open and alive and awake I am, the more I might become open to a kind of transformational energy or possibility that would move through me in a way that feels outside of time, that might not actually be in time. I don’t think I actually know what that means but it feels true. This acceleration that you’re speaking of - I begin to have a strong sense of this. It feels as if there is a timelessness that can be met and touched into anywhere and in any moment – just as we were speaking of as a sense of coherence and a collapsing of different dimensions, and as I say that it makes sense to me now that there

would not be separate dimensions, that even this is simply a way to differentiate and separate something into layers so as to feel some sense of being able to understand something in the mind. And then it feels like, of course - separateness is our creation, another way we contain our evolution inside of time. So all of this extraordinary power for transformation is perhaps available all the time if we open the old habitual structures and the body-mind that has for so long housed all of this, or which has lived this energy in very particular ways, and which we are used to running this evolutionary energy through in such ways that it has mostly remained a process bound by time, bound by running itself through our life experiences, possibly over and over again in order to evolve. I find it exciting, mystifying, beautiful to reach beyond my own borders to sense and touch upon this exquisite possibility out beyond all of the structures this self of mine has built to maintain a sense of safety and control and to remain a being bound by an orderly sense of time.

Stephen: Yes and I think it's the way that we're *presencing* questions that makes accessible aspects of human experience that feel so universal. The invitation in our practice is to feel and embrace the movement of whatever we've inherited - personally and culturally - that hasn't yet been fully brought into contact, into life. We expose this – grief for instance, if that arises, to presence, rather than to any intention to effect change or healing. There can then arise a timelessness that has a flavour of the future. The innovation in the processes we're pursuing, and in the quality of our presence, is resonant with a more evolved way of being human, of practicing humanity. This is our birthright: a way that was 'always so' and is not out of reach.

Michael: Yes! Erin and I were talking recently about how to bridge the gap between mainstream culture and the activities of the communities in which we participate. I feel so strongly that these relational practices would be best framed as a kind of remembrance practice, in a similar way to how the individual spiritual path is often framed as a returning to one's 'Natural State' or 'True Nature.' The paradox of this way of being together is that we're cultivating something that is both extraordinary and utterly normal. It is simply a more true expression of what it means to be human. I find proof of this in the ease and grace with which information floods the field of awareness as soon as we consent to allow it.



Stephen: Essentially what we're learning is to embody the subtle and to hold questions differently – relationally, through inquiry. We could say that when we consent to look deeply enough, into the deepest questions that we're enabled to sense and formulate, then our life can *become* a question, one that we live, or that we become an unfolding answer to our life's question. In working through relationship we're filling the space with energy and awareness, and this *magnetises the field of our inquiry*, connecting us to a sense of greater potential that feels simultaneously timeless and future-oriented. There is a sense that we're updating our evolutionary blueprint – filling whatever field we're presencing with life-energy.

The key is to develop our feeling capacity: to perceive through the feeling centre, which is the hotline to our knowing intuitive self. We do this most effectively through witnessing within relational space. This loosens up our rigid identification with a personal structure and leaves more space for information and insight to come in. To allow more of the subtle in our lives is to uncover layers of connection and meaning which are less about 'my subtle world' and more of *the* subtle: layers that are waiting to be embraced and embodied. With each one that I encounter I'm invited to include those unintegrated parts that I find there and to transcend the version of self upon which they depended. We do need to be in relationship to invite this. Through local collectives of relational practice we meet our own multidimensionality and, in doing so, merge with a much larger collective source of intelligence. Our task then is to practice and to pull more of life's rich spectrum down into the reality of our daily lives.

This work reminds us that we are essentially perceivers: finely tuned perceiving instruments, and that we can sensitise ourselves to and align with energies in a way that does not lock-in reality, as we tend to habitually perceive and perpetuate it. When we inquire into the subtle non-physical dimensions of ourselves then our own multi-dimensionality is further revealed, and this far exceeds the limits of reality as we have for too long defined it. We can strengthen our inner capacities and celebrate our connectedness to larger dimensions of reality. This makes us ever-clearer containers for those higher aspects of humanity which we have long denied.

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