

# *Becoming the Path – processes in counselling*

*You cannot travel on the path until you have become the Path itself.*

~ Gautama Buddha

In September 2010 I presented a paper called *A Path towards Presence - contemplative enquiry in action learning* at the Fifth Victorian Symposium of Transpersonal Psychology in Melbourne. In subsequent conversations, several participants related the U Path to their own disciplines – from Hakomi to Taoist and Zen Buddhist practices through to those of Carl Rogers. In another dialogue the U Path was considered in a Christian context – as a progression from the Father, through the Son, to the Holy Spirit. The following revised article summarises the conceptual evolution of my practice, as presented in the Symposium.

## *1. Seven Stages on the Path of Counselling*

In 1982 a little book called *Conversations on Counselling* was published in Britain. Edited by a priest, Marcus Lefébure, it was presented as a sequence of transcribed dialogues between himself and a counsellor, Dr Martin Gregory (later identified as the anthroposophist Dr Hans Schauder). Several of the dialogues are about the seven stages of the counselling process. These stages were not prescriptive but emerged in reviewing the processes Schauder found himself working through while counselling his clients.

Schauder calls the first stage *preparation*. He quotes Carl Jung suggesting that the counsellor has to ‘wander with human heart through the world’, in order not to be theory-laden. The requirement is for a relaxed state of mind and body, a state of mindfulness that is clear of all personal prejudices and emotions. In preparing for the encounter, the counsellor has to enter into a state of openness, into complete receptivity, ready to perceive without any hindrance whatever may come up in the session.

The second stage opens out with the client, and involves active *listening and exploring*. This permeation of the attentive space is an act of empathy, in inner silence devoted to the client’s world and process. Rudolf Steiner comments, in *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*: ‘When he practices listening without criticism ... then he learns, little by little, to blend himself with the being of another and become identified with it. Then he hears through the words, into the soul of the other.’ Schauder refers to three effects of this active listening: first, there is the relief felt by the client in being able to speak whatever is on his or her mind; then in this speaking, a detachment from the immediacy of the experience occurs, as the problem is seen separate from oneself; finally, through the mirror of the listener’s attentiveness, there can dawn an awareness not only of the meaning of the words but also of one’s self-meaning.

The next two stages are about coming to grips with the situation. In the stage of *assimilation*, the counsellor is living into the impressions that arise in response to the client’s narrative. Steiner comments: ‘We must learn to look out on the world with keen, healthy senses, and quickened power of observation, and then give ourselves up to the feeling that arises within us. We should not try to make out, through intellectual speculation, what the things mean,

but rather allow the things themselves to tell us.’ The task is to live in the impressions rather than the thoughts — ‘visualising in feeling-soaked images’, Schauder suggests — sleeping on them, digesting the experiences, ‘handing over the questions in mind to deeper layers of being and waiting for answers to come.’ As Rainer Maria Rilke puts it, ‘Be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. The point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live some distant day into the answer’. This patience allows an intensification of the questions — an enhancement — before letting go in order to let insight come. That is one aspect, relating to the content of the experience with the client.

Then, a *diagnostic interlude* is also necessary. It occurs on another level of consciousness, and involves an assessment of the possibilities and limitations implicit in the situation as it has developed thus far, a consideration of the appropriate form for the relationship. Questions regarding personal capacities, timing, health and safety, the possible need for referral — the counsellor has to sort the essential from the inessential, and resolve to be fully present (‘to be before one’) in any further process. The counsellor must be able to pause and dwell in that state the poet John Keats called ‘Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’ — before at last (and here Schauder refers to a Japanese tale) ‘arriving at certainty through an unconscious process which hits you, so to speak, below the diaphragm’.

The fifth stage involves *selection of target areas*, opening up a developmental space in these areas for work, and crystallising the next steps. The client, with the support of the counsellor, has to identify the ground to be worked over, and also find the motivation for change. There has to be a reason, a rationale for going on. The role of the counsellor in this stage is to be an encouraging and stabilising influence, accompanying the other while aware throughout of an emerging picture of the whole, but looking at it through the client’s eyes and mind. There are real decisions at this point, and the practitioner has to help the client maintain steadfast resolve and take the next steps for him- or herself.

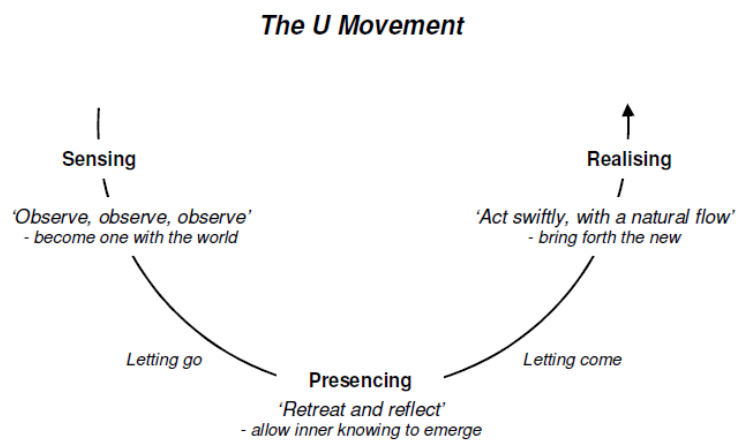
At the next stage the client needs to focus on and *work through the target areas*. The previous stage identified the ground; now the path is formed across that ground. Aims and goals are developed; a direction is set out towards the future. Here, the necessity for more skills is recognised: tools, techniques, functions, working-habits need to be acquired, developed, and practised. Practical planning is a real task at this sixth stage, to design and shape the essential patterns that will characterise the future mode of living. The counsellor in fact has become a life-coach at this point.

The final stage is for the counsellor to support the client in *enacting the new life*, stepping out purposefully into that envisioned and planned-for future. Thus, he or she begins to live more creatively, but now with the resourcefulness and steadily increasing capacities to deal with contingencies as they arise. ‘Life is not a stroll across an open field’, says Boris Pasternak in his poem *Hamlet*, so there can be no expectation that all will be easy from now on... But with a new preparedness to try it out, and with new tools to assist in the situations that happen, the client begins to make his or her own way.

## 2. The U Movement as a Process Path

I want to introduce here the principles of the U Path (developed in some detail in my lecture *Presencing through the Life Processes* — available on my website). As articulated in the *U Procedure* of Friedrich Glasl and Dirk Lemson, and more recently in Otto Scharmer's *Theory U*, this path involves an intentional entry and intensification to a stillpoint, and a subsequent emergence. The progressions of this path are summarised by Scharmer at the end of a 1999 interview with the economist W. Brian Arthur. In this interview, Arthur refers to a 'second type of learning' that proceeds in three steps. Scharmer and his associates have used the terms *Sensing*, *Presencing* (being present, sensing), and *Realising* for these steps to encapsulate Arthur's evocative core characterisations:

*'observe, observe, observe' – 'retreat and reflect' – 'act swiftly, with a natural flow'*



Reflection on Hans Schauder's stages in counselling in relation to this U Path can lead us to recognise how they can be distributed along the curve. The first three stages are about ways of observing, to 'become one' with the client's world; then *letting go*. The fourth stage of the *diagnostic interlude* requires the intent 'presencing' activity of inward reflection, in a state of negative capability that is preparatory to the *letting come* of insight; and then in succession come the three further stages of emergence towards the new life. We will return to consider these stages in counselling and the U Path at a later point.

## 3. Working with the Life Processes

In 1910, in an unfinished book now published as *Anthroposophy — a fragment*, Rudolf Steiner characterised the seven life processes that are a prerequisite for the life of any organism: *breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting, maintaining, growing, and generating*. While these life processes must be comprehended as continuously inter-weaving, we necessarily have to consider them in a linear narrative which does however have its own significance. For their activity is indeed both simultaneous *and* sequential, and therefore I think it is no coincidence that Steiner names them in this order.

In any organism, *breathing* and *warming* are the preconditions for all further activity. Through breathing, a rhythmic relationship is established between what is inner and outer — a space is opened up within space, thus becoming a place. This 'locality', which is at first no more

than a kind of pulsating differentiation, is then permeated by warmth, so forming a kind of content and establishing the basis for presence. And the *nourishing* process draws inward all that is necessary to give shape to this formative space.

*Secreting* is central. A process of sifting and sorting takes place — retaining what is essential, rejecting the inessential — through which form is given substance, while excretion disposes of what is not needed.

The existence of any entity must be regulated through a process of constant *maintaining*. This would however only keep things as they are, were it not also for the process of *growing* that underlies all development and transformation. All organisms develop, from their juvenile forms into maturity. Finally, replicative, reproductive capacities appear at every level in the organism, in *generating* its own kind.

Steiner was unable to complete his elaboration of this theme at that time; when he returned to it in his lectures *The Riddle of Humanity* in mid-1916, he developed a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the senses and the life processes, in such a way that the ‘enlivening of the senses’ and the ‘ensouling of the life processes’ were intimately inter-related. We will now consider how these ensouled life processes might be seen as integral with the seven stages in counselling...

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First, as practitioners working into any circumstance, there needs to be a *sensing of the field*. This begins with what Schauder calls *preparation*, proceeding towards the first encounter, in which we need to be alert, observing with our open senses and open mind. We can call this *breathing / sensing* — to be living sensitively into a whole range of impressions, often of a contradictory nature. So, ‘breathing’, we sense into things... Goethe refers to this breathing process in an aphorism:

*You always have to look on the inner and outer sphere as being parallel or, rather, as interwoven. There is constant systole and diastole, a breathing in and a breathing out...*

Is there sufficient *lightness of touch* to allow some breathing space *and* breathing time, so that the client can settle, and allay his or her initial doubts? In a very real sense, this requires the practice of *tact* — of *being in touch*...

Simultaneously we need to be aware of another life-field. We do not merely stand outside a situation and look at it; we have to enter in, to engage, and this penetration is accomplished through the expansive intent of warmth. In now *warming* to the situation, to the client, we establish *empathy*. Not sympathy (“I see you’re in a big black hole — let me get in there with you”) and not antipathy (“I see you’re in a big black hole — it’s not my problem”) but a genuine open-hearted presence, in *being there*. The client may have feelings of alienation and self-hatred. Warmth suffuses — so we can speak here of *warming / relating*.

This corresponds to Schauder’s stage of *listening and exploring*. It is about both absorbing and permeating the client’s viewpoint without any prejudice. Breathing opens a space, which warming fills. And because this breathing continues, the warmth-mood does not become too

humid and cloying. When breathing and warming are in the right proportion, the effect is like mild, fresh springtime air.

Schauder speaks then of *assimilating*. We have to take in the situation, and *digest* it, chewing it over, turning it over in our minds. In order to really grasp what is involved, to find what can be *nourishing*, we have to let issues sink deeply down into our body's unconscious processes. We need to sleep on them. If we were cows, we would regurgitate and chew over our cud — to ruminate... Digestion thus proceeds in stages; we have to break down a situation into its constituent parts, and work our way through them, to fully take them in.

In this *nourishing / digesting* phase we need to ensure that the client has sufficient opportunity to get a grasp on the unfolding situation. We might offer a little *food for thought*, but carefully, recognising the everyone's digestive processes are different — some are more carnivorous, ripping into it; others are ruminants. Still others are nibblers and light grazers. They digest at a different rate; if forced, indigestion may result. That tight knot in the belly can be fear and dread. We must make sure not only that the client has a meal-ticket to the table, but also is allowed to work through the menu in his or her own way. As a *companion* (*com* = with; *panis* = bread) accompanying them with open intent, we share the daily bread...

These first three processes are prerequisites for the central phase in any relationship: *secreting / essentialising* — the secret aspect of digesting. This is the *diagnostic interlude* that Schauder describes. We have to be intelligent (Latin *intelligere*: *inter* = amongst, between; *legere* = gather, pick out, read) — that is, we sift and sort. In crisis, the client may have lost this ability to sort things out. A kind of emotional diarrhoea, or else constipation, may then be the result. The practitioner needs to support the secretion / excretion process by undertaking some self-secreting. What is essential? What seems non-essential? Or not suitable at this moment? What needs to be forgotten? What remains in the sieve of consciousness?

Establishing what is actually in the field, and what does not belong there, may involve some intense effort. Always be prepared for surprises — the reality of secretion is the complete transformation of substances, so that nothing remains as it was. This involves a process of *letting-go* and *letting-come*. Through all this we need to be aware that the most vital secretion in this process is the Self. Am I more *present* — Latin *praesens* = 'being before (one, the other)' — with a conscientious inner question: is the client's Self becoming more present?

Throughout the following sessions, what begins to take shape now has to be borne forward. *Maintaining / practising* is a conscious task. Schauder has characterised this as the *selection of target areas*. What has been acknowledged by the client? What has been decided? Is there sufficient steadfastness to carry things through? Holding the situation still, and yet keeping the outcomes in movement, acknowledging the necessities of letting things change, are each important elements in this. We need to keep things in mind, ticking off each step as we proceed yet retaining that essence. And we also need to consider what faculties need to be developed, what skills are to be learned. This is time of 'sharpening of the saw'.

*Growing / developing* is a conscientious extension of this bearing-in-mind towards an ever-greater facility. This corresponds to Schauder's *working through the target areas*. The client will look for growth, for development, for change... The details of what now is needed must be

worked out. Where are the reflections, the review points where progress is to be evaluated? What might have to change again in the face of practical experience in the course of life? We often encounter resistance at this stage. The 'training wheels' of the *maintaining* stage are off. He / she might 'hit the wall'. We will need to patiently find a way beyond this wall of doubt, of antagonism, of fear — maybe having to revisit earlier stages, all the while recognising that this testing serves to consolidate and temper the new skills.

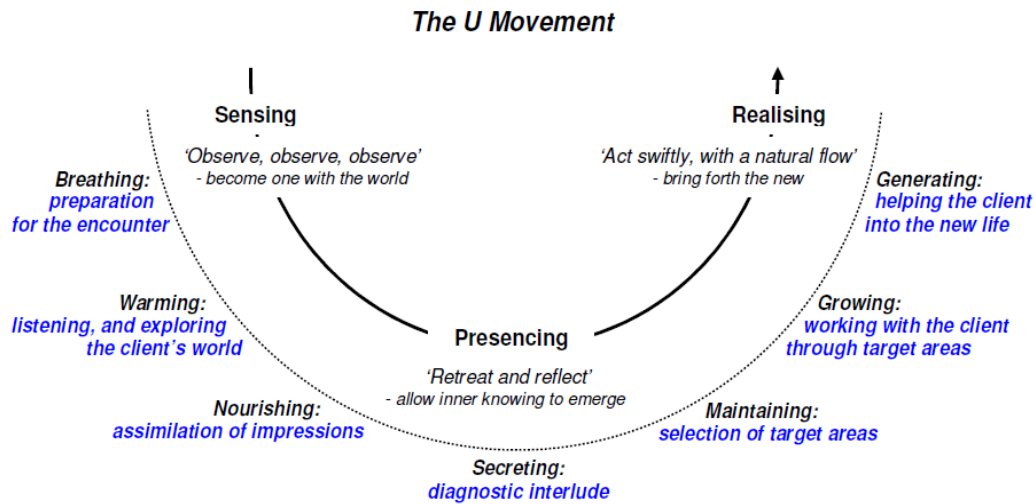
Ultimately, the client's experience in what Schauder characterises as *enacting the new life* will most likely take place away from, and perhaps subsequent to, the sessions. This *generating / creating* results from all the work that has been done — conceiving and realising a previously unimagined future. As practitioners we have been involved in the tending of root and branch and bud, but may not in fact witness what now blossoms into a new world of possibilities, and finally into fruition.

The decisive moments — those *Aha!* moments — in the counselling process are not a direct function of the life processes — they are always a gracious, instantaneous event. But such moments are well prepared-for through increasing awareness of these processes, which are *already taking place in us* — in reflecting about it, we are simply considering how we might cooperate more fully with the living functional basis of our own lives. Or, acknowledging that counselling never progresses along a prescribed path, we nevertheless have a framework for our reflective practice. We can now summarise these seven soul / life processes:

<i>Breathing:</i>	sensing in the phenomenological polarities
<i>Warming:</i>	permeating the experiential space
<i>Nourishing:</i>	taking it all in to become 'response-able'
<i>Secreting:</i>	sorting the essential from the inessential
<i>Maintaining:</i>	supporting the developmental environment
<i>Growing:</i>	cultivating the transformational process
<i>Generating:</i>	creating the new as a spontaneous outcome

#### 4. A Comprehensive Theory

The Greek word *theōrein* means 'to behold, to contemplate'. What I am developing here is my 'theory' — my way of seeing things. It provides a basis for insight into all kinds of activities. For instance, in the previously-mentioned *Presencing through the Life Processes*, I consider its relevance for teachers; in *Parenting as a Vocation*, the life processes are foundational for home-making; the article *Consulting and the Life Processes* may interest organisation development practitioners. These articles can be downloaded from my website. In this specific context of counselling practices, we can bring the above considerations into a comprehensive diagram that precisely illustrates the relationship between the *seven stages of counselling* and the *seven life processes*, seen together as stages on the U Path, in a progression leading from *Sensing*, through *Presencing* towards *Realising*:



These are associations I invite you to contemplate. In my understanding, such a path will be in itself hygienic, for the processing of experience is, as it were, 'borne upon the interweaving currents of life on little boats of differentiated consciousness'. Thus the client's life-bodily existence and soul-spiritual forces may be more fully harmonised and integrated.

The U Path represents a universal archetype for the collective wise flowing of humanity and cosmos, in my view effective in working with both secular and spiritual realities. If we can be attentive to process over substance, process over information, process over ideology, then we might indeed discover how we 'become the Path itself'.

~ John Allison

### References:

- Allison, John: *Consulting and the Life Processes*  
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