

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.

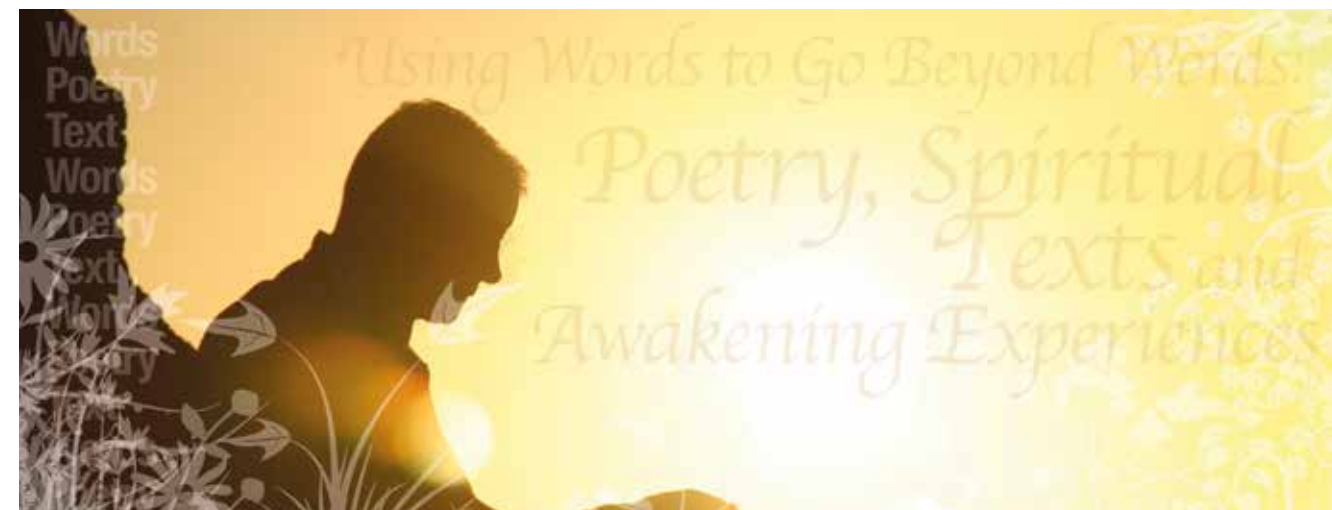
- (1) For example, the Hopi Indian language has no past, present or future tenses and no word for the concept of 'time.' The Sioux language has no word for 'time' either, and no words for "late" or for "waiting." (Hall, 1984). According to the anthropologist Robert Lawlor (1991), none of the hundreds 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?

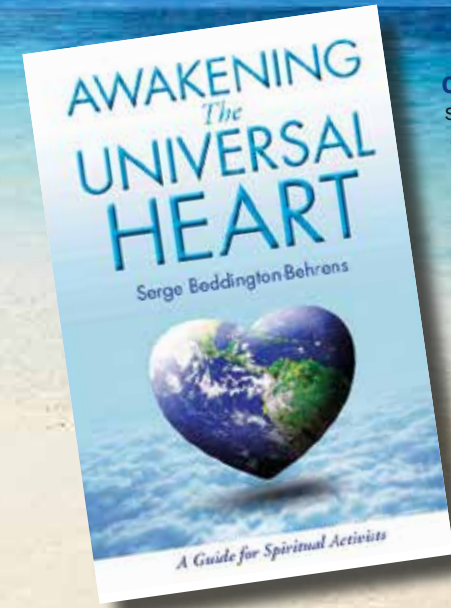
Serge. Good questions. I'll try to answer them in order. When I talk about the global or the universal heart, I am referring to the heart of humanity as a whole or the collective human heart which, if our own 'personal' hearts are sufficiently open, we can potentially link into or connect with. We will know when we are connected or when the universal heart has started 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 we 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.

Questioner. So you are suggesting that the universal heart lies behind all those forces working for positive change on the planet?

Serge. Yes, and you and I are all being challenged to align ourselves with this heart so we too can be instruments of this change, as it won't happen unless we, the people, work for it. My book suggests we all have a special responsibility to commit to making a difference in those particular areas which call us. No excuses. The survival of our planet is at stake and the spiritual activist is the change maker and we must not leave change to the powers that be, whoever they are (in many instances, they are part of the problem.) Put simply, if we want change in our world - less injustice, more rights for women, less crazy weather patterns, whatever - then we have to put in some effort ourselves. So let us say we want a cleaner environment, it may mean we need to work as an environmental activist. Conversely, if the issue of human rights concerns us, then we may become an activist for human rights. If we are upset at the destruction of our coral reefs or GM crops then we need to put our activism into working to bring about change in these areas.

Questioner. So being a spiritual activist is much more than simply being a good spiritual person and trying to bring good vibes into the world?

Serge. Of course. It includes that, yes, we need the right kind of consciousness, but it needs to be much more than that. To be spiritual today is very much to embrace social and political and ecological and environmental concerns; we also have to face the dark side of ourselves and of our world and not try to escape it. The answer is not to sit on a mountain top in states of bliss all the time, but if we do so, we must be sure to remember to use our bliss as an energy to help bring peace and joy and abundance into the world. Our planet has gradually become de-sacralised. Our role is to bring back a sense of the sacred into the world by working to restore harmony and balance once more, and there are a million different ways that we can do this. If we have the universal heart guiding us, then we can be sure that what we are personally trying to do to make a difference, will be aligned with what other activists working in their respective fields are also doing.

Questioner. None of us can do it all?

Serge. Of course not. It is narcissistic to believe we can on our own 'save the planet'! What we can do is focus on our little piece of the big work. If millions of us do little things, big changes can occur. No excuses!

Questioner. Do you see the many young people around the world who at this time are trying to bring about change, as being spiritual activists?

Serge. Yes I do and that is why I have so much hope. There is tremendous wisdom amongst the young people at this time and they are the voice of our future. They can see what is amiss with our planet so poignantly and every day their voice grows stronger, and this is a wonderful thing. Many of our current world leaders represent the past and they need to move aside and allow a new spirit of leadership to emerge in their place. At this moment a great struggle is going on between those who want to advance life and move forward into the new millennium, and those who want the world to stay rooted in past traditions. Although it is not yet obvious, the former are winning. There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.

Questioner. And I suppose nothing weaker than one whose time has past?

Serge. Exactly. The old world is rapidly dying. It is doing its best to try not to do so but is not succeeding, and one of our activist roles is to help it do so with minimal pain.

Questioner. So tell me about the structure of your book.

Serge. It is divided into four parts. The first section looks at the importance of the heart and how much of a difference having this mysterious ingredient makes to our lives. I speak from experience as I work closely with Heart energy in all areas of my work. The second section looks at how we can heal our hearts, as to have a full heart we need a healed heart. The third section explores how we may 'grow' our hearts and the last section explores all the many different ways that we can work as an activist. Here, I look at the world situation and what we can all do about it.

Questioner. You also, I presume, talk about many different ways that one may express one's activism?

Serge. Yes. But I see challenging times ahead for us all. This is why it is so important that, as activists, no matter in what area we work, we all learn to live more sustainably, consume less, confront our fear and greed, leave a smaller carbon footprint, and, most important, strive to 'be the change that we want to see happen'.

Questioner. Meaning?

Serge. Meaning, as Gandhi put it, that we make an effort to live our lives according to the values we hold in our heart. So, for example, if we want greater justice in the world, then we need to make sure we treat our fellow human beings honourably, be fair in all our dealings with life, or if we want a more loving world, we need to bring more love into everything we do, or if we want a world without war, then we need to hold peace inside our hearts and make sure that we will have worked through our own bellicosity. This is why the spiritual activist also needs to do a lot of inner work - work on ourselves - as well as outer work. The seminars and courses I will be teaching that accompany this book, focus a lot on this.

Questioner. So being a spiritual activist is quite a responsibility?

Serge. Sure. It is taking responsibility for our own lives and also for the larger life of the society around us. But contrary to what many think, responsibility is actually a freedom and a joy. What all the young people who are protesting in the Arab countries want, is to have more responsibility for their own lives; they are protesting against those who for eons have taken it from them and so robbed them of their freedoms. They are fighting to recapture their souls and though a very painful struggle, it is an immensely noble one. The last thing I'll say is that I aim to start an Institute or a School of Spiritual Activism to train people to be more effective change agents. So if any of you are interested either in doing any of the courses or in some way, perhaps, being part of this institute, please get back to me. See my website www.spiritual-activism.com

Questioner. Thank you Serge, I wish you well with all your ventures.

Serge Beddington-Behrens, PhD, is a spiritual educator, psychotherapist, couples counsellor and life coach who has worked in the area of healing and transformation for most of his life. He takes a deeper approach to life based on recognising the importance of growing our heart life, which in turn enables people more easily to integrate spiritual practice with psychological self-enquiry into a concrete and fundamental transformation of their lives. For further information, see www.spiritual-activism.com



24 February 2014 - 75th Birthday – A Synchronistic Owl

Nick Nicholls

I am attending a 10-day gathering at Frenchman's Cove in Jamaica. On 8 January I met the brother of a friend who was visiting our local area. He showed me a book that he was reading 'Saving the White Lions' by Linda Tucker. I felt that I had to buy the book immediately. When it arrived I put it to one side to take with me to read on the journey to, and during spare moments at the gathering in Jamaica.

On 23 February while reading this book, suddenly I was overcome with fatigue and had to put the book to one side. (Some time ago I had understood this phenomena to indicate that I was being influenced from beyond this physical realm for some reason. In my book, 'Discovering Truth' – free PDF download at <http://bit.ly/RMGceE> - I recount a number of occasions where events occurred that were followed shortly afterwards by a similar event being recounted in a book that I was reading.) Before the gathering I had offered to give an account of some of my experiences associated with communicating with other realms of consciousness. I had said that I would prefer to hear speakers on the first two days before giving my presentation in order to adjust what I would say in line with the theme of the gathering. At the end of the exchanges on the second day (24 February) I was asked if I would be willing to give my presentation that evening. I agreed and duly gave the talk.

We had arranged to dine later that evening a short drive from Frenchman's Cove. A couple of other attendees and I had already taken our seats in the mini-bus and were waiting for the remainder of the group to join us. John, who had a hire car, invited me to join him in the car. (As I had only met John two days previously and did not know him all that well, I felt that this invitation was associated with it being my birthday.) I exited the mini-bus and approached the rear door of John's car. He then suggested that I put my camera in the boot and insisted that I sat in the front passenger seat. I then sensed that something out of the ordinary was taking place as John already had three other passengers in the car.

We set off to the restaurant ahead of the mini-bus, but within less than 100 metres at the side of the track the

headlights picked out a barn owl that had just caught what appeared to be a mouse. John stopped the car about six metres from the owl; everyone was thrilled to see such an event at close range. I realised that my camera was in the boot and wondered if I would be able to retrieve it without disturbing the owl. John explained that in order to open the boot he would have to turn the headlights off. I was rather disappointed that I would not get a photograph of the owl, but then realised that had I been on the mini-bus I would not even have witnessed the event. About 30 seconds later the owl flew off with its prey and we continued on our journey.

John then enquired as to the symbolic esoteric meaning of 'owl' and I had little hesitation in responding 'wisdom'. Only subsequently did I recall that during the gathering we had been invited to focus our attention each day on specific words. The words for that day were 'Wisdom and Truth'. It being my birthday and the titles of my books being on the theme of 'Truth' I began to wonder if the appearance of the owl was a 'birthday gift' from beyond.

We had a wonderful evening and I received a special gift of 'Happy Birthday' sung in Jamaican style by Woody, the owner of the restaurant.

Upon returning to my room I continued reading 'Saving the White Lions'. It is the autobiographical account of how Linda had been saved by a lady who turned out to be Maria Khosa, known as the Lion Queen of Timbavati. Maria was a sangoma, a medicine woman of ancient lineage of lion shamans or high priests, who were initiated in the knowledge and way of the lion. Maria initiated Linda into understanding that everything in nature is connected. Through divination, Maria told Linda that she would eventually have to take on the mantle of 'Keeper of the White Lions'.

By the time I had reached page 213 Maria had died and Linda had engaged a film crew to record her efforts at providing a safe haven for white lions in the Timbavati reserve. The film crew were walking ahead of Linda when she heard screams and shouts.

