

100 Bache-The Living Classroom

The Living Classroom: Teaching and Collective Consciousness

(SUNY Series in Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology)

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(000 24.09.30 (24.08.10 Bache File))

(Copied here in the spirit of giving this limited one-chapter exposure to this material to foster interest in and greater book sales for the author)

Chapter 1

Resonance in the Classroom

There is more to intelligence than a solitary capacity exercised within the life of one entity. As it attunes to life, intelligence evokes a fuller, deeper intelligence in and around it. Resonant intelligence is intelligence that grows stronger or fuller as it resonates with other sources of intelligence.

—Tom Alee, "Resonant Intelligence"

It started this way. I was giving a lecture in one of my courses when a student asked a question. This was many years ago when I was a young professor fresh out of graduate school. I can't remember which course it was or the student, but what happened next is engraved in my memory. It was an ordinary question, one that I had fielded numerous times in previous semesters. On this particular day, however, instead of giving the answer that immediately popped into my mind, I stopped for a moment to mull over the possibilities. There was a pause in the flow of my thinking, a break in continuity as I asked myself, "Which answer has the best chance of getting through to this particular student?"

Suddenly I had a visual image of a small door in the back of my mind. The door opened and a slip of paper came through it with a suggestion written on it, an answer I had never used before. A different slant on a familiar topic. I tried it and it worked. In fact, it worked exceptionally well. Not only was the student satisfied, new ideas were sparked in the room. Learning had happened.

People experience these creative moments in different ways, but this is how I often experience them—a pause, a letting go, an emptiness, and a little door opening in the back of my mind. That was almost thirty years ago and intuition was less studied then than it is today, and even today many of my colleagues would raise their eyebrows at this story. We are, after all, rational people, highly trained professionals with advanced degrees, and rational people (with advanced degrees) don't have little doors in the back of their mind. I

was a product of respected universities, well trained in research and dialectic, and not once in many years of graduate education had anyone spoken to me about intuition, about how it worked or how to integrate it into my teaching. But here it was.

In the beginning, I barely noticed these moments. Being a conscientious academic, I came to class with reams of carefully prepared notes and outlines to put on the board. I worked my students hard, covering the material thoroughly. (I still do.) In those early years, as soon as a student asked me a question, my memory banks would kick in and automatically generate the "correct answer." I didn't yet appreciate that there are a dozen versions of the "correct answer," each with a different nuance, a different emphasis, and from among all these possibilities there is one answer that is perfectly shaped to unlock this particular mind. Gradually I came to see that these moments were choice points, opportunities for intuition to transform an otherwise predictable lecture into a lively improvisational exchange tuned to a specific audience.

So I learned to work with these moments. I found that if I slowed down when asked a question and took the time to interrupt my stream of thoughts, the door would appear and little pieces of imaginary paper would be passed to me from some deeper place with suggestions written on them—an idea, a picture, an example. I found that if I took the risk and used these gifts, some of which seemed strangely off target at the time, something magical would happen. Something new and unexpected would come forward. My answers seemed to hit the mark or ignite a vigorous conversation. Like that solid "whack" when you make perfect contact with a well-thrown pitch, the ideas that emerged often triggered a "perfect moment" in the classroom. The energy in the room would rise, students would brighten up, and we would move together in a creative excursion instead of a predictable loop.

Now you may think that this was just an instance of a boring lecturer getting away from his scripted notes and maybe it was, but I don't think so. I've always loved teaching and I've always had the gift of gab. I know how to work a room, how to pace an audience and take them through the material in a way that builds to peaks and crescendos. This was something different. This was about cooperating with some mysterious process that brought out what was inside me in a way that was exceptionally fine-tuned to my audience. So for the next five years I experimented with these moments and learned how to weave them into my lectures. I learned how to integrate my prepared material with the novelty they unleashed. Then something new began to happen.

About the time I was jumping my first major academic hurdle going up for tenure and moving from assistant to associate professor – students started coming up to me after class, when the room had emptied and they were sure no one would hear them, and saying

things like, "You know, it's strange you used the example you did in class today, because that's exactly what happened to me this week." Sometimes it was, "That's exactly what happened to my Mom recently" or some other close family member.

The first time this happened, I thought it was interesting, but shrugged it off. Then it happened a second and third time. In the years that followed, it became a not uncommon occurrence in my classes. Not that it would happen every time I lectured, thank God, but it happened often enough that I couldn't dismiss it. Students were finding pieces of their personal lives showing up in my lectures in ways that startled them, sometimes jolting them. If my colleagues would have raised their eyebrows at the story of the little door in my mind, you can imagine what they would have done with this. So being a rational person (with advanced degrees), I kept it to myself. But it kept happening, just often enough to force me to pay attention to it.

An Example

One evening I was teaching a night course on Eastern religions. There were about thirty students in the class. In the middle of my lecture, I found myself taking a little unexpected detour in which I described an account of Zen master who had an accurate precognitive intuition of his impending death. I had never done this before in this lecture. It was just a little aside, something dropped in to add a little anecdotal interest to the discussion we were having about the powers of the mind from an Eastern perspective.

After class, a silver-haired elderly woman came up to talk with me. I had never seen her in class before. She explained that she was not in the course but had come tonight with her friend, another elderly woman who was enrolled. The two of them explained that her friend had dragged her to class that night because she was worried about her. Her husband had died three months before, and her friend thought she was languishing at home and needed to get out of the house.

In the conversation that followed, she told me this story. Her husband had been a used car salesman in good health; his death was completely unexpected. Shortly before he died, he had cleared out most of the cars from his lot without explanation and gotten all his financial paperwork in order. A few days later, he and his wife were watching television in the evening when he put down his newspaper and, in a way that was quite out of character for him, turned to his wife and said, "Darling, I just want you to know that if I died tomorrow, you've made my entire life worthwhile." A week later, he died in his sleep.

What she wanted to know was whether I thought her husband might have been unconsciously aware that he was going to die, like the person I had described in my lecture.

I said that it certainly sounded like a possibility and this thought was comforting to her. This led to a longer conversation in which she described the challenges and opportunities his passing had created for her. After touching her grief, she got in touch with how overprotective he had been and how she was now being given the opportunity to develop herself in ways that his well-intentioned care had always prevented. To make a long story short, she decided that night to come back to college. She did so and thrived here for several years.

Was this just a coincidence as most of my colleagues would insist or was something more going on? My colleagues would likely say that if you lecture to thirty people week after week, sooner or later you're bound to hit a few bull's-eyes even with your eyes closed. And they have a point. If you think about all the life experiences tucked inside all our students, surely we're going to bump into someone's experience some of the time. Do the math and it looks less significant than it feels. That's what rational people say. For a long time that's what I said to myself. But the question kept bothering me. Was what was happening really just a series of coincidences? A woman who wasn't even a member of the course had her bell rung. Something touched her and she changed the direction of her life. How do you do that math?

As I experienced more incidents like this in my courses, eventually I came to disagree with the academic consensus, a dangerous thing for any junior faculty member who has to answer to peer review committees for promotions, grants, and sabbaticals. This had to be more than chance. The hits were too frequent and too well crafted. But if something more was involved, what was it and how did it work? I felt like I was being dragged dangerously close to the edge of a cliff.

A Second Example

This example comes one from a public lecture I gave in Minneapolis a few years ago. In this lecture I happened to mention as an aside that a number of students who were mothers have told me that they felt their babies had named themselves, that their incoming children had somehow communicated to them during the pregnancy their wish to be given a particular name. This usually took place in a dream or during a quiet moment. In making this point, I said with some humor and a raised voice, "I don't want to be called Shirley; I want to be named.." (leaving the sentence unfinished). The line drew the expected chuckle from the room and we went on.

The choice of the name Shirley was entirely spontaneous and random for me. I don't remember ever talking about children naming themselves in my lectures, and I certainly had never used the name Shirley before. I don't personally know any Shirleys, and there are

no Shirleys in my family. However, my "random" comment struck a nerve with someone in the audience, an elderly lady in her seventies. She later took the trouble to write me a letter about it.

After telling me a bit about her family history, she mentioned the Shirley-line and said it had struck a chord with her. Her name was Shirley, but she had always felt that Shirley wasn't her "real" name. In her heart she was Dorothy. All her life she had secretly identified with the name Dorothy, though she did not share this with others. Then she went on to write:

About 25 years ago, when I was a juvenile probation officer in Minneapolis, I passed one of our referees in the hall. At that time, he was also Clerk of Court for our county. Harold said, "Hi, Dorothy." Then he quickly apologized and said, "I made that mistake because you and Dorothy D. started work the same week." That fact was true-but ever since that day, many, many people have said to me, "Hi, Dorothy." They are people I know well or people I've never met (for example, an attorney who called to discuss a case), etc. There have been times when I was introduced to someone as Shirley—and the person to whom I was introduced has turned around and introduced me to another, saying, "Meet Dorothy."

Shirley felt that in her case her mother did not get the message. Though she had been named Shirley, she felt that she still gave off a Dorothy "vibe" that other people sometimes picked up on unconsciously.

Another coincidence? Perhaps. Certainly another unusual story. Being a well-read person, Shirley interpreted the episode in terms of C. G. Jung's concept of synchronicity. Synchronicity is the idea that two events can be meaningfully connected even though they are not causally connected by any physical medium that we have identified. She felt a connection between my choice of the name Shirley in my throwaway line and the deep ambivalence she had carried all her life about having been named Shirley, and it had led her to get more engaged in my presentation. ¹

The Magic

When these things first started happening in my classes, I was shocked because I was completely unaware of making any "para-normal" contact with my students, if you want to call it that, and certainly had not intended any. In fact, I had always thought of myself as something of a psychic brick, incapable of such things. Nevertheless, the trickle of such reports grew until these synchronistic coincidences became a not uncommon occurrence

in my classes. The students also began to tell me that it was uncanny how often my lectures answered as if on cue questions they were feeling but were not asking out loud.

Not only were students finding pieces of their lives in my lectures, but as the previous examples illustrate, these events often touched sensitive areas in their lives. It was as though a radar was operating below the threshold of our awareness that zeroed in on some part of their life that was hurting or constricted. Sometimes it touched a question they had been holding for a long time or triggered an insight they had been searching for, something they needed to find before they could take the next step in their lives. Sometimes it lanced a private pain that had been festering inside them for years. It was as if their souls were slipping messages to me, giving me hints on how I might reach them – telling me where they were hiding, where they were hurting, and, most important, what ideas they needed to take the next step in their development. This process, whatever it was, was obviously intelligent and it was obviously collective.

At home I started to call this mysterious interweaving of minds "the magic." When the magic happened, the walls of our separate minds seemed to come down temporarily, secrets were exchanged, and healing flowed. When the magic happened, my students and I tapped into levels of creativity beyond our separate capacities. On a good day the room was so filled with new ideas that after class I too copied down the blackboard. In these elevated conversations, I would sometimes catch glimpses of a deeper trajectory of ideas coming forward and working themselves out in our dialog.

As you can imagine, these occurrences often affected my students deeply. Imagine that you are an undergraduate taking a class simply looking for three more credits toward your degree when suddenly the professor is using your recent history to illustrate a point he is making. Buried in the back of the room, safely anonymous in the crowd, suddenly your life is exposed, your heart pierced by words that seem aimed directly at you. Given such a personal invitation, how could you not sit up and pay attention? How could you not get more deeply involved in the course?

As my students continued to come to me with these reports and I saw how deeply they were being affected by this mysterious alchemy that was taking place between us, I was more than a little shaken myself. What were these powerful processes that were linking me to them in such an intimate manner? Neither of us had solicited the connection, yet here it was. Did I need to protect them from what was happening? Obviously this was not what they had signed up for. How does one ensure informed consent when the dynamics are so involuntary and beyond the pale of academic discussion?

The only control I had over the situation was whether to close and lock this door in my mind and cut off contact with this deeper source of information, wherever it was coming from. Though I considered taking this drastic step, in the end I decided against it. If I cut myself off from my intuition in order to avoid these "complications," I would also be cutting myself off from a creativity that was benefiting my teaching in very tangible ways. Furthermore, I instinctively realized that it would be foolish and perhaps even damaging to cut myself off from this well of creativity just as my career was getting started. I did not know where this was leading, but I decided to stay with it and keep the door open. I chose to continue the experiment but to monitor my students carefully, watching for signs of impact and possible distress. As I subsequently learned, these synchronicities were the overture to a still deeper connection with my students that was beginning to emerge and would continue to deepen for many years to come.

Spiritual Practice

Now I need to put another piece of the puzzle on the table, a piece that brings us to the very heart of the issue this chapter is raising. For as long as I've been an academic, I've also been a spiritual seeker. Sometimes I think of these as my two jobs – one I get paid for, the other is volunteer work. In my paid daytime job, I'm a university professor in a department of philosophy and religious studies. My work is education; my tools are reason, critical reflection, oratory, lots of reading, and a sense of humor. In my unpaid nighttime job, I'm a spiritual practitioner. Here the tools are silence, prayer, meditation, and from time to time immersion in deep, introspective, cathartic states of consciousness. Though I began meditating when I was in graduate school, it was only after I came to YSU when I was twenty-nine that I settled into the discipline of a sustained spiritual practice, about the same time I started my marriage and settled into the rhythms of home and children.

So as I took out my first mortgage and changed the first of many diapers, I created a carefully divided world between being a professor and a spiritual practitioner. I spent my weekdays teaching and many of my weekends in various exercises designed to explore what Abraham Maslow called the "farther limits of human nature." I do not think the details of my specific spiritual practice are important to the story I'm telling here, and I've written about them elsewhere.² There are many forms of spiritual practice, many techniques and systems of transformation that sensitize the mind and body and push back the boundaries of conscious awareness. Far from recommending one system over others, I think that all of these systems have the potential to evoke the kind of phenomena I am reporting here.

I started my life as a Roman Catholic, but over time have drunk from many spiritual streams. Like many practitioners today, I have combined teachings and practices from several different spiritual lineages, hopefully without compromising any of them. The

strongest influences in my contemplative life have been Christianity, Buddhism, and shamanism. I would also include science in this list as a form of jnana yoga. In taking this eclectic approach to spirituality I'm a child of my generation, part of the wave of social entrepreneurs Paul Ray and Sherri Anderson describe in their book *The Cultural Creatives*, individuals who draw from a variety of spiritual traditions as they try to live a more centered, more harmonious life in today's global environment.

Spirituality is distinct from institutionalized religion, of course, but because the two sometimes get conflated, let me clarify what I mean here by spiritual practice. As I understand it, spiritual practice is about cultivating an experiential opening to the larger patterns of life and the deeper roots of one's existence. It is not primarily about faith, creeds, or ritual, though these may play a role in one's practice. Pragmatically, spiritual practice is about systematically engaging the constrictions within one's heart, mind, and body that keep awareness trapped within the narrow, repetitive cycles that constitute the private self and allowing one's being to relax into its deeper currents and its innate purity, eventually opening to the crystalline clarity that is the ever-present context and source of all experience. As this opening unfolds, one discovers many insights, encounters many truths, but the fundamental movement is simply to experience life as it is – in its fullness and immediacy, free of the constrictions of self-reference.

When one experiences life as it is – in its "suchness" as the Zen Buddhists say or as a "grace" as the Christians put it – one is inevitably struck by its wholeness, by the fact that at this profound and utterly simple level, life is not divided into parts. The things that usually fascinate us, the countless objects dangling in store windows or catalogued in our encyclopedias, the people walking down the street each with their different story, all these cease to exist as isolated, separate phenomena. Underneath and within this rich diversity, life lives and breathes as One. Its inherent wholeness is not fragmented by its emergent diversity.

The essence of spirituality then, at least as I understand it and try to practice it, is to open this living Oneness or Totality that encompasses and subsumes all distinctions. Wholeness, therefore, is the essence of the art. I hope other practitioners will feel their own experience echoed in this description.

Now let's return to our story. Honoring the time-tested wisdom of keeping one's personal beliefs out of one's professional life, I kept my two jobs separate. I did not talk about my spiritual practice in my classes and revealed my personal convictions only rarely and in carefully bracketed situations. My work at the university is not to instruct students in what I personally believe and certainly not to try to interest them in my particular spiritual path, but to expose them to some of the best minds in the intellectual and spiritual traditions I

am responsible for in our curriculum. While my spiritual practice has no doubt influenced what questions I think are deserving of my students' time and attention and what books are worthy of study, the choices I make always must pass academic muster. Every course one puts into the curriculum is carefully screened by several committees of one's peers, every syllabus is reviewed by one's department chair.

As a matter of professional ethics, therefore, I did not speak about my spiritual practice to my students, and yet with the passage of time I discovered that these two worlds I had kept apart so carefully were beginning to interact. As my spiritual practice deepened through the years, the synchronistic events I've been describing became more frequent and more intense. Despite my best effort to keep these two sides of my life separate, they seemed to be reaching out and touching one another. Not only were the synchronicities increasing, but students were beginning to have unusually deep experiences around the concepts I was presenting in class. It was as though their lives were being activated by more than just the ideas I was lecturing on. It was as if they were somehow being touched by the actual experience of these realities that now lived in me to some degree because of my practice.

Experiences of Resonance

Truth spoken directly from the heart and skillfully illumined by the mind has an enormous power that cannot be eliminated, even in the academic setting. This applies to spiritual truths as well as to other kinds of truth. Because I teach survey courses in world religions, I have spent many years conveying to thousands of students the insights of what some scholars have called the "perennial tradition." The perennial tradition is the name given to a collection of common insights that run throughout all the world's religions. The discovery of this common core was seeded by Aldous Huxley's pioneering work *The Perennial Philosophy*, published in 1944. Like perennial flowers, these ideas keep showing up wherever human beings have pushed beyond the boundaries of ordinary, sense-consciousness and explored the deeper dimensions of consciousness. Thus, the perennial philosophy reflects the experiences of the world's contemplatives more than it does the teachings that circulate among the masses of the faithful, which appear relatively diluted by comparison. This common spiritual ground would take considerable space to describe in detail, but it can be safely said to include the following concepts, which I've framed here in a contemporary vocabulary.

The perennial vision is that our physical universe is a living, multi-tiered, self-emergent universe originating in a rich plenum of pure potentiality, the source of the big bang. Because our universe is rooted in and continuously replenished by this infinitely rich plenum, a creative intelligence permeates and saturates all existence, allowing it to function at a deep level as a single, integrated, living Totality. Accordingly, underneath our

transitory egoic identity there exists a deeper identity that is our True Self, and this Self is sourced in this deeper reality. Thus, the perennial tradition recognizes the human capacity to penetrate beneath the surface of the personal mind and to awaken to these deeper dimensions of consciousness.

From the perennial perspective, the trajectory of evolution is for humanity to experientially realize its deeper transcendent nature and to fully embody it in space-time, progressively transforming the planet in the process. This journey of discovering and embodying divine consciousness is long, leading us to live on Earth not once but many times. From the universe's perspective, our species is an infant, emerging just 100,000 years ago inside a cosmic garden that has been unfolding for 13.7 billion years and will continue to unfold for many billions of years to come. Given the vast scale of the evolutionary project of the universe, we are only beginning to glimpse the depths of the reality that has birthed us and is birthing us still. ³

When students hear the perennial truths of the world's spiritual traditions simply spoken, when they are reminded of things long ago forgotten but always present at the edge of their awareness, there is sometimes a spark of recognition that can explode into a flame. This flame is contagious and sometimes stimulates sympathetic resonances with other students in the room. Students may collectively feel their energy shift to higher centers of awareness, though they may not understand what is happening. Symptoms of chakra-opening and kundalini-type arousal may begin to manifest. Energy runs, hearts open, and insights arise.⁴

These can be very powerful experiences for students. One sophomore described such an experience in an essay she wrote. It happened to her in an introduction to Eastern religions course when I was describing the Buddhist understanding of the relationship of the individual mind to the awakened mind. To convey this point, I sometimes do a visualization exercise with the students in which I develop an analogy with a tree, contrasting leaf-consciousness (the private self) with tree-consciousness (the Totality). In this analogy, we imagine that the leaves are individually conscious, but not yet conscious of the life of the tree they are part of until the moment of breakthrough occurs. It's a powerful exercise that I save until I think the class is ready to absorb its full import. On this particular day, this young woman experienced the following:

The thing that hit me the hardest of all that we talked about in class was tree-consciousness and leaf-consciousness. It was what brought everything together for me. What made me understand everyone's interdependence and stopped me from living in fear. I was so moved that it took everything that I had not to cry in class, not from sadness but from being hit by a life-altering

realization. It made an emotion rise in me that I had never felt before and I wasn't really sure how to react to it.

Another student, a woman in her mid-thirties, summarized her experience in a different class in the following way:

Sitting in class, I felt like I was inside one of those glass ball snow scenes that folks use as paperweights. Shake the ball and mass confusion begins with flakes of fake snow swirling all around... I couldn't hear the lecture. My mind struggled to focus and stay with your words, but I was missing it....

Later ... at home ... alone. It would all return to me, the lecture... Mostly feelings. Tears. Recognition. Understanding after I let it simmer for a while. Realization that if I didn't grab at it, it would be there waiting, this knowledge. These tiny bright spots of revelatory insight. I'd journal. I'd cry. Sometimes light and gentle, warm feel-good crying. Sometimes sobs, wracking and exhausting. I thought I was losing my mind a few times.

Instead of hearing your lectures with my Brain-Mind-Intellect, I actually heard you from somewhere else. ... Heart-Soul maybe? Ears of a type that I hadn't been exercising. They had atrophied. You gave them a workout. Or the class field was so intense that it penetrated my controlling dominant brain-mind and vibrated my heart-soul like cardiac shock paddles to bring it to life. The result? I'm becoming who I was long ago. The field by-passed my intellect and went directly to my heart to pry it open.... I now know what I had deeply buried in me for years, and the gift of the pick and shovel for the ongoing process comes from being in the energy of the folks in our classroom. It didn't come from me alone.

A third student, a seasoned middle-aged woman – is it significant that I'm quoting more women than men here? – described her experience more succinctly: "I have difficulty sitting in this class sometimes. I get so spiritually high that I start to tremble internally. I think that I might lift out of my body and float up."

Again I want to emphasize that it was not my intention to trigger these deep existential reactions. In fact, fearing that they were out of place in a university setting, I often tried to damp them down. This was impossible, however, without damaging the teaching process itself. Whenever we would come together and simply cover the assignment, these things would spontaneously occur, without premeditation or contrivance. It was as though fire was lighting fire. When my students and I would gather and simply focus on the task of

sharing understanding, these resonances of living experience would occur unpredictably – not always but often – drawing the students into heightened states of awareness.

Like all insights, these "Aha" experiences can be elusive. One student, a male this time, wrote an essay in which he tried with much frustration to convey the awakening he had experienced in one class. Those who have walked the edges of inspiration will empathize with his dilemma.

Do you know how close I was today?! I touched it! I felt it breathe! I grasped it with my mind! I knew it was there! It started when you lectured on nature vs. supernature. The Western world was vividly displayed to me...

What was it? It was only there for short spans of time. Damn my Western mind! No sooner would I feel it, I'd lose it. I cannot tell you what it was. Or even what I knew. But I know I knew something! It made sense. *It was as though everything I'd been fighting for and fighting against lay down, side by side.* I knew the answers to my questions, but the answers so overwhelmed me, I forgot the questions. Then I'd lose it. I came SO close to breaking down some barriers.

Teaching at Two Levels

Over the course of time, I began to realize that I was beginning to function on campus at two different levels, with each level attracting a different group of students. For most students, I was a conventional professor. This group took my courses looking for academic instruction and they usually walked away reasonably satisfied. Our relationship was primarily about information exchange, the usual undergraduate give-and-take. As the years passed and the magic deepened, however, a second group of students emerged with whom I had a different relationship. With these students the exchange of academic information seemed to become a vehicle for a deeper transformational process that triggered significant psychological confrontations, healings, and sometimes spiritual openings. This was happening not because of any conscious design on my part but simply from our coming together and doing the work of education.

This second group of self-actualizing students, to borrow Maslow's phrase, was much smaller in number. They were sprinkled throughout my introductory classes and then signed up for my more specialized upper division courses where their numbers increased, tilting the balance in their favor. Balancing the pedagogical needs and interests of these two groups can be challenging, for both groups are entitled to the college experience they expect. While I always took care to satisfy the intellectual needs of the first group, the

second group seemed to be in touch with the course content and with me at a deeper level. It was these students who were to initiate me into a new way of teaching that carried with it new responsibilities. It was they who eventually taught me about the dynamics of collective consciousness.

Teaching at this level in an academic setting, especially at a state university, quickly becomes a very delicate matter. You have to watch carefully to make sure that you have not crossed the line between explaining and persuading. Those who don't know me may suspect that these students responded as they did because I crossed this line or blurred the distinction between education and indoctrination. I understand this concern. In response I can only say that I know and affirm the boundaries of responsible instruction at a state university serving a pluralistic student body. I have diligently honored the separation of church and state in my classes, and my department chair will back me up on this. It is not misdirected missionary zeal that produced these results, but something far more subtle and difficult to comprehend.

More challenging than keeping church and state separate is dealing with student projections. When students are this deeply touched by something that comes out of your mouth, they tend to project all manner of things onto you and it often becomes necessary to protect them from their own enthusiasm. If you don't keep your feet solidly planted on the ground, you can easily get distracted by self-inflation, which is a waste of time, of course, and a waste of a precious opportunity. These things happen not because of our charming personalities but because of something much deeper and larger operating under our feet. Here teachers must be guided by the same principle that guides physicians – "Do no harm" – and indulging our ego is always harmful to our students. Their welfare must be our first, second, and third concern. Fortunately, all these things developed slowly, and my students taught me what I needed to understand about the process as we went along.

Deepening Resonance

So strongly conditioned was I by the Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm that it took years before I was able to admit what now looks to me to be the obvious and natural interpretation of these events – that my spiritual practice outside of class was somehow sparking what was happening inside my classroom, not by my talking about it but silently, covertly, energetically. *The expansive states of consciousness that were emerging in my private life seemed to be triggering incidents of sympathetic resonance in my public life.* The transpersonal states of consciousness I was entering at home seemed to be activating the transindividual fabric of life around me, energizing the meridians of the collective psyche and triggering a collective intelligence that was latent in my classroom.

My life and the lives of my students seemed to be moving in sync with each other. I remember one particular incident that dramatized this pattern. One night I had a dream that involved one of my students, a complex dream that did not make any sense to me. On my way to work, I decided that if this particular student showed up at my office hours that day, I would share the dream with her; otherwise I would let it go. (That's how cavalier I had gotten about these things.) Well, the student did show up at my office, and she wanted to tell me about a dream *she* had had that same night in which I had been a player. When she told me her dream, I realized that our two dreams formed two halves of a larger whole. By themselves, the two half-dreams made little sense, but when we put them together, the resulting whole-dream did make sense, and it contained a significant message for her. The whole-dream was not about her and me and there was nothing romantic going on between us. I had simply been enlisted to help her unconscious communicate a point to her conscious awareness. When she left my office that day she had much to think about, and I moved on to what came next. Something was always coming up next.

These synchronicities became particularly pronounced during a period of several years when I was undergoing a series of powerful inner experiences in my spiritual practice that were breaking me down at very deep levels. All spiritual traditions describe a phase of inner work that involves dissolving the boundary between self and other. They describe a membrane that marks the boundary between the individual and the surrounding universe, the interface of the personal and the transpersonal psyche. On the near side of this membrane, the world appears to be composed of separate beings, each with their own private existence. On the far side of the membrane, the world appears as an integrated whole, a continuum of energy that shows itself to be a massive, unfathomably complex, extravagantly beautiful, single organism. Hence, this boundary membrane is the domain of "death and rebirth," death to the world of the private self and rebirth into a larger transcendental order of wholeness that underlies and saturates life's diversity. When a practitioner is transitioning through this territory, standing at the interface of these two paradoxically compatible realities, powerful synchronicities with other persons sometimes manifest.⁵

As my inner work came to focus on this boundary, as it does sooner or later for every practitioner, some of my students seemed to be simultaneously undergoing particularly difficult challenges in their own lives. Most of my students did not enter these waters, of course, and passed through my courses untouched by these dynamics. But some did enter them. Those who did sometimes felt themselves coming to a breaking point in their lives or a moment of supreme risk-taking. It was as though they and I were together being drawn through a collective death-rebirth vortex, a vortex that was breaking all of us down in different ways, uprooting deeply buried pains, and crushing restrictive barriers in our lives.

Conscientious students who took my courses during this period were sometimes drawn into deep personal transformation as their systems strained to break the bonds that were holding them back from some richer, more authentic life. Some chose to end bad marriages or to heal wounded ones. Others left careers they had outgrown but were still holding onto. Some began to confront their addictions and others to re-approach persons from whom they had been estranged for a long time. One woman in her mid-forties hints at the profound disruption of her inner and outer world that occurred during this period when she began to spontaneously recover painful memories of child abuse, in a course on Buddhism, of all places:

During and after having been in your classes, my internal world became increasingly chaotic as demons from painful psychological gestalts began to emerge, and eventually coloring my external world too, challenging everything I thought I was and dissolving familiar reference points. ... As I struggled to break through powerful gestalts of pain, you spoke to and nourished my soul, making it possible for me to move more deeply into my spiritual journey.

While these kinds of reactions may be expected in certain types of courses, such as a counseling course, for example, this was not the case for the courses I was teaching. Rather, these events seemed to be the indirect effect of our simply coming together to study. It was not the content of the course that seemed to be driving these effects but something deeper. It had to do with the juxtaposition and interaction of our life energy at a deeper level.

Eventually I came to realize that the fact that my inner and my outer life, my "private" spiritual practice and my public professional life, could not be kept entirely separate from each other was *demonstrating an important truth about the nature of consciousness and the deep structure of reality*. It was actually demonstrating the validity of one of the core axioms of the perennial perspective – the inherent wholeness of existence, the integrated, interpenetrating nature of the universe. Beneath the surface of appearances there are energetic exchanges that connect our lives to those around us, subtle threads that weave our lives into larger wholes. From one perspective, consciousness is clearly differentiated into separate lives, and yet from this deeper perspective it functions holistically, pulsing with a deeper intentionality that ignores the boundaries between self and other.

Seeing Through Two Eyes

It is as though we can see the universe through two different eyes. Through one eye we see the usual world of separate beings. Through this eye of the physical senses we see separate

selves – individual human beings learning, growing, challenging themselves, becoming more than they were. Through the other eye, we see the exquisitely intricate patterns that weave these separate lives into larger wholes. When seen through this second eye, consciousness – and life itself – is not something that can be divided into separate bits and pieces but is a seamless whole. It is like the air that is in your lungs one minute and mine the next and in the trees the minute after that. From this perspective, there are no private minds. The very concept of a private mind is seen as an illusion, or, to put it more carefully, as only one half of a greater truth. The challenge is to learn to see through *both* eyes simultaneously, to affirm both the truth of individuality and the truth of wholeness.

The truth of wholeness and interconnectivity was not a truth that was invited or welcomed in the philosophical landscape I had internalized in graduate school. Like most of my colleagues, I had internalized a worldview that had been born when Newtonian science was at its peak influence. It was a vision of life that was deeply "atomistic," by which I mean that it sees a world composed of separate parts, where the big parts are made of smaller parts that are made of smaller parts still until eventually you come down to some irreducible nugget. For Newton, this nugget was the atom. In this intellectual landscape, the key to understanding the world lies in finding the smallest bits and pieces of life and the laws that govern their properties and movements. From there we can piece together the movements and characteristics of all the larger units life has assembled.

Even after we split the atom and discovered the strangely interconnected and entangled world inside, this tendency to view the world as composed of discrete parts continued in many disciplines. In psychology it combined with other intellectual currents to coalesce into the conviction that the human mind is fundamentally a discrete entity, a private affair. From my perspective, however, this is life as seen through only the first eye. Persons who hold this view of consciousness have simply not yet opened their second eye. They see clearly through the eye of the senses, but the eye that sees wholeness is still closed. In this atomistic worldview, which is still the default view of most academics even seventy years after the revolution of quantum mechanics, teaching is conceptualized as the transfer of information between ontologically separate minds, minds that do not touch. Teachers pass along to their students the knowledge they have accumulated, or, if they are more gifted, they awaken their students' hunger for learning and then help them satisfy that hunger through a combination of readings, lectures, and discussions. This exchange is always conceptualized as taking place between minds that are fundamentally separate entities. Information must be taken out of one mind, packaged in words or pictures, and projected into other minds where it is taken in, decoded, and assimilated. If all goes well and the transplant takes, our students walk away with something growing inside them that wasn't there before.

It is an unquestioned tenet of most pedagogical thinking today that this exchange takes place between separate beings who are not connected in any way other than through physical channels. The common-sense perception that there are separate minds housed within separate bodies is reinforced daily by the simple fact that our students don't know what we know, that they have to work hard to learn what we have already mastered. However, while this model obviously captures much that goes on in the classroom, it also misses much. It misses what one sees through the second eye. It captures what I would call the "front yard" of teaching but it misses entirely the more subtle dynamics of the "back yard" of teaching. In my classroom, something more was happening, something that went beyond this model.

In contrast to the atomistic model, the understanding of life emerging in many disciplines today – ecology, quantum-relativistic physics, chaos theory, systems theory, feminist theory, and transpersonal psychology, to name only a few – stresses interconnectivity and interpenetration. The living systems model points to a world of fractal iteration and coparticipation, of networks operating within networks within networks, of wholeness sustaining part-ness. Theory is echoed in human experience. People who meditate or who cultivate other forms of spiritual practice often report that as they shift to deeper levels of consciousness, a new awareness opens. In this awareness they discover that their lives are threads in a single intentional fabric of complex design. These threads are so tightly woven together that they cannot be meaningfully separated from each other.

These observations suggest that when one person begins to throw off the layers of conditioning and awakens to deeper, more inclusive states of consciousness, surrounding persons will necessarily be affected. We can picture this if we imagine this deeper Mind, which I capitalize here to distinguish it from the personal mind, as a large tablecloth spread out on a table. If the tablecloth is pulled up at any one point, the entire fabric is drawn up to some degree. Similarly, when any one of us "rises" into clarity, we are all uplifted to some degree and those near us are lifted more than others.⁶

Though this suggestion is still heretical in most academic circles, it raises fewer eyebrows in spiritual communities, which have long been aware that persons undergoing deep spiritual transformation affect those around them. When deep levels of the psyche are activated, the effects radiate outward to touch surrounding persons, like circles rippling across a lake. Satprem, for example, discusses this phenomenon in his biography of Sri Aurobindo entitled *Sri Aurobindo or The Adventure of Consciousness*. There he writes:

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would realize that transformation is not just an individual problem but one involving the earth and that no individual transformation is possible (or at least complete) without some degree of

collective transformation.... It should be noted that each time Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had some experience indicating a new progress in the transformation, the disciples, without their even knowing anything about it, experienced in their consciousness a period of increased difficulties or even revolts and illnesses, as if everything were grating. Now we begin to understand how things work.⁷

Mike Sayama also mentions this phenomenon in his book *Samadhi*. In his discussion of the dynamics of "vital energy" or ch'i, Sayama quotes the Japanese healer Kaneko Shoseki who made the following observation:

Apart from the normal communication between men through language and action there is another quite different sort of mutual influence. It is that of the rhythm of the Original Strength which permeates all human beings and Nature. Through it every individual thing . . . is connected with every other. If then one who is further removed from the working of the Primordial Force is close to one who lives more in accord with it, the rhythm of the Primordial Force will certainly be transmitted from the one to the other. The latter without knowing it exerts a good influence on the other.⁸

In this chapter I am emphasizing the role of the teacher's consciousness as an initiating catalyst, but it goes without saying that initiation requires the participation of two parties, not just one. The professor alone cannot make this happen. Most of my students, remember, did not enter these waters. For this deeper transformation to take place, the students must step forward from their side and seize the opportunity. There must be an openness and receptivity on their part, a felt need to engage or to express themselves more authentically. They may not have been aware of this need before the course began, but somewhere along the way they must make the decision to engage the material more deeply.

Transpersonal Psychology and Teaching

The discipline of transpersonal psychology weaves together psychological theory, scientific research, philosophical analysis, and classical and contemporary spiritual inquiry to outline a worldview that holds the following. Beneath the levels of consciousness in which our minds are separate and distinct lie hidden depths where they begin to interpenetrate until they eventually are enfolded within an unbroken, seamless field of consciousness that I am here calling Mind.

If we view teaching as an activity taking place within this Mind, or perhaps better put, within this Mind-Field, our model of classroom dynamics expands dramatically. Just as our individual minds are intelligent, this larger Mind possesses a collective intelligence. The incidents of energetic resonance and informational bleed-through begin to look less anomalous and more natural, even expected. From this perspective, there is no ontological gap between our minds, no juncture or tear in the fabric of being, only a psychological gap that creates the appearance of separation. A starting point that affirms the existence of a seamless field of consciousness underlying our quasi-separate minds gives us a new context within which to view what takes place when minds "meet" in earnest exchange in the classroom.

If mind is a field phenomenon as this study proposes, if it registers not only as our particlelike, sensory awareness but also as a wavelike awareness that extends beyond our bodies, then teaching is more than just sending out information across an ontological chasm for our students to catch. In addition to this, teaching involves the *direct energetic engagement of the mental fields of our students*. It is mind directly engaging other minds within the unified field of Mind. Through this direct engagement, bridges of resonance sometimes spring into existence underneath, supporting the exchange of information taking place at the conscious level. Usually these deeper resonances are so subtle that they pass undetected, like most of the operations of the collective psyche. Under certain conditions, however, they can surface and make their presence consciously felt in the classroom.

From the perspective of many spiritual systems, both ancient and contemporary, there is no such thing as an entirely private mind and for that reason there is no such thing as an entirely private spiritual practice. Every practice emerges from and reaches back into the extended fabric of Mind. Its effects spread out around us in circles, like ripples spreading across a pond. In chapter 3, I will review some of the scientific research that supports this model of consciousness. For the moment, let me continue to speak using metaphor more freely.

When a person begins to sink into oneness with life through sustained spiritual practice, it is as though it creates a depression in the spiritual-gravitational field around that individual. Other persons are sometimes drawn into this field of influence often without seeming to choose it. Why this happens is easier to understand from a transpersonal, integral perspective than from an atomistic, materialistic perspective.

In the transpersonal vision, life is deeply and inherently integrated at the start. Though we rightly value our boundaries and celebrate our differences, the deeper currents of life nourish the connective tissue of our integrated existence. Our personal intelligence

participates in a larger collective intelligence. Therefore, when one person enters into communion with this deeper intelligence, it is as though it generates an energy that radiates through the underlying fabric of life in which we are all suspended. Clarified states of consciousness are contagious. This is an utterly natural phenomenon, an unstoppable effect. Our spiritual ecology simply does not allow private awakening.

This radiating effect is particularly noticeable when one is standing in the center of one's work in the world. Performing artists, musicians, athletes, and ministers have all reported experiencing the collective waves that sometimes pulse through them when they work. The same is true for teachers. There is a subtle collective pulse that sometimes registers inside our work, a meaningful and complex interweaving of lives and insights. As a teacher, I have learned to trust this mysterious process, to not be afraid of it, and to respect its power. It demands impeccable conduct and complete surrender to the good of our students.

Though I left my spiritual practice at home every morning when I went to work at the university, I could not leave myself at home, and my spiritual practice seemed to be changing my energetic constitution at deep levels. It appears that my "private" attempt to actualize a more authentic existence and deeper communion with life was causing my person to act as a kind of lightning rod triggering sparks of a similar awakening among those students who were receptive to this influence. And this was happening automatically, without my conscious intention or direction.

As the second group of self-actualizing students began to be drawn toward their own deeper potential, they began to wake up to new possibilities in their lives. Most of them experienced this as a pleasant, even ecstatic experience, an "Aha!" moment or series of moments. For some of them, however, the waking up process presented them with difficult personal challenges. Without either of us intending it, taking a course with me triggered their own transformational process. Before they could become the "more" that they had the potential to become, they had to confront whatever it was that was keeping them stuck in the "less" position.

When their systems were activated by what I believe is a life-affirming, life-enhancing energy, these students began a spontaneous process of detoxification – a shedding of old patterns, old ways of thinking and feeling. Why this happens is rather straightforward. In order to make room for new growth, they had to confront the habits, convictions, and choices that had been holding their lives in some stuck position. I do not believe that this would have happened if they had not been ready for it to occur and even inviting it at a deeper level. They entered this transformational process not because they were forced to but because they were ripe for it.

This transformational initiation did not happen to all my students, of course. Most of my students, those in the first group, simply experienced an intellectually stimulating course. "Thanks for a great course, Doc. See ya!" It was the students in the second group who felt something more happening and signed up for more courses with me. The most powerful synchronistic effects showed up primarily in my upper division courses, where the majority of students were repeat business. These students *chose* to expose themselves to this activation. They wanted more, not less, of what was happening to them.

While the activation my students experienced was sometimes quite powerful, there were no casualties and many positive breakthroughs. On the rare occasion when a student's self-transformation became particularly turbulent, I referred him or her to a gifted therapist in the area with whom they were able to process what was emerging in a safe therapeutic environment. The woman who wrote that she thought she was "losing her mind" is glad she lost it. She used our time together to make important changes in her life and has become a good family friend.

I understand how strange this story may sound to readers who, like me, were educated to think of the mind as compartmentalized and physically constrained to the brain. And yet I believe that this conventional way of thinking is simply false, and it does educators a great disservice because it desensitizes us to the subtler collective textures of the teaching experience. By failing to legitimate our lived experience, it obstructs our ability to make sense of what is actually taking place in our classroom and thus stifles the full transformative potential of the student-teacher relationship. It is not that people's minds don't function separately in a "stand-alone" mode because they obviously do, but it appears that this is not the whole truth. There is also a more subtle dynamic operating in the classroom, a *collective* dynamic that reflects the wavelike features of mind that transcend and integrate the particlelike mind, a *collective* intelligence that surrounds our personal intelligence.

Teaching and Spiritual Practice

With a growing number of educators taking up different forms of spiritual practice today, the interactions I have been describing in this chapter are likely to become more common in the years ahead if they are not that way already. The spiritual disciplines people are practicing are many and varied – yoga, meditation, shamanic initiation, vision quest, sacred medicine work, prayer and fasting, trance dancing, and experiential psychotherapy. This list may be putting too exotic a spin on it, for surely a life of service to the collective good has the potential to produce similar results. Even so, there is no denying that powerful techniques for expanding consciousness and engaging the deep psyche have become part of our cultural landscape. Before the last century, many of these practices were the

carefully guarded secrets of small contemplative circles or the lifeblood of cultures far distant from our shores. But how quickly our spiritual terrain has changed. For better or for worse, self-transformation is a highly marketed, widely distributed commodity today. Previously secret lore is being passed along to a hungry public through an international network of workshops, institutes, and retreat centers.

Educators who engage in transformative practice can expect these connections with their students to surface in a variety of forms. I have been describing how I happened to experience them, but there are countless ways for these subtle dynamics to surface around us. As unique beings from the moment of our birth, we each have distinct constitutions that lead us to meet the world in different ways, causing different configurations of experience to crystallize around us. Furthermore, the spiritual practices we do vary widely and impact consciousness in different ways, encouraging this deeper fabric of connectivity to surface in a variety of patterns. The subtle training of Buddhist mindfulness meditation, for example, may lead some teachers to begin to notice the delicate dance of synchronicity pulsing quietly within the ever-changing flow of circumstance. Alternatively, the powerfully evocative states of shamanic immersion may trigger more explosive sparks. The underlying fabric of life can express itself in many modalities.⁹

If there is a message that my students and I wish to share with the reader that comes from our experience, it is this. *If you are an educator who has chosen a form of spiritual practice that has the capacity to activate deep levels of the unconscious, you can expect to stimulate sympathetic resonances in at least some of your students.* Separate minds are an illusion of the senses, how life appears if you look at it through only one eye. If you begin to immerse yourself in the inherent wholeness of life and to stimulate the purification processes that inevitably occur when self seeks True Self, you will not make this journey alone. As an educator, you must anticipate that at least some of your students will move in rhythm with your descent. You must expect it, and you must prepare for it. Like ripples on water, these resonances are inevitable, and the better teacher you are, the more powerful you can expect them to be.

These observations apply to more than teachers, of course, and I hope they will be picked up and used by persons in other occupations. They apply to anyone who works with or lives in groups, which includes just about all of us. The resonances described in this chapter can spring up wherever persons gather in well-focused collective projects – in think tanks, board rooms, on playing fields, and around the dining room table.

I do not think we need to be afraid of the energetic resonances that spread out around us as a result of our spiritual practice. We need to be careful, of course, and to act responsibly and compassionately at all times, but I think we can trust that we are where we are supposed to be. Furthermore, I do not believe that what happened in my classes was the result only of energetic resonances springing up between my students and my person. This is only half of the story. There was something else that was contributing to these events. This is what we will explore in the next chapter.

Notes

Chapter 1

Resonance in the Classroom

1. On synchronicity, see Jung, 1973; Combs and Holland, 1990; Peat, 1987; and Progoff, 1987.
2. Bache, *Dark Night, Early Dawn*, 2000
3. For more on the perennial tradition, see Schuon, 1974, 1986; Smith, 1992. For an important recasting of this tradition, see Ferrer, 2001.
4. In Indian philosophy, there are said to be seven distinct spiritual centers called chakras ("wheels") that anchor seven levels of awareness ranging from the grounded fight-or-flight response to the highest state of God-realization or non-dual awareness. Kundalini is the name given to the energy that moves upward from the lowest chakra to the highest chakra, opening the chakras as it rises and triggering various shifts in awareness. The chakras that are most relevant to the discussion here are the heart chakra, said to be the seat of compassion, the throat chakra, the seat of creativity, the brow chakra, the seat of insight (especially insight that reaches beyond the physical senses), and the crown chakra, the seat of non-dual awareness. (See Swami Ajaya, 1983; Mookerjee, 1983)
5. One does not have to have permanently crossed this boundary for these synchronicities to occur. Using Ken Wilber's vocabulary, one does not have to stabilize "states" of transpersonal consciousness into "stages" of transpersonal development for these patterns of resonance to manifest. My experience is that even temporary immersion into various transpersonal states, if sufficiently deep, will elicit these responses (Wilber, 1997).
6. Two points here. First, "nearness" may be physical proximity or it may be "karmic proximity," meaning people with whom we have a particularly strong internal connection. Often it is both simultaneously. Those who are near us physically are often those with whom we have strong karmic connection. These kind of karmic ties show up frequently in our careers. For a teacher, therefore, the classroom is often a hotbed of karmic connections. Second, if a person's spiritual breakthroughs

influence those around them, the same would also seem to apply to our spiritual failures. When any one of us fails to step up to some personal challenge, those with whom we have connection are all dragged down to some degree. The resulting tension between all the pulling "up" and "down" establishes the common denominator of the collective human psyche, C. G. Jung's collective unconscious.

7. Satprem, 1993:291. In discussing Aurobindo's attempt to transform the single body of humanity, Satprem writes: "But then, if the body is one with all other bodies, it means that all the other bodies are right there inside it, along with all the falsehoods of the world! There is no longer only one person's battle; it becomes the whole world's battle. ... There is only one body" (1993:286-287).
8. von Durckheim, 1971:206-207; cited in Samaya, 1986:80-81.
9. While all forms of spiritual practice can be said to serve the general goal of spiritual awakening, when you get down to specifics, they approach this goal differently and often conceptualize the goal itself differently. It's important, therefore, not to oversimplify or overgeneralize here. See Jorge Ferrer's important observations on the participatory nature of spiritual practice in his book *Revisioning Transpersonal Theory*, 2001.

The Living Classroom: Teaching and Collective Consciousness (SUNY series in
Transpersonal and Humanistic Psychology)

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