small clinical trials in humans have supported the taking of antioxidants whereas other larger trials testing antioxidants such as vitamin E and β-carotene have not. It should be noted that NAC and vitamin E also increased growth of human lung-cancer cells in culture by the same mechanism, viz., reduction of reactive oxygen species leading to reduction of the protective p53 pathway, although we cannot translate what happens in a culture dish to humans. Surveys have shown that humans take dietary supplements with up to 20 times the recommended daily intake of vitamin E. There is cause for concern.

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Sci Transl Med. 6:221 ra15 (2014)

Legal marihuana - combatting addiction

Now that Cannabis sativa marihuana has been made legal in certain parts of the world it will be a common drug of choice - similar to tobacco and alcohol - and enjoyed by many. But legalisation also brings the problem of possible wide-spread addiction prompting a search for treatments for those who do become addicted in a way that their lives become unmanageable. In a recent paper, Vallée, Piazza and colleagues (Neurocentre Magendie, Physiopathologie de la Plasticité Neuronale, Bordeaux, France) have shown that one of the compounds induced in the brain by marihuana – pregnenolone - mitigates the addictive properties of marihuana. Pregnenolone is a precursor of all neuroactive steroid hormones (affecting mood and cognition), and is also, itself, a neuropeptide. The researchers found that a subcutaneous injection of the active component of marihuana (Δ(9)-tetrahydrocannabinol;THC) greatly increased pregnenolone levels in the brains of rats and mice for at least 2 hours. The increase in pregnenolone in the brain occurs through activation of the cannabinoid (CB1) receptor. Then, the pregnenolone operates via a negative feedback loop as an inhibitor of this same CB1 receptor. In this way, pregnenolone protects the brain from CB1 receptor overactivation. Conversely, inhibition of pregnenolone synthesis in mice increased THC-induced adverse effects of cannabis intoxication and addictive properties. Thus THC induces pregnenolone synthesis in the brain, which in turn counteracts at least some of the behavioural and cellular effects of THC. This negative-feedback mechanism could explain why cannabis overdose does not occur. The findings that pregnenolone-binding to CB1Rs removes the 'high' may lead to an effective therapy for individuals for whom cannabis use leads to addiction.

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The neurobiology of sharing in monkeys

Social interactions in everyday life determine the success of the individual and the group to which they belong. Such interactions require awareness of one's own experience and desires as well as the desires and intentions of the other, or of the whole group. This social awareness profoundly influences human behaviour in observational learning and in motivating (or not) cooperation, altruism and service. Defects in social awareness contribute to neuropsychiatric disorders such as autism. The Prisoners Dilemma in game theory tests the different strategies in making such decisions. For example, an individual has to judge the sharing intentions of another in order to decide whether to share or to selfishly take the whole portion. Chang, Gariépy and Platt (Duke University School of Medicine, North Carolina, USA) have studied the neural correlates of decisions made by two rhesus macaques (*Macaca mulatta*) faced with a reward of apple juice. Each can choose either to select a symbol on the computer screen that results in the equal sharing of the juice or to select a symbol to take all the juice for itself. If both choose the selfish option then neither gets much juice. In the decision process it is important to try to evaluate what the other monkey will choose.

The novel aspect of this study is that the researchers have wired up the monkeys' brains (neurons in three frontal cortical areas) so that they can evaluate the specific brain circuits involved in the animals' choices, and in their assessments of their partners' choices. The researchers identified activity in specific brain circuits depending on the choice made - a specific set of neurons in the orbitofrontal cortex fired if the animal chose personal rewards while a different set in the anterior cingulate gyrus fired if the monkey thought its partner would cooperate. So, in addition to mirror neurons, which are involved in copying another individual's actions, we now know about neurons that predict another individual's unknown actions. In the future, we will know how disorders that affect social skills, such as autism spectrum disorder, disrupt brain circuitry.

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***Marilyn Monk** is UCL Emeritus Professor of Molecular Embryology at the Institute of Child Health, University College London, and Honorary Professor at Melbourne and Monash Universities, researching gene expression and its regulation in development and cancer. She is also an Alexander Technique Teacher and Psychosynthesis Counsellor.*

Using Words to Go Beyond Words: Poetry, Spiritual Texts and Awakening Experiences

Steve Taylor

Many readers will be familiar with the poems and poets discussed here and may even have heard Sir George Trevelyan recite them. Steve opens up the field, exploring the nature of language and awakening experiences. As T.S. Eliot wrote in an essay on Goethe, 'Wisdom is communicated on a deeper level than that of logical propositions; all language is inadequate, but probably the language of poetry is the language most capable of communicating wisdom.'

Poetry is a natural medium to communicate higher states of consciousness. Everyday language belongs to everyday consciousness; its structures are a reflection of those of normal consciousness itself. Since our normal state is to see ourselves as separate to the world, as beings 'in here' looking out at a world 'out there', the basic structure of the English language (and other European languages) is a subject/duality, an 'I' or 'you' acting on things which are separate to it. And since we have a strongly linear sense of time, and our thoughts are often focused on the past and the future, ordinary language is split into tenses, and full of terms referring to the future and the past. This contrasts with the languages of many indigenous peoples, which do not have past, present or future tenses, and only have vague, general terms to cover notions of the past and future. [1]

As a result, it's difficult to describe awakening experiences in ordinary language. It's like trying to catch water with a net. That's why some spiritual traditions only attempt to explain the experiences in negative terms – for example, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad describes *brahman*, the all-pervading spiritual essence of the universe, as 'neti neti' (not this, not this). Or as the 16th century Jewish mystic, Isaac Luria, is believed to have told his disciples, 'I can hardly open my mouth to speak without feeling as though the sea bursts its dam and overflowed. How then shall I express what my soul has received?' (in Hoffman, 2007, p.104).

But poetry is a way of expressing the inexpressible. It isn't bound by the normal constraints of language. It doesn't have to convey meaning directly, but can just suggest it, through allusion, image and metaphor. It can take the conventional signs and symbols of language – designed to convey information – and convey something *more* than information with them: real, felt experience. In philosophical terms, it can be truly *intersubjective* – that is, it can create a real communication of being, an exchange of feeling. There is a Zen saying that 'The finger that points to the moon is not the moon.' But good poetry *can* be the moon.

In his famous preface to his and Coleridge's 'Lyrical Ballads', Wordsworth (1800/2012) defined poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.' When we have powerful feelings and experiences, there's often an impulse to 'frame' them in poetry. To capture experience in this way may seem wrong, a manifestation of the acquisitive impulse, like the desire to catch and collect butterflies. Surely we should just let our experience flow by, without holding on to it? But we need to frame intense experiences so that we can *re*collect them and relive them. Wordsworth (ibid.) also described the origin of poetry as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' He often described how valuable it was for him to recall and relive his spiritual experiences (or 'awakening' experiences, in my preferred term). For example, in his famous poem 'The Daffodils' he describes how often, 'in vacant or in pensive mood', the image of the daffodils returns to him and 'then my heart with pleasure fills/And dances with the daffodils' (Wordsworth, 1815/2012).

And my guess is that for Wordsworth poetry was an *aid* to this process of recollection too, a way of rekindling his moments of serenity and awe. He framed his awakening experiences in poetry so that he could more easily recall them.

It's useful beyond words – literally – for us to be able to return to these moments, particularly when the everyday world overwhelms us and we feel oppressed by anxieties. And of course, it's useful beyond words for us to pass on these experiences to others, so that readers can touch into our awakening experiences when *they* are oppressed by anxieties – or even when they're not. Spiritual poetry is sustenance for the soul, a reminder of higher realities when we're stranded amongst lower ones.

In this sense, poetry can be a 'transmitter' of awakening experiences. Like the best composers or painters, a good poet can describe his or her experience so clearly that it's transmitted through to a receptive reader, who then experiences something of the same state. When I see paintings by Van Gogh or Turner, I experience something of the amazing intensity of their vision, just as when I listen to Gorecki's third symphony or Marvin Gaye's *What's Goin' On*, my soul stirs to the drama and power – and the sorrow and ecstasy – of the music. And in the case of spiritual poems, this means that awakening experiences can be passed on to the reader.

Contemplative Reading

In this way, reading poetry can be seen as a type of spiritual practice. There's a close parallel with the traditional Catholic practice of 'contemplative reading' (*lectio divina*, literally 'divine reading') of passages from the Bible. Monks usually

prepare for contemplative reading by sitting in silence or reciting prayers, to induce a calm state of mind. Then the passage is read very slowly, sometimes several times – specifically four times in the Benedictine tradition – without trying to 'understand' it in a normal analytical way. The reader doesn't make a mental effort to uncover the meaning, he tries to keep his soul open so that the meaning can unfold and reveal itself, and so that he can become one with spirit behind the words (Pennington, 1998). There is another parallel in the Judaic tradition, with the 'language mysticism' of the Kabbalah. The Kabbalah aims to awaken human beings to divine reality, through transcending the world of the senses, and this can be done by contemplating the letters of the Hebrew alphabet – in particular, contemplation of the name of God (Lancaster, 2005).

There's no doubt that contemplative reading is a very effective way of inducing spiritual states of being, even if it's not done consciously. In my research, I have found that spiritual texts can be a significant (although admittedly not one of the *most* significant) trigger of awakening experiences[2]. One person told me how a powerful awakening experience occurred while she was reading the Bible:

> *I was reading a Gospel passage which caused me to experience a shift in consciousness. I discovered a dimension I never imagined would be like that and that it was possible for an ordinary person like me to experience. I literally equated my experience as to a removal of a veil before my eyes. There was suddenly a sense of "knowing", of "Truth" and "rightness", a sense of deep awareness and I felt whole, in harmony, safe and engulfed by joy and love.*

Another person described an experience she had while reading Neale Donald Walsh's *Conversations with God*: 'At some point during this book, I had a profound awareness of being one with all things. That the things I was worried about didn't matter. I was so joyful, so at peace, and this feeling lasted several days.' Similarly, one person told me how, when she was reading a passage by Krishnamurti, 'I saw everything that he was saying and I didn't have to read anything anymore. I knew what I was, I knew what he was going to say. That was a huge moment. There were two months of being in that non-conceptual state. It was very strange. I could experience peace and freedom but it didn't last.'

And finally, one person described a powerful awakening experience which occurred while she was reading Eckhart Tolle:

> *I was reading* The Power of Now *and looking at the space in the room when I suddenly felt my mind clear and I felt lighter, as though all my problems had gone.*
>
> *Even though exhausted from lack of sleep (my baby was 8 months at the time) I felt rejuvenated and refreshed. I felt pure joy and peace and a love for everyone and every thing. It was pure bliss. This actually lasted about three days.*

And I believe that reading poetry can have this effect too. To read a poem properly, you have to practice 'contemplative reading.' You can't read poetry with the same mental hurriedness which you read a newspaper or a magazine, hungry for information and trying to absorb as many facts as you can. You have to step out of the forward-thrusting momentum which pushes us from one task or distraction to the next, and relax into the present. Your mind has to slow down and become emptier, so that you can let the words slowly work on you, unfolding their meaning and their rhythmic and tonal qualities. You have to give complete attention to the poem, in the same way that you give complete attention to a person you love and respect. This is a similar state of stillness and attentiveness to meditation or mindfulness, and in this state, you are much more receptive to the 'transmission' of feeling and insight from the poet. And sadly, I think this is one of the reasons why many people find poetry difficult, and aren't interested in it – because they find it difficult to step away from activity and let go of frenetic busy-ness for long enough to concentrate on a few lines of text which don't give away their power and meaning so easily.

The Tradition of Spiritual Poetry

As a result of these connections, there is a long tradition of poets who were also mystics, and whose main poetic aim was to convey the insights and visions which came from their awakening experiences. In English literature, this tradition begins in the 17th century, with poets like Henry Vaughan and Thomas Traherne. Vaughan and Traherne were both Christian mystics whose poetry is pervaded with an awareness of the divine in the ordinary world, and a sense that 'heaven' is not a place beyond the Earth but a condition *of* the world, which is always present but which our senses normally close us off to.

Although spirituality – particularly in relation to nature – was a common theme of the whole Romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley were the most overtly spiritual of the Romantics. Wordsworth has many beautiful passages in which he describes the presence of an all-pervading spiritual force in the world – for example, in *Tintern Abbey:*

> *A motion and a spirit, that impels*
> *All thinking things, all objects of all thought,*
> *And rolls through all things* (Wordsworth, 1950, p.71).

This is clearly what the Upanishads refer to as *Brahman*, the 'invisible and subtle essence' which 'is the spirit of the whole universe' (The Upanishads, 1988). Shelley was aware of it too, describing it in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' as 'Spirit of beauty' and 'The awful shadow of some unseen Power/[which] Floats though unseen among us' (Shelley 1817/2012).

In the 19th century, the tradition was continued most explicitly by Christian mystics such as Gerald Manley Hopkins and Francis Thompson. The poet laureate – and probably the most popular poet of the Victorian era – Alfred Lord Tennyson was very familiar with awakening experiences too, such as when he described a form of mantra meditation, repeating his own name until his 'individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being' (in James, 1985, p.384).

More recently, the poetic spiritual tradition was carried forward by D.H. Lawrence, Ted Hughes, Kathleen Raine and R.S. Thomas (another Christian mystic). Although very different, Lawrence and Hughes were both mystics who didn't exist in ego-separateness but were able to enter into the being of other human beings, animals, plants and the Earth itself. Hughes' mysticism was much less intense than Lawrence's, but he shared the latter's ability to 'see into the life of things' (in Wordsworth's phrase).

And this is just in English literature. France has its own poet-mystics, like Lamartine and Rimbaud. Germany has many more, including Goethe, Holderlin and Novalis. America has a similarly rich tradition – only with less overtly religious overtones – with spiritual poets such as Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Thoreau and Emerson, and in modern times, nature-mystics such as Mary Oliver and Wendell Berry.

All of these poets were – or are – very spiritually developed individuals who had frequent awakening experiences, which were the mainspring of their poetry. Some of them were tortured by the seeming inaccessibility of awakening experiences, and the gulf between the world of meaning and harmony they revealed and the seeming emptiness and bleakness of everyday consciousness. This is Shelley's complaint in 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.' As he laments to the 'Spirit of Beauty': 'Why dost thou pass away and leave our state/ This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?' (Shelley, 1817/2012).

Rimbaud was tortured by this gulf too. After experiencing higher states of consciousness which gave him a 'vision of purity' he found the shadowy, limited reality of ordinary consciousness impossible to endure. He writes that now he 'must bury my imagination and my memories' now that he is 'returned to the soil with a duty to find and a rough reality to embrace!' (Rimbaud, 1961, p. 87). This frustration may have been one of the reasons why, at the age of just 19, he abandoned his attempts to become a visionary and, at the same time, abandoned poetry. Other poets didn't experience this frustration though, because a higher state of consciousness was normal to them. They didn't just have awakening experiences, but existed in a permanently awakened *state*. This was true of my D.H. Lawrence and Walt Whitman, for example, my own two favourites.

People are sometimes surprised when I refer to Lawrence as a mystic, partly because of his popular reputation as a sexual liberator, and also because there are so many other facets to his work and his personality: working class novelist, playwright, travel writer, anthropologist, painter, and so on. And it's true that Lawrence doesn't have many of the outward signs of spirituality – little knowledge of eastern spiritual traditions or spiritual practices, and seemingly little of the serenity and detachment which 'enlightened' individuals display. But this is also partly because his mystical vision is conveyed most fully through his poems, which are largely forgotten next to his novels. Lawrence was amazingly prolific in his short life (he died at the age of 44) and wrote close to 1,000 poems, in addition to over 40 books.

Admittedly, a lot of Lawrence's poetry isn't particularly good. Many of his earlier poems seem awkward, as if he was struggling with a form he wasn't suited to. He only found his true poetic voice in the last few years of his life, once he abandoned conventional verse forms and let his insights express themselves spontaneously, letting content dictate form. His natural wakefulness also intensified towards the end of his life, particularly during his final few months, as he was dying of tuberculosis. Despite their occasional bitterness at the madness of human beings, his final poems – published after his death as *More Pansies* and *Last Poems* – are the most profound and spiritual works he wrote, filled with an awareness of spiritual radiance pouring through the world, and a sense of deep serenity. Lawrence sees God – or gods – everywhere around him. It is the presence of the gods which 'makes the air so still and lovely to me…And I fall asleep with the gods.' He feels a deep peace inside him which he describes as 'Like a cat asleep on a chair/ at peace, in peace / feeling the presence of the living God' (Lawrence, 1993, p.672.)

And most movingly of all, Lawrence greeted his imminent death with equanimity, and even joy. Like all mystics, he sensed that the death of the body is not the end of life. He describes death as 'the great adventure' in which 'the winds of the afterwards kiss us into the blossom of manhood…after the painful, painful experience of dying there comes an after-gladness, a strange joy' (ibid., p.691).

Whitman never struggled with his poetry as Lawrence did. His poetic voice was authentic and assured from the beginning. His awakened state seems to have been intense from the beginning too. For me, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is as great a spiritual text as *The Upanishads*. Both books are so bright with spiritual radiance that reading them is like staring straight at the sun – a dazzling and sometimes dizzying experience. I can't read either them without being filled with euphoria and reassurance, sensing that they're describing the fundamental reality of the universe, in all its harmony and overpowering meaning.

In fact, it's possible to say that in some ways *Leaves of Grass* is even greater than *The Upanishads*. Whereas the latter are a little detached, with no real connection to the everyday human world, Whitman depicts the radiance of *Brahman* pouring into all aspects of human life, from the messiest and most mundane to the most exalted. *The Upanishads* tell us that all is *Brahman,* that we are one with the universe, and that the soul is deathless, but Whitman *shows* it. Spirit doesn't just shine through space and through the natural world, but also through the craftsmen, soldiers and sailors who Whitman meets, through sex and friendship, and even through warfare, illness and death. As Whitman describes it himself:

> *I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each moment then,*
>
> *In the faces of the men and women I see God, and in my own face in the glass…*(Whitman, 1980, p. 94)

It was because of this all-embracing spirituality that Richard M. Bucke – author of *Cosmic Consciousness* – described Whitman as the 'highest instance of cosmic consciousness.' Knowing Whitman personally, Bucke noted that Whitman had completely integrated his 'enlightenment' into his life, rather than allowing it to 'tyrannize over the rest' (Bucke, 1901/2012). It wasn't a distinct part of his personality, which he kept separate from his job or relationships, but one which illuminated every aspect of his life and his personality. He didn't meditate for days on end, or go to live in a monastery or forest; he carried his spirituality with him into the everyday world.

The Guru as Poet

In an 'awakened' state, poetry flows naturally and easily. There is no struggle for inspiration. The heaviness and narrowness of ordinary consciousness blocks creativity – its automaticity of perception, its dullness of feeling and its separateness. It's when they're trapped in this mode of consciousness that writers experience 'writers' block.' In this mode, the ego is closed off to everything apart from its own desires and thoughts; it struggles to have a relationship with anything beyond itself. In the awakened state, however, perception is always fresh and intense, and there's a constant flow of new energies and potentials. The awakened self experiences no separation, so the world is constantly entering into it and it into the world. As a result, in Wordsworth's phrase, there is a constant 'overflow of powerful feelings.'

It's this 'open' state which gives rise both to awakening experience and to poetry. Poets and mystics are people with very labile self-boundaries, who aren't trapped inside the cramped shell of the ego. It doesn't mean that all poets are mystics, or that all mystics are poets, but it means that the two often overlap.

This is why the connection between poetry and spirituality works the other way around too. In the same way that many poets were also mystics, a high proportion of people best known as mystics – or enlightened beings or spiritual teachers – were also poets. Many of the greatest spiritual figures in human history have chosen poetry as their main (if not their only) medium of expression. In the Sufi tradition, there are mystic-poets such as Rumi, Attar and Kabir, while the Buddhist tradition has enlightened poets such as Milarepa, Basho and Hakuin. In the Hindu tradition, several more recent spiritual teachers have been prolific poets, including Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda – and most recently – Sri Chimnoy.

And of course, many of the world's great spiritual texts are written in a poetic form too. Could there be any poetry more majestic than *The Upanishads* or the *Bhagavad-Gita*? Or any text more beautifully suggestive and allusive than the *Tao Te Ching*? For me, the authors of the Upanishads were as great as Wordsworth or Shelley. Their language is precise and stately, never a word wasted or misplaced, and they know the perfect images and metaphors to convey meaning - for example, in the Svetasvatara Upanishad, 'Like a tree everlasting he [*Brahman*] stands in the centre of the heaven, and his radiance illumines all creation,' (*The Upanishads*, 1988, p.89) or in the Mundaka Upanishad, 'Even as a spider

sends forth and draws in its thread, even as plants arise from the earth and hairs from the body of man, even so the whole creation arises from the Eternal' (*The Upanishads*, 1988, p. 75). .

It doesn't matter whether these texts were consciously written as poetry – when awakened people express themselves, it often *becomes* poetry. In this sense, as well as being the natural medium to communicate awakening experience, poetry is its natural *expression*. It's the natural *out-breath* of awakening experience, and it emerges from it as naturally (to paraphrase the Mundaka Upanishad) as vegetation emerges from the soil. And in the same natural way, the awakening experience which gave rise to it is transmitted to the receptive reader.

Fittingly, just as in awakening experience themselves, in poetry all distinctions and dualities fade away. The mystic is one with the poet (or vice-versa), just as the receptive reader becomes one with the spirit which gave rise to the poem, and infuses it.

(1) For example, the Hopi Indian language has no past, present or future tenses and no word for the concept of 'time.' The Sioux language has no word for 'time' either, and no words for "late" or for "waiting." (Hall, 1984). According to the anthropologist Robert Lawlor (1991), none of the hundreds of Australian Aboriginal languages have a word for time, and nor do any Aboriginal peoples have a concept of time. In a similar way, the English anthropologist E.E. Evans-Pritchard describes the Nuer people of Africa as living 'out of time':

The time perspective of the Nuer is limited to a very short span – in a sense they are a timeless people, as are most primitive societies. They have no word for time in the European sense. They have no conception of time as an abstract thing which can be wasted, or saved, or which passes (in Service, 1978, pp. 257-8).

(2) My research (in Taylor, 2012a) found that the four most significant triggers are – in order – psychological turmoil, contact with nature, meditation/prayer and 'Watching or listening to an arts performance e.g. a dance performance, music or a play.'

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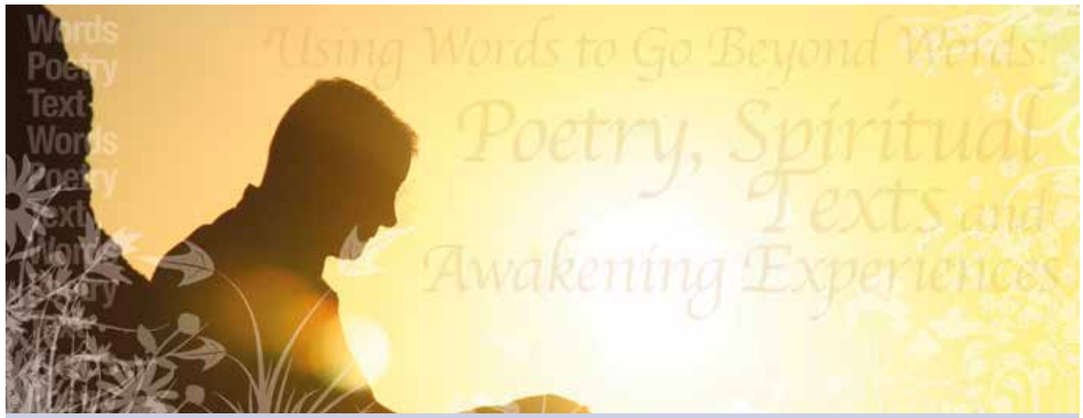
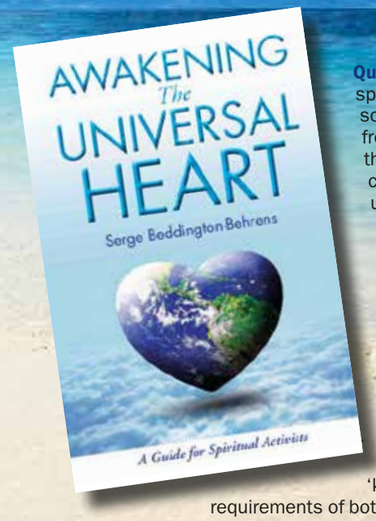


Steve Taylor *is a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Metropolitan University, and the author of several books on spirituality and psychology, including* ***The Fall*** *and* ***Back to Sanity****. He is also a poet – this essay is adapted from the Afterword to his new book of poems and spiritual reflections,* ***The Meaning*** *(O Books). www.stevenmtaylor.com*

Interview on Spiritual Activism

Serge Beddington-Behrens



Question. Serge, you have just written a book on Spiritual Activism and the emergence of the Global Heart. Let me start by asking you a few questions. First, what do you mean by the global heart and why is it 'awakening' today, and how does it relate to spiritual activism? And secondly, how does spiritual activism differ from other forms of activism?

Serge. Good questions. I'll try to answer them in order. When I talk about the global or the universal heart, I am referring to the heart of humanity as a whole or the collective human heart which, if our own 'personal' hearts are sufficiently open, we can potentially link into or connect with. We will know when we are connected or when the universal heart has stared awakening inside us, when we start feeling furious about the many huge injustices in the world or when we find ourselves minding what happens to people who live right at the other end of the world from us, or when we suddenly experience a mysterious love for our fellow human beings whom we've never met, or feel moved to commit to championing some cause where there is no direct, personal gain to ourselves.

Questioner. So you are suggesting there is a part of ourselves that naturally 'feels' for all of humanity?

Serge. Yes. It is the universal us or the *real* us and we connect to it through our hearts. Who we all are is *not* our ego self that experiences separation from our fellow human beings and sees us as isolated 'islands unto ourselves'! We can't do any proper activism from that place as our own selfish agendas will always intrude. To be a proper spiritual activist, therefore, we are challenged first of all to work at awakening our own 'personal' hearts. And this is no 'given'. We live in a very left-brained, mind-oriented culture where the world of the heart is not particularly respected, and many of us, especially if are male, have learned from early on to be very detached from this part of ourselves. The problem about this is that it is in our hearts where our true humanity lives - where we discover our visionary abilities, our capacity to be wise, kind and intuitive and loving, compassionate and courageous etc, all key qualities if we wish our activism to be effective. Therefore, a lot of my book looks on how we can revivify our personal heart life or bring it back in from the cold.

Questioner. So are you suggesting that without Heart, we just go about doing our own selfish thing?

Serge. Basically, yes. We stay in the toxic condition known as being normal! Remember that great quote by R.D. Laing years ago in his book 'The politics of Experience' where he talked about the ghastliness of 'normal man' and how he avoids facing his dark side and continually projects it outside of himself onto all and sundry, continually represses, splits off from or suppresses who he truly is and has consequently been responsible, over the last fifty years, for killing off many tens of million of his fellow normal men? Well, I think heart is the antidote to all this cuckooness. When our hearts wake up, we start to become properly human. And for me, this is the same as becoming spiritual. My thesis is that if our humanity or our spirituality lies behind our activism, then we can be sure the causes we will work for, will be good causes and that we will go about our work in a good, wholesome and ethical way.

Questioner. So the spiritual activist is someone who works from an open heart that has become connected to the universal heart?

Serge. Yes. This guarantees that our activism will be directed in areas that are aligned to the flow of evolution, as the universal heart has an intrinsic wisdom and 'knows' how the requirements of both parts and wholes link into one another. Therefore, the more we connect to this heart, the more we become one with the flow of evolution. We shift from being part of the problems of the world to being part of their solution. The force is now with us!

Questioner. So you are suggesting that the universal heart is also the heart of evolution; it *knows*, as it were, the divine plan?

Serge. Precisely, yes. And we all need to be connected to that flow and therefore aligned with the deeper plan for the evolution of humanity which you call the divine plan. Otherwise we can be activists for all sorts of causes that actually hold evolution back.

Questioner. Like if we are terrorists?

Serge. Exactly. The terrorist is an activist for the cause of Sharia law taking over the planet and subjecting everyone to its medieval tyranny. There is no love, no heart, no wisdom in the terrorist. In no way are they spiritual activists. They are wholly disconnected from the universal heart. A good example of a strong opening of the universal heart occurred at the time of the first great Tsunami wave that devastated whole portions of the planet. Many were deeply moved. In England at that time, even those who lived on the streets, felt so touched by the plight of their fellow humans at the other end of the world who had lost everything, that they wanted to send over their last pennies in aid to try to help.

Questioner. So the universal heart opens in times of crisis?

Serge. Yes it does. Crises are 'dangerous opportunities'; they always awaken something deeper inside us and the fact that we are witnessing so many crises on our planet at this moment, is why the universal heart is now awakening so powerfully. Behind all the many different kinds of freedom movements that we are seeing springing up all over the world at this time - be they to try to unseat unscrupulous dictators, champion gay rights or work for greater corporate honesty or financial transparency, end the trafficking of women and children, etc - lies the universal heart.