

## **Relational Depth: A window into an Interconnected world**

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My keynote is both an exploration and an invitation to you. It's an exploration into 'relating', the process of relating and its qualitative nature. What do I mean by this? The shape and feel of a relationship can be widely different. It can be detached, controlling and competitive or respectful, collaborative and caring. It can feel full of potential or be limiting. With relational depth, its qualities are Rogers' six therapeutic conditions (Rogers, 1957). Usually relational depth refers to 'moments of intense contact and connection' and 'enduring experiences of connectedness' (Mearns and Cooper, 2005) within the therapeutic relationship. This morning I invite you into a world where *relational depth is a possibility at all times*. This possibility arises from my foundational assumption that 'we live in an interconnected universe'.

This keynote is not academic in the usual meaning of that word. My intention is not to prove an argument, rather to invite you to join me in my explorations as a participative lived enquiry into an interconnected world where *'living life with relational depth'* becomes a possibility. If you wanted you could, observe the changing qualities of how you relate both to yourself, me, and the conference as I speak and notice if and when there are any shifts.

Why does the qualitative nature of relating matter? Relational depth is significant within therapeutic relationships because the therapeutic relationship is enhanced and client's (and probably therapist's too) experience enduring positive effects. I believe that the qualitative nature of how we relate creates the very structures and processes of our society (Wyatt, 2004a). This means that if you extend relational depth beyond the therapeutic context into the wider world, it could help to address Einstein's much quoted plea regarding the problems of today can never be solved by the same consciousness that created them. This would mean that by living our life with relational depth and creating societal structures and processes embedded with relational depth we may find a way forward that addresses the global problems that we are facing in

the 21<sup>st</sup> century and undergo the transcendence of consciousness required for us to truly work collaboratively to achieve this.

Today I am going to start with relational depth and the Person-centred therapeutic relationship, explore the nature of relating and then take you on a whistle stop tour through the evolution of the major world views. We'll then arrive at the state of the world today and see what significance the quality of how we relate has to societal structures and processes. The focus then will be exploring relational depth from this interconnected worldview particularly in relation to the self and groups. I'll then conclude with where this leaves us in thinking about communities and our society at large.

### **Relational depth within Person-centred therapeutic relationships**

Dave Mearns was probably the first person within the Person-centred approach to coin the phrase 'relational depth' when he used it as a contrast to 'surface relational competencies' (1997, p. 20). He pointed out that most of our human relating doesn't happen at depth and he posed a great question ... 'Why is it so rare?'

Others have referred to a similar phenomena between two people: Buber's I-thou (1958), Rowan's 'linking' (1998), Jordan's 'intimate intersubjectivity' (1997) and Stern's 'moments of meeting' (2004). Different types of meditation and contemplation including prayer could be seen to create opportunities for relational depth within the self. Whilst others have focused on this level of connection within groups and societies including Patrick de Mare's 'Koinonia' (1991), Scott Peck's 'community', which he distinguishes from 'pseudo-community' (1990), Buddhism's 'co-dependant arising' (Macy, 1991), Thich Nhat Hanh's 'interbeing' (2003) and for Christians it could be seen to be the descent of the 'holy spirit'.

Dave Mearns and Mick Cooper's excellent book 'Working at Relational Depth' (2005) gave the concept prominence and since, others have explored and researched both the meaning of the concept philosophically (Dave Mearns, Peter Schmid, Elke Lambers, Steve Cox, David Murphy and myself) and the significance of it for therapeutic practice by attending to both the therapist and client's experiences of relational depth (Rosanne

Knox, Mick Cooper, Maria McMillan, John McLeod, Sue Wiggins and David Murphy).

In the first sentence of Dave and Mick's book they refer to 'moments of intense relational contact' and 'enduring experiences of connectedness' (2005, p. 1) and this highlights the two differing aspects of relational depth – a significant moment that follows a shift in the relationship, and a qualitative description of an ongoing relationship. The significance of both these – moments and the ongoing relationship at depth – is that the therapeutic relationship is enhanced and the client experiences enduring positive effects. Research by Rosanne Knox has identified these as 'feeling better, being more connected to self, improved relationships to others and an ability to move and tackle things in their life (2008).

Dave and Mick offer the following working definition of relational depth

A state of profound contact and engagement between two people, in which each person is fully real with the Other, and able to understand and value the other's experiences at a high level. (2005, p.xii).

This definition brings together all of Rogers' six conditions of therapeutic contact. What is striking in this definition is that realness, empathy and unconditional positive regard are mutually experienced and offered by therapist AND client to each other. This is a *significant* reformulation of Rogers' conditions. Mearns and Cooper describe this mutual, bi-directional and co-creative relating as 'a complex gestalt of interweaving experiences and perceptions' ... 'a co-transparency, a co-acceptance, a co-understanding, a co-receiving of each other – a flowing backwards and forwards between therapist and client through the channel that connects them' (Mearns and Cooper, 2005, p. 46).

The research by Mick Cooper into therapist experiences of relational depth (2005) supports the theory as therapists interviewed identified the following characteristics – being empathic, real, focused, immersed in the moment and fully accepting of the client. Rosanne Knox's research into client's perception of therapists in moments of RD matched these findings and in addition found that clients reported being invited to a deeper level, having a sense of being emotionally held or supported and

experienced the therapists in a very personal and profound way rather than merely professionally (2008).

A central experience described by clients in all the research was one of letting go. In addition Maria McMillan and John McLeod found clients experienced this when they felt an enduring sense of connectedness and caring in the therapeutic relationship (2005). Rosanne Knox and Mick Cooper's research (2010) identified the client's own readiness and willingness to be vulnerable that followed a shift either in their own perception of the therapist, in the level of openness between them or in the relationship itself. They saw themselves as the pro-active agent as they were following their own active decision and they described a process of letting go, opening and flowing. Client's also described their experiences of relational depth as involving feelings of safety, aliveness, transparency and openness (Knox, 2008).

This research attended to clients OR therapists experiences of relational depth. This means that the mutual, bi-directional and co-creative aspects of relational depth as far as I know, has not been fully investigated yet. This would need the focus to be on the relationship and/or moment from the therapist AND client's perspectives. David Murphy's recent PhD where he researched 'levels of the therapeutic conditions as provided and perceived by both clients AND therapists' during their therapeutic relationship (2010) starts this process. As David wrote to me in a recent email 'I found that the association between client's perception of therapist provided conditions and outcome was stronger when therapists also rated themselves as providing higher rather than lower levels of the therapeutic conditions. This suggests that perceived mutually high levels of the core conditions is a better predictor of outcome than a unilateral perspective.' (2010). David didn't say this, but I will – his research is a significant step towards supporting the mutual and bi-directional nature of relational depth.

I hope my exploration will lend further support for this mutual, bi-directional and co-creative nature of relational depth as well as revealing some rather spooky things!

### **What is the nature of relating?**

So for the last 10 minutes I have been speaking about 'relational depth' but what does relational and relationship mean? The Oxford

Dictionary defines 'relate' as to establish an association between two or more things. So relating is about an association, a linking, a connection. Are there limits to what can relate to what and if so what are they? Am I relating to my watch and the concept of time, to each of you and the conference as a whole, to the tree outside? Am I relating to the ground underneath my feet, or to the flood victims in Pakistan ... and the flood itself? How about to Carl Rogers, or a memory I have of a kingfisher – a glimpse of its iridescent blue. To a man on Death row, to a grain of sand on the beach, to all the people in the world?

Are there limits in connection with locality, time, whether something is animate or not? Is it to do with having consciousness or the number involved? And then what is the nature of the association, the link, the connection? What is the process involved? What is happening to the two people relating and what happens in the space between them? Where are the different qualitative characteristics of relating created and how? Do they reside in each of the 'what' or 'who', or are they effected by the between? What is the between, is it empty, or are there invisible forces and fields? Is our culture embedded in this space and all of history too?

We don't really have many of the answers to these questions. They inquire into how we see the world (ontology) and our understanding of knowledge (epistemology). The thorough historical overview of the changing nature of these worldviews is beyond the scope of this keynote, yet I do want to give you a snapshot of a few of the major ones because I believe these underpin and influence how we relate. These different views of reality are embedded into our language, our culture, our structures and processes.

I'm going to start around 8000BCE. Animism is based on the belief that spirit is universal. No distinction was made between the self and the environment and everything – rain, sun, rocks, trees, animals, humans, all had a specific spirit and were collectively part of the whole. The Australian aboriginals and Native Americans honour this tradition. Here being connected and relating was living and life was circular, embodied, ecological and sacred.

Next, Buddhism, one of its central tenets is Paticca Samuppada – this means co-dependant arising or mutual causality. Reality is a

dynamically interdependent process created from 'a web of mutual causal interaction' Macy, 1991). Reality is not primarily about entities made up of substance/matter that can impinge on each other but rather of relationships. Humans, through the preconceptions and predispositions of the mind create a human-made reality and through Buddhism they're invited to develop awareness, compassion and non-attachment, to let go this human illusion. The self is not a separate entity that decides whether or not to participate in the lives of other beings. It does so already, by its nature, the interrelatedness of all beings is a given. The nature of relating here is participative and interpenetrative; one might even call it entangled.

We're going to make a pretty huge jump now to the Modern or the Newtonian-Cartesian view of the world. A major part of this development was Galileo and Francis Bacon's new empirical and inductive approach, which directed the scientist's attention to properties that could be measured and quantified. This was the start of quantity gaining supremacy over quality. Rene Descartes then sought 'certain knowledge' and the only knowledge he was certain about was 'I think, therefore I exist'. From this, he developed an analytical method of reasoning and a separation of the mind (the thinking thing) from matter (the extended thing). The material world became 'a machine with no purpose, life or spirituality' (Capra, 1983, p.45), that could be taken apart to be understood and behaved like billiard balls in a predictable and quantifiable way, according to the mathematical laws formulated by Isaac Newton. The nature of this world was materialistic, mechanistic, reductionist, there was one truth and the knowledge sought was rational, objective and quantifiable. What this means is that if A is done to B then C will predictably follow. Relating took place between entities and was defined by unidirectional causal determinism where control, prediction and domination replaced the earlier moral and ecological awareness.

In this world where determinism and prediction was highly valued unexpected contradictions began to turn the Newtonian-Cartesian world upside down. Matter started behaving strangely. The discovery of X-rays demonstrated a mysterious force emanating from what was supposed to be solid matter. The discovery of radioactivity by Marie and Pierre Curie revealed that atoms were not immutable as had been previously thought. Then electrons, quanta, photons and other particles started to be discovered. Then

particles seemed to have both wave-like properties and particle-like properties. This wasn't meant to occur in Newton's three-dimensional space. Isaac Einstein, Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg and Erwin Schrodinger all had to learn to ask the questions that took them below these contradictions. Einstein discovered a fourth dimension continuum, where space and time are connected. This became his law of general relativity. It was within this continuum that the quantum discoveries took place. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle is about not being able to measure the momentum and the position of a particle at the same time. And when we observe something we are involved in bringing the observation about. This meant that the linear explanation that X causes Y was no longer true at this quantum level. This severely challenged objectivity and determinism. Non-locality concerns the entanglement of particles and says that once they have shared an identical state, they remain linked to each other however far they travel from one another. What does this mean for how we relate? Is it that relating is now no longer defined by locality, objectivity and determinism?

Whereas, the Newtonian-Cartesian world was a material, deterministic world subject to physical forces, the world has now become less certain. It's a world of mass, energy and fields. It's weird to think there is more empty space in this chair than matter and then to realise the solidness at a subatomic level is created by vortices of energy, which, prevent us from putting our hand through it. This new science suggests the whole universe is a 'dynamic web of inseparable energy patterns'. There's even positive energy in empty space, called the zero point field, so much so, that in a cubic metre there's enough to boil all of the world's oceans according to Richard Feynman, an American physicist. How bizarre is that. And dogs that know when their owners are coming home, even when it's random. They sit on the doormat as if they've received an instant message. Rupert Sheldrake who researched this and other related phenomena, posits the existence of 'morphic fields' that links physical bodies to their environment through which some sort of communication occur. And Margaret Wheatley suggests our communal space may be 'filled with these interpenetrating influences and invisible fields.' (1999)

There are so many more developments that I could address but one that I must is Darwinism. Charles Darwin was working on his theory at the same time as Alfred Russel Wallace. Whereas

Darwin emphasized 'survival of the fittest', Wallace's work emphasized the 'elimination of the weakest'. There's a longer story concerning why Darwin's theory took precedence, Suffice to say, it's not to do with the science (Lipton and Bhaerman, 2009). 'Survival of the fittest' has been used as an excuse for inhumane behaviour and competition has played a central role in shaping our society. It often informs how we relate.

Evolutionary biology has found the significance of the role of the environment with genetic determinism. This is called epigenetic. And this, alongside Wallace's contribution now suggests co-operation played an equal if not larger part in our evolution.

There are many avenues that have developed from discoveries of quantum science and the philosophical and social reaction to the materialism and objective certainty of the Newtonian/Cartesian world. They collectively fall within the postmodern worldview. Here, exist multiple realities and perspectives. One avenue is social constructionism which explains how multiple realities are constructed as our mind interpret and constructs a reality that makes sense of our individual and cultural experiences. The cartoon, give you an idea of this.

Another broad avenue is the holistic/emergent paradigm in which resides systems, chaos and complexity theories. A system is a configuration of parts that are connected and joined together by a web of relationships. Different properties emerge at more complex levels of self-organisation, for example the property of salt is very different from the properties of sodium and chlorine, the properties of our body is very different from the organs within it. Systems, Complexity and chaos theory has shone a light on the complexity all around us and shown us that we cannot always understand what needs to be understood from breaking it down into its parts (reductionism). These theories help to show patterns in what has previously been thought of as random and show how a stable state can become disorganized, reach a bi-furcation or tipping point and then self-organise into a more complex organisation.

What's the significance of all of this for our world today and for relational depth? The Newtonian/Cartesian world has brought us much – freedom from the authority of the church, the industrial revolution, undreamt of technological advances, medical expertise which has reduced infant mortality and extended life expectancy,

global communications, higher living standards from economic growth and consumer goods.

And ecologically our planet is crippled by the pollution and diminishing natural resources resulting from the incessant drive for economic growth and technological advances. Our societies buckle from the stress of so much change including secularisation and the demise of the family. Little new meaning beyond consumerism has been found to replace more traditional values and attitudes. Politically the ramifications of 9/11 have had horrifying consequence of intensifying fundamentalism, terrorism and pre-emptive military initiatives. Many see the natural disasters occurring as the start of climate chaos. Psychologically we lurch and reel from these societal, political and ecological effects.

What has gone wrong? ... Brian Lipton and Steven Bhaerman have likened our world to Mickey Mouse in Walt Disney's sorcerer's apprentice. 'Modern civilisation, being the apprentice, has activated the power of technology' without the skill and wisdom necessary and what has resulted is spiralling disaster (2009, p.62).

I see the truth in this image but I think our current scenario is more complex. On the one hand, so many of our societal structures and processes are still in the tight grasp of the old worldview. The objectivity, determinism and materialism has led to massive fragmentation and 'fixity' on so many different levels which results in inept partisan politics, a collapsing financial system, an 'us' and 'them' mentality, a society where a policeman cannot jump into water to save a drowning child because of issues of Health and Safety but a passerby can. And on the other hand we also have a bubbling up of innovative, co-operative ventures emerging from people's ecological, political and sociological concern. They embrace process rather than fixity, co-operation rather than competition, world-centric rather than egocentric values. They seek the emergent possibilities from the interrelatedness of the interconnected world that quantum science, chaos and complexity theories and Buddhism shows us is possible.

Many futurists see us at the stage of disequilibrium prior to a bifurcation point (Laszlo, 2009). The worlds systems as we know them are dying and we are simultaneously grieving for the old world and experiencing the birth pangs of a new world. The

interconnectedness from new science, systems theory (and Buddhism) can support this transition by revitalising the quality of how we relate and providing a qualitative different blueprint for our societal structures and processes. The values of competition and control can shift to caring and co-operative. I've always thought Rogers' conditions had a significant part to play in this necessary transformation and Rogers' writing entitled 'person of tomorrow' (1980) shows he did too. I think the essence of relational depth is the inherent nature of this interconnected world and I'll now turn to exploring the concept beyond the therapeutic relationship. I'll start with relational depth and the self.

If you've managed to stay with me so far, I thank you. I think we need to switch gear and do something different for a while. I'm going to lead you through a meditation or awareness exercise so we can start to focus on relating with ourselves.

*Maybe if you feel comfortable close your eyes and just watch your breathing, if you don't want to do it that's Ok too.*

*Don't try to alter your breathing just watch.*

*And look inward and see what you are thinking and how are you feeling, what sensations are you aware of ... how would you describe your own self-relating. ... are you calm, or frustrated and jarring or curious? These may not be your words at all. What are yours? Are you understanding and accepting, can you be real with yourself. See if you can lean into your experience and see what is at the edges that you may just get a glimmer of ...*

*What's your mood and has it changed since you got up this morning maybe track your journey here, arriving, registering, and maybe meeting people you know.*

*Any self-configuration around, or condition of worth, any repetitive pattern that is like an old friend?*

*Now bring your attention to the area around your heart, as if you're breathing in and out from your heart, if you lose your focus just gently take it back.*

*Now think of anything special that makes you smile, nearly like an inner smile, enjoy the feeling, breathe in and out with that feeling.*

*Gently notice any thought or feeling or sensation you might have had or are having now while you're doing this.*

*Again very gently lean into it, maybe soften and see again what is at the edges ...*

*Ok, if you've had your eyes shut open them and bring your focus back to us all in the room ...*

As I talk now about relational depth within the self, you may like to think about aspects of your experience just now and I will refer back to this exercise.

## **The self and Relational Depth**

In an interconnected world as a result of the interrelatedness and mutual causality, a major theme is that we co-create the world from our inner landscape. As the inner, so is the outer.

Experiences from infancy lay down the foundation for our social and emotional functioning in adult life. Neuroscience has shown that loving attention for the baby generates the neurotransmitters that facilitate a high level of neural connectors and brain growth (Schore, 2003). These neural connections create a dense network of possibilities. The infant's experience begins to create patterns of neural connections as a result of a similar situation happening again and again. Once neurons are formed into patterns they are used to organise behaviour. These pathways and their interactions are mostly unconscious and non-verbal but they structure our expectations and how we see the world and can mean that the reptilian brain rules too much of our lives rather than there being a balance between the four parts of the brain (Reptilian, limbic, neo-cortex and pre-frontal).

Sue Gerhardt (2004), and others who have followed neuroscience research suggests that loving relating in later life, whether with partners, children, within a community or within a therapeutic relationship, can extend the pathways laid down in early life so the person can develop a richer fuller life.

It seems to me many of us want to access a richer relational life. We want our inner relating to be what Mick has called I/I instead of the I/Me (2003) where we have real self-empathy and acceptance for our self, rather than criticism or fragility. Many of us know and can track our changing internal landscape from the more superficial, presentational form of relating to a deeper more connected up form. As therapists we know the development of our congruence or psychological maturity will mean that we will gain this I/I internal relating and be able to offer an enduring connection with our client. Congruence developed as a multi-level whole person concept by Jules Seeman (2001), Ivan Ellingham (2001) and myself (2001, 2004a, 2004b) requires a connection and coherence between different levels or systems and 'configurations of self. This coherent self is a connected up individual both within herself and outwards able to open to the interconnected world. It is

an ongoing process, and also we can experience shifting in and out of this connectivity.

I'll recount a couple of experiences of mine to illustrate what I mean about this shift, this connecting up, that leads to both self-relational depth and being connected to the wider world.

During my own therapeutic journey about 10-15 years ago I remember realising that when I was attending to my experience I sometimes became aware of an opening, at the edge of my awareness, so small that it would have been so easy to miss. But if I slowed down sufficiently and had the courage to allow my consciousness to lean into this opening then I would experience such depth of feelings and release that previously I had no idea was there.

Another ... When I'm rushing and my anxiety starts to rise up inside of me, if I am able to slow down and sink more fully into my body the shift that I experience is quite exquisite. I feel whole. My centre of gravity drops down, I feel my feet on the ground and the support it gives me. Stillness replaces my previous anxiety and spaciousness takes over from being rushed.

Let's lean into this experience of shifting, and experiencing a coherence or wholeness. This leaning in (as I invited you to in the exercise) can be seen as an invitation to relating at depth. When I talk about leaning in, it's similar to the process of Eugene Gendlin's focusing (1981) or Vipassana meditation. I deepened my understanding of this process through Goethean methodology. Johan Wolfgang von Goethe was a writer, philosopher and a scientist. His method of scientific enquiry could not be more different from mechanistic science. He said 'The human being knows himself only insofar as he knows the world; he perceives the world only in himself, and himself in the world. Every new object, clearly seen, opens up a new organ of perception in us.' (Goethe in Miller, 1988, p.39). As we lean into an experience or what we're researching, we open our self so what we are focusing on, can teach us about its true nature by taking form within us from the fullness of our participation.

This 'leaning in' can lead to the shift from surface, presentational relating to an experience of relational depth. The process itself can be considered relating at depth too,

From 'leaning into' relational depth and reading the research there seems to be conditions for relational depth, the process and the benefits. They aren't easy to differentiate because of the mutual causality of relational depth. For example the benefits become a deeper level of the conditions and the conditions are the benefits as the spiral turns. (Even though here they are written linearly, this needs to be translated into a systemic interconnected way – my next task or somebody else's!)

### *Conditions*

- Some degree of self-awareness;
- Self-empathy and self-acceptance;
- Enough maturity to be ready and willing to be vulnerable;
- A feeling of trust and safety.

### *Process*

- Slowing down,
- Staying with,
- Allowing,
- Softening,
- Opening,
- Leaning into,
- Deciding to,
- A shift re connecting within self and beyond,
- Flowing, sense of wholeness.

### *Benefits*

- A feeling of being a connected up self (I-I);
- Confidence;
- A perceptual shift – stepping free from conditions of worth and the I-me (removing the limiting glasses);
- Accessing wisdom (through heart intelligence and higher self);
- A sense of the interconnected world and feeling whole with infinity;
- Synchronous events happening (Jung's synchronicity is an example of acausal connection that links the inner realms and intent with outer events).

I want to tell you about the research from The Institute of HeartMath in the States, for several reasons.

- It provides us with a simple exercise to facilitate a shift into relational depth.
- It provides information about what is happening in our bodies during a relational depth experience.
- And it provides evidence that humans creates fields which adds support to the fields of interpenetrative forces of the interconnected world

The exercise is called freeze-frame (1999) and its similar to when I invited you to focus at your heart and think or remember something that made you smile. It creates what they call heart coherence which influences the whole body and brings it into psycho-physiological coherence. The heart communicates with the brain and the body in four interconnected ways - neurologically, biochemically, biophysically, and energetically, creating rhythmic information patterns throughout every cell of the body which also extends out in all directions into the space around a person. The heart rate variability, a measure of the naturally occurring changes in heart rate, beat by beat, provides a window to understand the communication pathways between the heart, the brain and the body.

It was discovered that the heart rhythms were very responsive to thoughts, emotions and stress. With stress and negative emotions the heart rate variability becomes erratic and disordered, influencing the parasympathetic nervous system like a foot on the brake and the sympathetic nervous system like a foot on the accelerator. The result – the autonomic nervous system is out of synch and overall psycho-physiological incoherence results limiting our ability to think clearly, focus, learn and reason.

With positive emotions like appreciation, care & love the heart rate variability becomes highly ordered and coherent, reflecting greater synchronisation between the two branches of the autonomic system, which results in psychophysiology coherence leading to enhanced focus, comprehension, memory and creativity. (As I think relational depth would to.

The heart rate variability pattern shown in the top graph, characterized by its random, jerky form, is typical of feelings of anger or frustration. Sincere positive feelings states, like appreciation (bottom) can result in highly ordered

and coherent heart rate variability patterns, generally associated with enhanced cardiovascular function.

These next two graphs show an individual's heart rate variability, pulse transit time and respiration patterns for 10 minutes. At the 300-second mark, the individual used Freeze-Frame. As you can see, all three systems become in sync and coherent, meaning the patterns are harmonious instead of scattered and out-of-sync. The influence of the heart is significant because of how it connects up through all of the body via its four interconnecting ways of communicating.

The electromagnetic field created by the heart is powerful. It's 5000 times stronger than the brain and as well as influencing every cell in our body it extends 12 feet away. The brain draws the patterning of information present in the heart's field and uses it to determine our internal experience of the world. I think if the heart rate variability was measured when we experience relational depth we would see the coherent pattern produced by appreciative emotions. Thus when we experience relational depth our bodies are psycho-physiologically coherent with all four parts of our brain functioning together. And we start to heal or extend the neural patterns laid down in infancy that affects our social and emotional intelligence.

Our bodies are a community of 50 trillion cells ... the total number of cells in a human body is greater than the total number of humans on 7000 earths. And these diverse cells, organs and organ systems all co-operate and work together in health. Teilhard de Chardin, a French philosopher and Jesuit priest talks about the elemental attraction between cells and connects love as a quality that brings things together from cell to cell and to people. The potential for our more conscious 'human love' arises from the more elemental attraction between our cells (1955). At the same time, I think there is deep embedded fear within our society; I think more present in the West although that has started to change. The qualities of competition, control and determinacy inherent in the Newtonian/Cartesian world, the fragmentation within the self, between others and our environment, the pursuit of materialistic goals and the devaluing of emotions and values have strengthened this fear base resulting in alienation and a lack of caring and this feeds back on itself. It's been suggested by several within the Person-centred approach including Pat Patterson

(1997), that bringing together the conditions are like a non-possessive love. The work of the Person-centred approach, through Rogers' conditions and relational depth, and the HeartMath Institute are having an important influence in facilitating a movement away from 'fear' towards 'love'.

This shift into relational depth and towards love embraces the interconnected nature of the world. When this happens some pretty amazing things start occurring. We've looked already at some of the benefits, but these others, sometimes called emergent, are on a different scale. They include a parent lifting up a car to free their child trapped underneath, the spontaneous remission of cancer, setting an intent that you have no seeming possibility of achieving and then spontaneous events happen so your intent is fulfilled. Currently we only use 5% of our brain - *the potential is amazing*. And more and more we're being shown now by science as well as by spirituality that our beliefs shape our lives, shape how we see the world and determine how much of our potential we can realise (see Lipton, 2005).

I'm going to leave that hanging a little so I can turn to groups and relational depth now. I will return to the significance of 'fear' and 'love' again.

## **Groups and Relational Depth**

What does relational depth look like in a group? To begin to answer this question I want to recount two very different group experiences of mine (2004b).

### ***Two illustrative scenarios***

*The family - mother, father and three children were getting ready for their summer holiday, a caravanning trip to the highlands of Scotland. Each efficiently completed their allotted tasks. There was not the light-hearted banter of a family excited to be going on their summer holiday but rather a brittle tolerance of each other as the preparations were made. The youngest having finished what she was doing asked her brother if she could help, he sneered a reply of 'What makes you think you could be of help?' Upset she sought out her father who had her fill the radiator with water. Tasks were completed but with an attitude of minor hostility and aloofness. The father was cold towards his elder daughter and ignored his son who sullenly ignored everybody after being rude to his mother. As the family got into the car, finally ready, the atmosphere was tense, cold and unpleasant. The youngest endeavoured to lighten the mood by chatting about Scotland. Her mother told her to be quiet.*

.....

*The group was a first year of a Diploma in Counselling. This was the last but one day. The year had been challenging in different ways for all concerned. There was warmth between most people, a lightness and ease. There were stronger bonds between some people but even where there was an unresolved tension there seemed to be still a mutual respect and tolerance of the difference and the difficulty. The task of the day was to complete self, peer and staff assessments. What happened during that day surprised many of the students? Each had unpleasant memories of exams. As each student found their strength to talk about their learning over the year they found the feedback they received from their peers and tutor drew out their own assessment, deepening and broadening it. Each person was making a different point yet a thread ran through all of the comments ever honouring the student as each contribution deepened the recognition and understanding. Many voiced being in awe of what they had achieved together and how it had culminated on this day about assessments. Some reported they felt 'transformed' and many went home stunned.*

These two examples clearly illustrate –

- A fragmented group with the individual members pulling in different directions. Their superficial style of relating also acts as a mirror into the isolation and rigidity of their conditions of work, which shape their perceptual patterns.
- And a group, which is functioning as a 'we', working collaboratively to achieve a common purpose, through a richer, fully participation of each individual person.

I was the younger child in the first account and the tutor in the second. Stephen Joseph, a student in the group was the first to use the term 'thread'. He writes about his experience of this connected up conversation.

*What was fantastic was the experience of people really listening to each other, people responding to what the person was saying, so that it was like a thread ran between people connecting them, and each new thing that was said built on what had gone before. That doesn't happen often, most of the time people just seem to say something that's in their own heads, which has some loose connection with what the other person has said, there is no thread, no real connection between people or listening to each other. (2004, personal communication)*

I had many more experiences as a facilitator and a participant when the group would shift and take on a completely different

quality. We were so interconnected and yet I experienced myself being more of myself. For instance...

As a shamanic exercise, we walked blindfolded in a group with one hand on the shoulder of the person in front of me, like a giant caterpillar, over Dartmoor. We couldn't synchronise most of the time but occasionally when we were able to find coherence with each other, the feeling of being like one organism was profound. I didn't feel I had lost something, rather gaining something. I felt huge, vibrant and part of the universe.

On my Masters in Human Ecology I struggled with their old paradigm of learning as it was meant to be an innovative course. It jarred with my experience as a Person-centred facilitator. One weekend on a Sunday morning when there had been an unusual amount of conflict both simmering and expressed in the group, the authoritative tutor was able to let go of control and allow the group a more horizontal structure ... and a shift happened, we started really listening, really seeking to understand and exploring difficulties together. Afterwards I was able to research this and asked students and staff what their experience had been. All but one who replied said they had experienced a shift. The common themes reported were – a new sense of community or synthesis, unity, connectedness, solidarity, shared identity and deepening relationship. For one or two the shift they experienced was more uncomfortable and their emphasis seemed to be more about the difference between individuals (Wyatt, 2004b).

Was this shift an experience of relational depth in these groups? I think there are probably many different ways to experience relational depth in groups – as an individual touched by something that has occurred or a memory triggered; and in connecting with one other person, a few people as a sub-group. The shift with the whole or most of the group brings about a deeper connection and something very profound, the stepping into something sacred and infinite. This makes the experience transformational.

I taught a one-day workshop in Manchester on congruence and this shift felt like it was starting to happen ... like riding the crest of a wave, but a participant cut right across with a statement that felt completely unrelated. Those of us on the wave were shocked. Somebody said about being interrupted and she replied she hadn't been aware of anything-special happening. The group started

leaning in to their different experiences. One person revealed that she would normally be sulky and difficult now and there was a sensitive exploration of her shift and other people shared some of their vulnerabilities. Some when during this the feeling started to grow again. Somebody else said I don't understand what's happening, before we were deciding about whether to do an exercise and that has just been dropped. He was right, it had. Again we leaned in and explored where people were, their different experiences, and people exploring more of their perceptual patterns and seeing how they defined their world. This time nobody interrupted and a thread grew and developed and the conversation roamed over a wide area. Just before we were breaking for tea I asked the group if they were willing for me to take a straw poll regarding how many people were riding each wave or were engaged in each thread... mixing metaphors. The first thread had 4, the second had 8 and the third had everybody. The special qualities do seem to kick in with all or nearly all participants involved.

I called this connecting up a 'holonic shift' (2004b). A holon is a term coined by Arthur Koestler (1967) for something that is simultaneously a whole in and itself, and at the same time its nested within another holon and so is a part of something larger than itself. It therefore both differentiates at one level and integrates at the other level.

The shifts others and I were experiencing had this nature. We became a 'we' and at the same time each of us felt more differentiated as an 'I'. We opened out of our restricted, defended anxious relational patterns and were able to openly enquire into others differences. And these shared differences were in the fabric of the group and thus in the being of everybody, having a subtle and profound effect, so without any formal consensus people knew that a shared meaning was being generated.

The thread and shared meaning is Bohmian dialogue (2003), named after the physicist David Bohm. And this generative dialogue and holonic shift seem to go hand in hand when there is this relating at depth within the group and there is openness to the interconnected nature of the group and the world. The interpenetrative influences of all systems, cultures and grouping can be brought alive with the participation of the members of the group.

People feel a sense of community, which has a compassionate, collaborative and wise culture. Patrick de Mare has used the term Koinonia for this type of 'non-attached love' (1991). He sees it as a cultural transformational process with groups moving from fear to hate and through the process of dialogue to reach Koinonia, the 'impersonal fellowship of spiritual-cum human participation.

Over the years, starting when I was writing my Masters dissertation (2004b), I have been clarifying both the conditions and benefits for these shifts that occur in groups (2006). They too have the circular nature I mentioned when I was talking about 'the self and relational depth'. Relational depth is both a condition and an outcome.

#### *The Conditions for the shift*

- The facilitator holding the frame, providing the container
- A group-directed horizontal power structure founded on the belief in Rogers' AT/FT.
- A facilitative culture of safety, realness, understanding, acceptance and care (maybe 'love' could summarise these qualities).
- Willingness by the members to participate and relate at depth with one another.
- Willingness by the participants to suspend their certainty and explore their self-assumptions, be open to new information and willing to re-organise, and explore their self-assumptions and suspend certainty.
- A level of psychological maturity so there is a resilience to handle either their own disequilibrium and /or the groups.
- Communication and connection between individuals facilitated by the differentiation of each individual, which in a way maximises the diversity of the group.
- A balancing of the two complementary properties of self-assertion and integration.

#### *The benefits of the new level of organisation after the shift'*

At the level of the individual

- A deeper and expanded consciousness
- A deeper and expanded participation - actualising more of the self.
- A feeling of non-possessive love for others

- More creativity is accessed which leads to functioning at a heightened level.
- A coherent self develops accessing heart intelligence.
- A willingness to collaborate and become part of a whole.
- Feelings of compassion increase and intercentric and world centric values develop.

At a group level

- The structure of the group is both person and group-centred.
- Diversity is sought and embraced.
- Dialogue occurs as the major form of communication. This allows shared communal meanings to be generated that lead to collaborative based strategies.
- Creative emergence and accessing collective wisdom.
- A higher level of functioning is realised.
- There is a cultural transformation from 'fear-based' to 'love-based' ... koinonia. There is increased awareness with wise judgement, compassion, collaboration, intercentric values and world-centric morals.

I'd love to know if group members' heart rate variability would indicate heart coherence during a shift. I'm not aware of any research carried out. My guess would be that when there is this relational depth and shift into both I and we'ness, with shared meanings generated and 'fellowship' experienced, there is heart coherence and psycho-physiological coherence throughout the body.

New capacity and intelligence emerges through connection: from cell to cell, dendrite to dendrite, human to human and group to group.' as Alan Briskin et al so eloquently expressed (2009). When we listen deeply, let go of certainty and allow ourselves to not know there arises the possibility for a knowing beyond any one person to emerge that would have been crowded out before. Collective wisdom emerges in these small gaps between what is known and what is unknown and all will recognize and resonate with the wisdom and 'right action'.

## **Conclusions**

Since the time of Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton there has been a tendency for a polarity between the material physical world and the invisible forces that the ancients called spirit and today are called energy fields. With the discoveries from new science we need a worldview that acknowledges and encompasses both visible matter and invisible fields otherwise we're leaving out half of reality.

In embracing such an interconnected world with mutual causality from its interpenetrative fields, 'The atomism of the bounded self is replaced by a self, open to these interpenetrative fields of influence from self, others, culture, and the organic world - the self emerges from these interpenetrative influences through the quality of participation. The whole world resides in me as William Blakes captures in his famous poem (2001)

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

Relational depth is both the given of this emergent, participative world and the way to shift our self-organisation from the embedded fear of the fragmented world of certainty and our impoverished neural pathways. The connection experienced, the non-possessive love felt and the heart coherence created, enables us to step outside of our usual perceptual mindset, to shift from our usual presentational relating and to step out of the fragmented, objectifying world into an interconnected one.

Our communities and societies can also experience the shift into connection and relating deeply. The sense of community at a football match and what was generated at Diana funeral whilst many would say is not the depth we seek; it does however show us the potential. Similarly when TM meditators arrived in Washington in 1994 during a heat wave and meditated twice a day, the crime rates fell and continued to fall while they were there and increased again when they left. Just before 9/11 and the funeral of Diana and other events where the attention of huge numbers of people are coherently focused, Random Number generators stop being random. The spookiest part of that piece of research is that it happened before the event (Lipton and Bhaerman, 2009).

After 9/11, for a couple of days, it felt as if there was a possibility, you could call it a bi-furcation point, for a new way forward to emerge. Sadly that wasn't to be. There will however be moments for each of us and the groups and communities that we belong too where there is a possibility to step away from fear towards love, for people to connect, to relate with depth, to listen deeply, to suspend their certainty and allow shared meanings and collective wisdom to emerge from the unknown. We so badly need this new emergent consciousness to find a way forward through the difficulties we are facing today. Can we become a multi-cellular whole, which can be fully an 'I' and a WE so that self-interest and planetary interest are one and the same? I believe so.

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