

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the degree of Master of Arts in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

‘Understanding the nature of empathy: A personal perspective’

Robert Jones, May 2005

Abstract

Title: Understanding the nature of empathy: A personal perspective

Subject terms: Empathy, heuristic self-search inquiry, Buddhism, transformation, needs, love, relationship, compassionate communication, meditation.

Names: Rogers, Buber, Rosenberg, Maslow. Moustakas, Sela-Smith, Sontag, Shelley

I decided to approach the subject because of curiosity about, and an increasing concern to deepen my understanding of the nature of empathy, whilst training in empathic communication skills. The central questions for me being, what is empathy, and how is it communicated?

Through the initial processes of the dissertation I discovered an approach or methodology, heuristic self-search inquiry, that lead me into a process that became deeply personal and significant for myself. The dissertation then became an exploration of my personal experience of receiving empathy or its absence, in significant events my life.

I examined these significant life events from the aspect of 'met or unmet needs', through a process of heuristic self-search inquiry using the Moustakas' method and Buddhist reflection.

By contrasting 'techniques' of making empathic connection with approaches to empathy that were dependent on the 'way of being' of the therapist, I was able to show the element of 'love' and 'interest in another human being' may create a deeper empathy. I used examples from literature to support my thesis in this respect.

My conclusions may raise important questions in respect of a therapist's attitudes in respect of their interconnection and relationship with other human beings, within and outside formal therapy settings.

Contents

1. Acknowledgements	page 4
2. Introduction	page 5
3. Literature review	page 9
4. Methodology	page 19
5. Discussion	page 26
6. Synthesis	page 57
7. Summary & conclusion	page 58
8. Appendices	page 60
9. References	page 69

Acknowledgements

Embarking on this project was motivated by my desire to write something. By choosing to engage in an MA dissertation I consciously set myself a disciplined approach to writing. I little realised the direction the process would take. The journey became one of intense effort that took me back into areas of my life history I hadn't realised were unreconciled. Those who were influences on me on that journey I must now acknowledge, and thank for their part in the process of reconciliation and self-transformation I have undergone.

Firstly my Buddhist teacher, Urgyen Sangharakshita, (Dennis Lingwood) who has shown me by example, in his own voluminous writing over fifty years, that one can communicate oneself, with perception and insight about what matters most in one's life. Secondly my mid-life introduction to counselling lead me to appreciate Carl Rogers, and made me curious about the nature of empathy. This has taken me into areas I hadn't imagined I would venture. Likewise with Martin Buber, who inspired and helped me to begin to understand and appreciate the deeper meaning of 'relationship'.

The approach to writing (this work) I eventually chose was inspired by empathic understanding from my academic supervisor, Tony Merry, who sadly died before he could comment on my progress, or see the completion. I am grateful for the introduction he gave me to the Moustakas heuristic method, through reading the writing of Sandy Sela-Smith. Who has become an exemplar for me through her own approach to heuristic self-search inquiry; and also a transatlantic correspondent who has encouraged me in the painful process of writing from the 'feeling self'.

In discovering non-violent communication as a 'new' approach to empathy, I am grateful to Marshall Rosenberg, whose pioneering work has created an environment that allows others to find a way in which to develop empathic understanding.

Finally without the constant support and encouragement of my daughter, Katharine, my dear friend Abhayavajra, and my partner Amarapuspa I would be floundering in life, as well writing. Finally to Elaine who skilfully walked me through the choices for a replacement Apple Mac, after mine crashed at the final edit stage, just as Tony Merry predicted. To honour Tony Merry's memory I dedicate this work on empathy to him, hoping it has added something to his own very considerable writing on the subject.

1. Introduction

"I heard the sound of my own voice. It embraced the others, it encouraged them. But I was even more skilled at listening. There is a moment when one must be silent. That is the moment when you touch the other's soul. Someone who is pouring out feeling. Whom you have helped bring to that point, perhaps by the display of your own feeling. And then you look deeply into the other's eyes. You make a little mmmm or ahhh, an encouraging, sympathetic sound. For now, you just listen, really listen, and show that you take what you are hearing into your heart. Hardly anyone does this."

The heroine, Emma writing her epilogue towards the end of Susan Sontag's novel 'The Volcano Lover' (1992:405)

This study is concerned with the concept of empathy. In particular it will examine the concept in psychotherapy, with an emphasis on the humanistic approaches; introducing several references from literature (as the one above), in order to show that the concept has universal presence and has a benefit outside the formal therapeutic setting.

Rationale: a personal perspective

I can relate to the character in Susan Sontag's novel, as I have tried throughout life to be helpful, without knowing what empathy was, or even knowing the best way of being helpful, or how to be with someone in their joy, or their sorrow. So I have chosen the topic of the thesis in order to attempt to discover the nature of empathy and have posited the question:

How does a human being communicate empathic understanding to another human being?

I have consciously used the term 'nature of empathy' in this study, as I was already aware, from previous reading of psychotherapy literature in this area, that empathy seems to have an essence or nature that defies an exact conceptual description. The need to deepen my understanding of empathy has become of a real concern, as it is now crucial to my work, which involves being with people in two of life's most crucial situations, dying, and bereavement. In these settings I want to help the other person develop a self-understanding of their emotional pain and suffering.

My journey of curiosity and discovery about people started from life changes I made fifteen years ago. From the changes I made then, I found myself with a need to make a reassessment, after illness a few years ago, of who I was trying to become. How I could carry on contributing to society, in a way that was meaningful to me. This led me to a process of training as a bereavement counsellor in 2000. In that training, I was puzzled by the concept of empathy and its related concept: unconditional positive regard. My introduction to both these theoretical concepts was through the work of Carl Rogers, in particular his paper, 'A theory of

therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centred framework' (Rogers 1957). In this paper he set out six core conditions, including empathy, as essential ingredients for therapeutic change that became the model for client or what was later known as person-centred counselling.

Following my initial training in bereavement counselling, I decided to deepen my knowledge of counselling theory and practice and obtained a place on a two year counselling diploma course. Whilst the course had its emphasis in the person-centred approach, it also offered the opportunity for a grounding in other humanistic approaches, and theory of human psychology from a humanistic basis.

In my training in counselling, I realised that empathy seemed to play a significant part in the psychotherapeutic process. This was confirmed in my reading of psychotherapy literature, (Barnes & Thagard 1997; Barrett-Lennard 1962; Bozarth 1984, 2001; Kahn 1997; Kohut 1997; Mahrer, Boulet & Fairweather 1993 Rogers 1957, 1961, 1980; Shlien 1997; Truax & Carkuff 1967); and I concluded that all approaches to counselling and psychotherapy had made, and still continue to make contributions to the understanding of the nature of empathy. In searching the literature on empathy, I began to feel dissatisfied with some of the explanations of empathy and techniques used to communicate it. This was due in part, to Carl Rogers (1980), refuting what he saw as a trend developed from research into counsellor responses, with an emphasis on reflections, by amongst others, Truax & Carkuff (1967). So a number of subsidiary questions began to form in my mind.

i) How can I meet another, through empathic understanding?

ii) Does the exposure of 'needs' of self and others, as described by Maslow 1962, and Rosenberg 1999, create a climate for empathy?

iii) Is Buber 1933, in his description of the 'I and Thou' meeting between two human beings explicating the nature of empathy in the relationship?

Realising, that I still felt dissatisfied with some of the explanations of empathy I had previously read, I concluded that by undertaking a study into the nature of empathy from a position of having a questioning approach, I might discover something new. I was also aware that no study had been undertaken into the work of Marshall Rosenberg's approach to compassionate communication which uses identification of needs rather than feelings, as the basis of empathy. If through my study I could show Rosenberg is correct in this approach, then I might make a contribution to the helping professions.

Initial approach

At the start of my journey of discovery into the nature of empathy, I was fascinated how Susan Sontag creates a character who, with all her other human failings, seems to have such an expressive insight into empathy. Maybe it can be explained by a quotation from Kohut :-

“the empathic understanding of the experience of other human beings is as basic an endowment of man as his vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell”

(Kohut, 1997:144)

In my opinion, Kohut would find it perfectly natural for the fictional person in Sontag’s novel to utter those words. What Kohut is communicating resonates deeply with my own spiritual practice of Buddhism over the last fifteen years and it also challenges me in my attempts at empathic understanding.

There is a wealth of literature on the subject of empathy, so my initial approach to discover its nature followed a traditional route by attempting to acquire objective knowledge of the subject. The literature review revealed that most approaches were based on findings from clinical case studies, or critiques of those conclusions. In particular, Jerold Bozarth, (1984, 2001) has written widely on the subject, making comparisons between other psychotherapists understanding and Carl Rogers’ writing on empathy, (Bozarth 1984). Apart from writers working in the humanistic approaches I found little is specifically mentioned about empathy, from which I concluded that other psychotherapeutic approaches seem not to regard empathy as central. However empathy seems present, to a degree, in most approaches, and perhaps it could be said to have been taken as given, or an essential ingredient and not made explicit. In undertaking the literature review, I had initial misgivings. As I have said, I had looked at the subject before, and had been left with a feeling of dissatisfaction and some questions unanswered. However, I put aside my misgivings, although I now know, from the process that was to follow, that the misgivings were well placed and were to be fundamental in what followed. I began the literature search and made some progress in finding what I have identified as key components or ingredients of empathy. None of these key components seemed to give me a satisfactory answer to the primary question about the nature of empathy; nor did they provide answers to the subsidiary questions I had posed. The literature search came to a point where I felt I was not making progress, and so I turned to exploring alternative methodologies.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) seemed a possible approach that might have provided a methodology which could have allowed progress towards what I was searching for, had not the events I relate below set me on a very different path. The events I describe eventually caused me to discover a methodology in heuristics that was to become satisfying and demanding, and yet was one which I felt would provide an answer to my question(s). I was confirmed in my belief by an explanation of heuristics by Moustakas.

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. Moustakas, (1990:15)

However before I embarked on a heuristic approach to this study I set out on a review of the literature on empathy in the hope that its nature would be revealed, and it would give me an answer to the question I posed: **How does a human being communicate empathic understanding to another human being?**

2. Literature Review

I began the literature search in what was familiar territory for myself from my counselling course: I returned to basics with Carl Rogers' work.

My starting point was Rogers' paper, 'A theory of therapy, personality, and interpersonal relationships, as developed in the client-centred framework' (Rogers 1957), that was later to be recognised as a seminal text in psychotherapy. Rogers had begun his approach in the 1940s with what he then termed 'non-directive psychotherapy', with a move away from describing the person in therapy as a patient, to relating to them as a client: Rogers later used the term 'Person' (Rogers, 1961). In this, I see an attempt to elevate or change the status of the client to a more human level, even an attempt to change the balance of power in the therapeutic relationship to one of equality, in which both the therapist and client had equal value.

In doing this Rogers was intentionally bringing empathic understanding into the therapeutic relationship from his own present understanding of empathy. Others (Anderson & Cissna, 1997: 35) have argued that Rogers had been influenced by the writings of Martin Buber *Between Man and Man* (Buber, 1933) and *I and Thou* (Buber 1937, in Kaufman, 1970).

Further they suggest evidence exists in Rogers' own papers that he taught Buber to his students as early as 1952.

Later Rogers expressed appreciation of a definition of empathy formulated by Barrett-Lennard that he asserted came closest to what he meant by empathy:

Qualitatively it is an active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person, of reaching out to receive his words and signs into experienced meaning that matches at least those aspects of his awareness that are most important to him at the moment. It is an experiencing of the consciousness behind another's outward communication, but with continuous awareness and this consciousness is originating and proceeding in the other.

(Barrett-Lennard,1962:143-144)

When I looked at dictionary definitions of empathy I discovered that the word was a comparatively recent one in the English language and was defined as:

power of entering into another's personality and imaginatively experiencing his experiences, power of entering into the feeling or spirit of something, (especially a work of art) and so appreciating it fully. (Oxford dictionary, Britannica edition, 1962)

As Barrett-Lennard (1962) hadn't used the words power or spirit I was puzzled and I decided my journey had to start before Carl Rogers with an examination of the etymology of the word empathy

History and etymology

The word empathy made its entry into the English language in 1910 as the result of Titchener working with Wundt in Leipzig and translating the German word *Einfühlung* as empathy, specifically for use in psychotherapy. According to Shlien (1997) *Einfühlung* is related to appreciation; and the use of 'empathy' has very a different association with its relation to the Greek word 'patheos' meaning 'illness', 'suffering', or 'to suffer with', which is the root of the word 'sympathy'. Often I find I am confused when reading psychotherapy literature when empathy is specifically dissociated from sympathy: I am confused by two aspects:

Firstly, whether prior to the word first being used in the English language, the concept of empathy didn't exist in the English speaking world?

Secondly, if the concept of empathy did exist could it be seen was it synonymous with sympathy?

My belief is that the concept existed and it was called sympathy. In support of this I offer a quote from the English poet Shelley, from his essay 'Defence of Poetry', written in 1820, nearly a hundred years before the word entered the English language. This in my opinion may truly describe empathy:

The great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an *identification of ourselves with the beautiful* which exists in thought, action or *person*, not our own. A man to be greatly good, must *imagine intensely* and comprehensively: *he must put himself in the place of another* and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.....

(words in italics, my emphasis)

The greatest instrument of moral good is the imagination.

(Percy Bysshe Shelley ,1820)

I doubt whether Carl Rogers in his research and writings on empathy would find fault what Shelley is conveying here: Yet it is Shelley's description of sympathy!

I conclude that empathy or sympathy in its deepest sense are synonymous: Further I would agree with the quote from Kohut that it is a 'natural endowment of a human being:

The empathic understanding of the experience of other human beings is as basic an endowment of man as his vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell (Kohut 1997:144)

Having arrived at an agreement with Kohut I was left to discover how the world of therapy used what apparently is a natural endowment of man; so I began my search with its roots.

Psychoanalytic therapy

Whilst Freud and James make no significant references to empathy and how it was used in their encounters with patients, it is clear in the process of psychoanalytic therapy there was an attempt to understand the patient, using techniques of silent listening and interpretation. This is well described by Murray, in 'Exploration in Personality' (Murray,1938).

Carl Rogers

Breaking with the traditional psychoanalytical approach in 1957, Rogers started a new tradition that has given birth to many views, understandings, even taught techniques, on the concept of empathy, which I shall now address.

Raskin in his article *The history of Empathy in the client-centred movement* traces the history of Rogers' understanding of empathy in the development of client-centred therapy from 1942. He draws attention to the fact that the word wasn't actually used by Rogers until his paper of 1957 (Raskin, 2001).

Key concepts in empathy

i) Empathy as a learnt technique

Truax worked with Rogers on the Wisconsin Project in research, testing the validity of Rogers' assertion that, '*the six core conditions were all that were necessary and sufficient for therapeutic change*' (Rogers, 1957), which underpinned the 'client-centred' counselling

approach. Truax, working later with Carkuff, went on to develop a system of labelled empathy responses the counsellor could use, based on their assertion that empathy was a communication skill that could be learnt (Truax and Carkuff, 1967).

Others, working in the field have criticised Truax and Carkuff's approach, basing criticism on the fact that what underlay this taught technique was dependence on reflective responses. Rogers himself later perceived the trend in reflective responses in client-centred therapy, and he went to some length to point out that 'whilst his method did have reflection as a key ingredient, the approach was more 'a way of being' rather than doing'. He went on to say, "that the emphasis upon therapist *responses* instead of *empathic attitudes*, led to *appalling consequences and complete distortions of client-centred therapy*" (Rogers, 1980) (words in italics are my emphasis).

ii) 'A way of being' rather than a technique

Bozarth (1984), wrote in clarification stating, reflection was a formalised technique used by Rogers and others who were adopting the client-centred approach as a way of communicating empathic understanding. This he claims, in itself, is more than a technique or cognitive schema (Bozarth, 1984). Writing later, Bozarth makes the assertion 'the difference of Rogers' concept of empathy from other concepts is that empathy for Rogers is intertwined with unconditional positive regard' (Bozarth (2001:144).

If Bozarth is correct in his understanding of Rogers' concept of empathy, then a definition of what unconditional positive regard meant for Rogers is required: Rogers defined unconditional positive regard, 'this means to value the person, irrespective of the differential values which one might put on his specific behaviours' (Rogers, 1957:208).

Here we have a definition, in my opinion, that is akin to the quote above from Shelley: However for me it lacks Shelley's poetic elegance, and avoids using the word love.

In the same paragraph of his 1957 paper, Rogers uses terms such as 'prizing', 'acceptance' and 'warm appreciation' as synonymous with unconditional positive regard. In Rogers' use of these terms, 'prizing' has, in my opinion, a quality akin to love, although falls short of the full meaning of the word, although in using the term 'unconditional positive regard' he argues that it has the same qualities. Kahn's view was that Rogers spent forty years trying to answer a single question 'What would a therapist do to convey to a client that he or she is loved?' (Kahn, 1997). He further asserts, what Rogers meant by love was the sense of the Greek word, *agape*, a love that requires nothing from another in return, and, according to Kahn, is characterised by a desire to fulfil the beloved. This is in contrast to love in the sense of the Greek word, '*eros*' which is a need-based love, that requires something from another; which can be seen as romantic love, often including a wish to possess the beloved object, or person. Here we are entering an important aspect in the therapeutic relationship:

How can the therapist convey his *agape* type love for the client through empathy?

iii) The therapeutic relationship

As a contrast to Rogers' writing on the therapeutic relationship, I have drawn from Martin Buber, writing from a Judaic philosophical background, rather than as a trained psychotherapist, although familiar with psychotherapy, and also familiar with Rogers work (Anderson and Cissna, 1997). For Buber the relationship was the crux of the issue in therapy, as it was in life. For Buber, in writing '*Between Man and Man*' the relationship between two human beings was based to some extent on his understanding of the relationship between Man and God (Buber, 1933). From his understanding of the relationship between Man and God he asserted, '*In the Beginning is the relation*' which I take to be a reference to the relationship between Adam and God in the Book of Genesis in the Bible. In writing about the nature of relationship, Buber coined the terms '*I and Thou*' and '*I and It*' to describe the two possible ways for a human being to be in relationship with another (Buber, 1937).

As I have indicated earlier, Carl Rogers had been influenced by Buber's writing and had, as early as 1952, drawn from Buber in teaching his students, (Carl Rogers archive). At their first and only meeting in a public dialogue in 1957, prior to the publication of Rogers' essay, their different understandings of the therapist-client relationship were debated. In particular, this included Buber's refutation of the equality of the therapist-client relationship, that was to become central to Rogers' concept in the client-therapist relationship. Another significant difference that emerged in the dialogue was Buber's assertion that he understood there was something deeper in the '*I and Thou*' relationship, than his understanding of empathy; this he termed, '*inclusivity*' (Anderson and Cissna, 1997).

Sadly this, and other differences, in the way which Buber and Rogers viewed the therapeutic relationship emerged in their dialogue that couldn't be explored more deeply, due to their prior agreement on the time allotted for the dialogue. One of Rogers' main points in the dialogue and, possibly one of the main areas of agreement between them, although described differently by each of them, was what Rogers terms '*as-if*' in the therapeutic relationship.

iv) The as-if factor

In the Buber-Rogers' dialogue, as in his later writings, Rogers pointed out his approach to therapy, was '*a way of being, rather than doing*' (Rogers, 1980). In stating this he was emphasising the point that even in a state of deep empathy with another, there was what he termed the '*as-if*' factor. What he was saying here was, that he retained his own sense of himself throughout the encounter whilst attempting to see the other's world from his or her shoes. Buber agreed with Rogers on this point in their dialogue, although he takes this a step further, using a metaphor to describe therapeutic process: '*to see the mountain one stands on, one must move across to the other mountain to view it*'. In this, Buber is drawing attention to

the fact that the client's perception of the therapist was within the process and should be taken account of in the '*as-if*' factor.

In his writing about what he termed a 'new framework' Zimring, (2000) maybe throws some light onto the theoretical considerations of the '*as-if*' state: He describes what he terms the '*I-state*' and the '*me-state*' in empathic encounters. According to Zimring, in the '*me-state*' we have an objective view of the world; from this state, we can therefore see the possibility of it being used imaginatively, to be in another's shoes and from there try to understand the world from their perspective. Whereas in the '*I-state*', according to Zimring, we experience our world subjectively, with feelings.

If Zimring is correct in his assertion about two states of being in the human, we have an explanation that the therapist in his or her '*I-state*' experiences the therapeutic encounter subjectively, with his or her own feelings: In the '*me-state*' imaginatively steps into the client's shoes to experience their world objectively. Although without the client's feelings, as they can not be felt by another person, however perceptive the therapist is.

Note, the use of the word imaginatively brings us back to the quote from Shelley.

Whereas Mahrer (Mahrer et al, 1993), has departed from the '*as-if*' approach in what he describes as the 'the third model of empathy': Using the term, 'the internal therapist' to describe a process of letting go of the therapist's identity or self, in order to enter into an alignment with the client. Mahrer emphasises that this is a deliberate disengagement from one's ordinary self, identity, or individuality. I am left puzzled how in practice, a therapist could possibly disengage from feelings, thoughts and perceptions without becoming alienated from himself !

What is suggested by Mahrer in letting go of the self has echoes in the 'analogical thinking' method of empathy described by Barnes and Thagard (1997). However, in their view, they consider the self in identification with the other deepens the empathy, and possibly, is the cause of empathy. They use an example of an audience in a theatre watching the play Hamlet, asserting that those in the audience who have had losses in their life, although not the same as Hamlet's, are more likely to have an empathic response to Hamlet's suffering. Their concept of empathy, through identification with another, runs counter to main stream thought in psychotherapy, that identification with another is founded on sympathy in its debased meaning, and is pity.

To some extent it could be argued that John Shlien is using a process of identification when he asserts that the quality of sympathy is required for true empathy to exist (Shlien, 1997). He differentiates between two types of empathy: One he describes as having a beneficial effect

and the other harmful. He illustrates the latter using as an example the huntsman who, closely and empathetically follows the prey, which requires an identification of the hunter with the prey, albeit without sympathy.

The beneficial effect arises according to Shlien from what he calls positive empathy. From this, we can come to the possibility of love being a required ingredient of empathy. An ingredient or quality he asserts is necessary in positive empathy: In this has a similar view to Shelley.

Following the thread of feelings, as in the quote from Shelley, I want to explore two other approaches to empathy.

Eugene Gendlin, after working with Rogers in research on the Wisconsin Project, in which the core conditions were tested, arrived at a technique or approach for encouraging the client to access feelings that were out of awareness and weren't communicated. He described this development in empathic understanding as focusing, (Gendlin 1969).

v) Focusing

Gendlin, (1969) contends that the therapist in sensing something else in the body of the client, other than what he or she is communicating, by the technique of focusing allows other feelings to come into awareness, and that there is a perceptible 'shift' in the client. Further Gendlin, (1969), asserts: that the sensing of feelings out of awareness in the client come from a deep empathic response to the client, that arise from being in tune with the client's embodied feelings. Mick Cooper has more recently described embodied feelings being accessed and identified, through what he calls 'embodied empathy' (Cooper, 2001). (Rothschild, 2004), claims that an awareness of the other's embodied feelings opens up the possibility to a technique of mirroring from the therapist's body that can bring about an empathic connection. Rothschild claims this technique can be learnt. However I am left wondering, in this approach, where the place is for 'the way of being', in the attitude of the therapist, as it seems to me to be very self-conscious, and possibly not congruent,

So far I have approached empathy as a means whereby the therapist encourages the client to become aware of and express feelings. I turn now to another approach to empathy developed by Marshall Rosenberg, based on the identification of 'needs', that he variously terms 'compassionate communication', 'a language of compassion', and 'non-violent communication' or in its abbreviated nomenclature, NVC, (Rosenberg, 1999). He acknowledges that he worked from Maslow's premise of the human being's, 'hierarchy of needs', required for survival, and development, (Maslow, 1962),

vi) Non-Violent Communication (NVC)

In NVC there are some similarities with Gendlin's focusing approach in that the client or person is encouraged to access their 'needs', either met or unmet, which may be out of awareness. According to Rosenberg, in becoming aware of their need(s), and possibly expressing them verbally, there is an apparent shift or release in the person accessing them. From this he suggests they can then understand their feelings in relation to their met or unmet needs. This is similar to the effect Gendlin (1969) claims for focussing.

Rosenberg (1999), has identified four ingredients that become four steps in the NVC approach, first, the 'observation' which is a factual representation of an event, without bias or judgement or blame: Arising from the observation, the second ingredient, a feeling associated with the third, a need, and finally a specific achievable request made to oneself or to another. Having experienced training in NVC I have become convinced that Rosenberg has developed an approach to empathy that goes beyond others I have experienced. I have found by exploring both my met and unmet needs, I am better able to identify the feelings I am experiencing. For me, to be able to bring into awareness and maybe express, the needs and feelings seems to create a shift or release, confirming what has been claimed by Rosenberg. Often this has created an opening into layers of unmet needs in my personal history. Rosenberg, (1999) has been at pains to point out this approach is not limited to formal therapy situations, and is valid in any human encounter. It has been used successfully in prison and education settings, as well as with groups in environments of conflict such as that pertaining in Palestine and Israeli

One example that I find amply demonstrates the power of empathy in relating to needs is shown Appendix One: A close friend from India who was resident in the UK for four months to attend the same training as myself in NVC, found himself one evening faced with a potential mugging. His use of non-violent communication defused a potentially violent situation and allowed both participants to leave satisfied. In my friend's case, safe and still with most of his money, and the assailant with sufficient money to meet his immediate need, to buy food.

Summary and evaluation of the process of the literature review

I have described in the literature review some of the approaches to empathy I discovered and have identified what I considered were some key concepts. In doing so, I am aware that the review is not a full representation of the research work on empathy, and that it has a bias towards the developments arising from Carl Rogers' pioneering work, due I suspect, to my introduction to the concept of empathy through person-centred counselling. This therefore seemed the natural starting point of my search to discover the nature of empathy.

I feel satisfied that in the review, I have uncovered aspects of empathy. I have concluded that even if the approach to empathy is through a learnt technique, it is in my opinion still necessary for it to be embodied, so that it becomes in Carl Rogers' words 'a way of being'. This seems to accord with my experience of learning the ingredients of NVC: Until the process of making empathic connection becomes natural and the language becomes idiomatic, and one's own, it can remain a technique that has the potential for alienation from others, and maybe one's self. I base this assertion both on my own early attempts to communicate using the ingredients for empathic communication taught in NVC and watching others' attempts who are newly trained. Also, through hearing criticisms of the NVC approach. Perhaps till we have all recognised Kohut's assertion of empathy being a natural endowment of the human being and we respond to something already inside us, we flounder in our attempts at making empathic connection, and in a sense remain incongruent.

However having stated this, I was left feeling dissatisfied as it still left me no nearer the discovery of the nature of empathy; the question still remained, and became a deeply personal one. The feeling related to my sense that none of these key concepts really helped my understanding of empathy: Each in its own way provided something. In some ways it was familiar territory I had visited before: The feeling of dissatisfaction was not about lack of comprehensiveness that there were more key concepts I had yet to discover. The dissatisfaction arose because the literature seemed to a large extent objective, almost third hand, and wasn't in some instances in accordance with my experience of empathy. My search had widened considerably to include novels. Also it included tracing back to the early beginnings in the psychoanalytical approach to therapy, where empathy was rarely explicitly stated. The point I had reached in the literature review coincided with a general dissatisfaction of not making any progress in my life. At this time I was introduced to heuristic research. This seemed to offer a way making progress and I quickly became immersed in examining the process I had been trying to follow in acquiring knowledge of empathy. I have described this in Appendix Two.

My consequent understanding of my process in the literature search was the principle cause of my decision to adopt the heuristic self-search inquiry method in the dissertation.

3. Methodology: A question and dilemmas

July 4th 2004

As stated in the introduction, I commenced the dissertation without any bias towards a methodology and decided I would start by studying the very extensive literature on empathy. As I began to examine methods, I quickly came to the conclusion that a quantitative study did not seem appropriate, as in my opinion, the subject matter did not lend itself to statistical analysis. I was aware that studies had been carried out on empathy using quantitative analysis, for instance Carkuff and Truax (1967), to measure and rate therapist and client responses, however my main interest concerned discovering the nature of empathy itself, rather than how to apply it. I therefore decided to adopt a qualitative approach, and started a preliminary examination of methodologies that might be applied to a study of the literature.

Due to my interest in existential phenomenological psychotherapy, I was initially drawn to seriously consider how interpretative phenomenological analysis, (IPA), might be applied. I commenced studying the literature on empathy with the intention of applying a phenomenological approach later. Eventually I came to the point described in the introduction when I wasn't discovering anything new in the literature that would lead me to discovering the nature of empathy.

At this time heuristic research was suggested as a methodology I might consider in order to make progress. So I left aside the literature study and began to investigate what heuristic research was and whether this had any meaning for me in the process I was engaged in. I first read of Clark Moustakas method of heuristic research, in Sela-Smith (2001): 'A critique of Moustakas' use of his method in his study on loneliness' (Moustakas, (1961).

What attracted me to the Moustakas heuristic method and Sandy Sela-Smith's critique was its essence, in that the word 'heuristic' is from the Greek *heurshein*, which means to discover or find. It seemed therefore to offer the approach I required. My attention then shifted to a heuristic study and I soon became immersed in a methodology that seemed to offer the possibility of making progress. The initial attraction was, using myself as the topic of research. At the same time I became fearful of the method, and its implications for me, not least that the approach required letting go of research deadlines and time frames. Also, in using myself as the subject of the study, I realised that the events in my life would of necessity expose others, some of whom were now dead. This raised a question of ethics, in not being able to gain their permission. Kim Etherington in describing a reflexive researcher, which I was to become, suggests that the use of reflexivity exposes and makes explicit many of the moral dilemmas. However she suggests that these are there, but go unnoticed in non-reflexive research (Etherington, 2004).

Laura Richardson, encapsulated some of the dilemma I was beginning to feel.

We find ourselves attending to feelings, ambiguities, temporal sequences, blurred experiences, and so on; we struggle to find a textural place for, in ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties (Richardson, 2000: 931)

I was also aware of a resistance to move forward into an heuristic research method, in that it would become a study of events in my own life, rather than what I set out to achieve: an objective examination of empathy, from my understanding of the literature. My concern about losing objectivity was lessened after reading Kim Etherington describing a reflexive approach to research:

Reflexivity is not the same as subjectivity but rather it opens up a space between subjectivity and objectivity that allows for an exploration and representation of the more blurred genres of our experience (Etherington 2004:37).

The hesitation finally ended after reading Sela-Smith's description of subjectivity in research, in what she terms an 'heuristic self-search inquiry' (HSSI) approach to the Moustakas heuristic method:

.....as one that invites the conscious, investigating self to surrender to the feelings in an experience, which carries the researcher to unknown aspects of self, and the internal organizational systems, not normally known in waking consciousness (Sela-Smith, 2002:59).

Therefore, if I decided to adopt this approach, and become the subject of the enquiry, and if Sela-Smith was correct, then I would discover aspects of myself that were normally out of awareness. The prospect of entering into a dialogue with myself caused fear to arise about the unknown and uncertainty. However from a Buddhist perspective this would be congruent with what I was already trying to do with my life. I began to realise by studying some of my own life events, from the position of what Sela-Smith (2001), terms 'I who feels', I was opening the possibility of examining:

How I had experienced receiving, or not receiving empathy.

How I experienced giving, or not giving empathy.

One other reservation I had was whether I could stay with the process of relating to painful events in my life, being conscious of Sela-Smith's assertion, in her critique of Moustakas' method (Sela-Smith 2001), that he avoided his own loneliness, in carrying out his research into loneliness (Moustakas, 1961).

I also sensed part of myself unwilling to go back in time, into issues in my life, when I felt then, and still feel now, that there was a lack of understanding of myself. I have looked at these issue before, and believed I have dealt with them, and forgiven the perpetrators. The

resistance seemed to come from a reluctance to re-examine aspects of my personal history issues from the position, '*I-who-feels*', from memories of the events. This perspective would be from my present understanding of empathy, rather than the one who felt empathy, or its lack at the time. However I was aware of another dilemma. If I step back from a heuristic self-search inquiry approach, do I throw away an opportunity for self-transformation? The study of my own history is however phenomenological, in that the study has value and meaning for myself in the present, although I am not the same person who lived in the events. I am conscious in writing the last paragraphs that I am writing in the first person, as someone who is feeling in the present, and I have entered into a dialogue with myself. Realising this, I sense I have already become immersed in the 'heuristic self-search inquiry' (HSSI) method, as described by Sela-Smith (2001), from the position of 'I who feels': I am therefore reluctant to move back to consider other methodologies.

Towards the end of the period when I felt stuck with the literature review I had a dream that seems to herald a new beginning. It concerns my attempt to escape from what was then my current situation.

I was in a prison and was moving from room to room. There didn't seem to be any cells that constrained my movement. I moved freely through the rooms, all of which were inhabited by human beings with a frightening appearance, that threatened me but didn't impede my progress. I searched for the last room that I sensed would have the exit out of the prison. Finally, I reached the last room, and knew I had to go through a window to be free.

At this point I awoke with a feeling of hope, I would be free. The window to freedom seemed to echo another dream, I refer to later, in which I was trying to erect a ladder through a window in the roof of a glass conservatory, in order to fix a telephone wire, so I could communicate my financial situation to others.

I have a sense I am in the process of leaving a psychological prison. Emotionally I'm already out, with a new sense of freedom, although the objective practical changes are only just beginning to happen. From this different perspective, that is 'the one who is feeling free', I shall now address the heuristic self-inquiry research methodology.

Moustakas (1990:15) describes heuristic self-inquiry research:-

Is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illustrate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand oneself and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet virtually with every question that matters personally there is a social- and perhaps universal- significance.

He goes on to describe the essence of the process:

Self-dialogue is the critical beginning; the recognition that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with oneself. One's own self-discoveries, awarenesses, and understandings are the initial steps in the process (Moustakas 1990:16).

The last sentence encapsulates how I already function in the world, my 'way of being in the world' as a Buddhist, in that I am already aware that what I experience through my senses leads me to self insight. Also I perceive research in this method will place demands upon the self that are outside the norms of other scientific research methods.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) give little comfort to those wishing to follow this approach observing:

Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shift. It defies the shackles of convention and tradition.....It pushes beyond the known, the expected or the merely possible. Without the restraining leash of formal hypotheses, and free from external methodological structures that limit awareness or channel it, the one who searches heuristically may draw upon the perceptual powers afforded by.....direct experience, (Douglass and Moustakas,1985:44)

Both the quotation above and the one following could be seen as descriptions of how a Buddhist can, and maybe ought, to practice creatively, both in sitting meditation, and outside formal meditation.

Moustakas (1990:24) describes the research process:

Indwelling refers to the heuristic process of turning inward to seek a deeper, more extended comprehension of the nature or meaning of quality or theme of human experience. It involves a willingness to gaze with unwavering attention and concentration into some facet of human experience in order to understand its constituent qualities and its wholeness. To understand something fully, one dwells inside the subsidiary and focal factors to draw from them every possible nuance, texture, fact and meaning.

My reservation about the above quote is the use of the word 'meaning' in the last sentence. Heuristic research by definition is a method of self-inquiry, and is therefore subjective, the 'meaning' of observed phenomena will be particular to the individual researcher. This may not be 'the truth' per se, as the perceptual habits of the observer or researcher will always be present and constantly changing.

I have shown in Appendix Three, the six phases of heuristic research Moustakas (1990), asserts are essential for the process, along with my comments.

Comparison of heuristic research with a phenomenological research approach

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) contrast heuristic inquiry with phenomenological research as follows:

- (1) Whereas phenomenology encourages a kind of detachment from the phenomenon being investigated, heuristics emphasizes connectedness and relationship.
- (2) Whereas phenomenology permits the researcher to conclude definitive descriptions of the structures of experience, heuristics leads to depictions of essential meanings and portrayal of the intrigue and personal significance that imbue the search to know.
- (3) Whereas phenomenological research generally concludes with a presentation of the distilled structures of experience, heuristics may involve reintegration of derived knowledge that itself is an act of creative discovery, a synthesis that includes intuition and tacit understanding.
- (4) Whereas phenomenology loses the persons in the process of descriptive analysis, in heuristics the research participants remain visible in the examination of the data and continue to be portrayed as whole persons.

Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985:43).

Commenting on each point of the comparison

1. I have already experienced difficulty with staying detached from the subject of the research, empathy, as it is close to my heart and feel that I can only relate to it subjectively. When I have a resonance with what I discover in the literature, I sense a connectedness with the author, and a relationship is then formed.
2. Here, this comparison fits with my belief that my effectiveness as a therapist, or human being, in relationship with another and many others, is best served by my not attempting to have definitive meaning; trying to live with not knowing.
3. What I understand is meant here is, what is discovered by heuristic research, is in itself preconditioned, and continues to be conditioned in the process of the research: Ultimately the conclusion can only be provisional: I am excited by this comparison, in that the heuristics method opens a door to reality, in the arena of flux and conditioned phenomena.
4. If this comparison is correct, then I'm assured my choice of heuristic self-search inquiry to discover the meaning of empathy has been correct, in that I can stay with the authors in the literature as persons and would be able to stay with the meanings that form the persons.

A transformative experience

Sela-Smith (2001) offers the possibility of heuristic self-search inquiry, (HSSI) being a transformative process in referring to William James' work *The Varieties of religious Experience* (1902).

He believed that psychology and religion dealt with feeling and transformation. When we experience a feeling of uneasiness, a feeling that something is wrong about us,

wrong with where we are, wrong with what we are doing, or believing, we search for the solution that saves us from whatever is wrong. If we find it, we have gone through transformation and the process of finding it can be sudden or it can take a long time (Sela-Smith, 2001:35)

Etherington (2004:16) asserts that, ‘.....reflexive methodologies seem to be close to the hearts and minds of practitioners who value using themselves in all areas of their practices (including research) and who also value *transparency in relationships*’. (italics my emphasis) These two quotations seem to me to show the validity of the academic path I was beginning to enter and reflects my spiritual path of self discovery, and transformation in Buddhism.

Summary

Already I can sense there has been a self-transformation in my willingness to adopt a heuristic research approach, despite the resistance I felt and still feel, based on my fear of the unknown, and a lack of certainty. I am able to relate the uneasiness described by James, (1902), to what is known in Buddhism as ‘unsatisfactoriness’, a translation of the sanskrit word *dukkha*. According to Buddhism, this is the experience we all have as a result of everything being dependent on conditions, and therefore impermanent and insubstantial: This feeling of unsatisfactoriness was what lead me to become a Buddhist. If Sela-Smith is correct, and heuristic self-search inquiry research can lead to transformation, I am receptive to, and willing to follow Moustakas’ definition of heuristic research:

Engaging in scientific search through self-inquiry and dialogue with others, aimed at finding the underlying meaning of important human experiences. It requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered. There is a need to get inside the question, to become one with it to fully grasp or understand it. (Moustakas 1990:175)

I hope those reading my work may approach it, in the spirit of Gergen and Gergen :

In using oneself as an ethnographic exemplar, the researcher is freed from the traditional conventions of writing. One’s unique voicing—complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness is honoured. In this way the reader gains a sense of the writer as a full human being (Gergen and Gergen 2002:14) in Etherington (2004:137)

In the knowledge that I have revisited my life to discover something new. As Zohar and Marshall write ‘remembering from the viewpoint of a fresh perspective.....It is an opportunity to rewrite the family history by giving a different outcome, to recapture the original self (acorn) and to reinvent the mature self and its culture, (Zohar and Marshall 2000:186), as in Etherington (2004:137)

Understanding the nature of empathy: a personal journey

Roots of the dissertation

A few days before starting a solitary retreat in a remote mountain valley in Spain, where I had decided to write the dissertation, I remarked to a friend, who lives there. That I didn't understand what drew me into wanting to work with the dying and bereaved. His answer is probably the reason, "Because you are interested in people". This was my starting point for trying to discover the nature of empathy. It also marks my departure from some of the psychotherapy literature on empathy with which I have often felt in conflict.

A comment made by my academic supervisor, a few months before: "The only way you can write the dissertation is from being a Buddhist, as this is what informs your life". This left me feeling relieved and empowered as I felt his comment had set me free to express myself, free from my conflict with the literature.

What I have written above seems a necessary prelude, as I have now chosen to write the dissertation using the Moustakas' method using a heuristic self-search inquiry; to follow what Sela-Smith (2002) has described as writing from the perspective of 'I-who-feels'. To remain true to this method, what follows is therefore written from the 'I' who has a Buddhist perspective on the world.

Rereading 'I and Thou' (Martin Buber 1937) on the solitary retreat, before I started to write, I felt disappointed that this did not provide me with any clearer understanding of the nature of empathy. I connected my experience to the subject in Casper David Freidrich's painting 'The Wanderer above a sea of fog'. In this painting, a man in the foreground dressed in a black frock-coat, a walking stick in his right hand, with his back to the viewer, stands on a rock: He gazes out across a valley shrouded in clouds or mist, to the far distant mountains; a gulf before him, with no obvious path, or discernible means of reaching the mountains. This painting became important to me just prior to my illness seven years ago. It informed my personal myth, a distant vision of something I couldn't yet discern I was moving towards, with both curiosity and longing. The painting continues to be significant for me, still embodying a personal myth. Now I looked out across a valley, an abyss, to a vision of successfully completing the dissertation, without as yet an obvious path or means.

I have concentrated the heuristic self-search inquiry to answer the research question, to three main interrelated areas of my life history. The three areas, are for me, as for many others, the most significant aspects of our life in the journey from birth to death. 1) The family we grow up in, 2) our work or career, and 3) the family we create. I have used these three aspects to provide a thread of continuity and to describe my 'being in the world' and interrelatedness with others. It is my intention to reveal the nature of empathy or its absence, through describing my interconnectedness or relationship with others.

In writing about my life several sub themes began to emerge:-

The first I have called, points of departure. These mark significant life events that resulted in a change of relationship, with myself and another.

The second is my needs being 'met' and or 'unmet', at the point of departure. This I have now seen as my having experienced or not experienced empathy, at the point of departure.

The third is the sense of freedom I that seemed to occur at the points of departure when my needs had been met and thereby having a sense of empathy.

The fourth, when I sense there hadn't been an empathic connection, and there was a feeling of betrayal, at the point of departure, when my needs hadn't been met: Or my betrayal of others when their needs hadn't been met.

Explication of point of departure: severance of relationship

My life has been marked with severance of relationship, points of departure, when I have left, and not wanted to go back. I see this aspect of myself in Casper David Freidrich's painting.

The Wanderer is depicted looking out over the sea of mist towards the unclear distance. For me he has his back to the past, which is finished, and may be completed. His posture is one of reflection, or contemplation, as he stares into the future. He appears not to be running away from the present, maybe he has sufficient self-empathy, and a sense of his needs to know that they are not rooted in the past. As I know my needs haven't been. They have been met from the present in making choices for the future.

My use of the term severance of relationship is a mislabelling for the actuality. What I suggest is that a point when what exists in the present comes to an end; the point when the nature of the relationship significantly changes. Although it could be argued that relationship is just a process that is in constant change. Miles Groth writing as an existential psychotherapist asserts, 'Such changes are occurring all the time, every day, although we do not readily see them because they are not very dramatic. They are none the less important existentially, however, for being less noticeable'. He continues, 'when I finish writing (or revising) this text, I will have changed, perhaps in an important way that will take me months to comprehend', (Groth, 2001:84). What Groth states is also true from a Buddhist perspective; all phenomena are in a constant state of flux, including ourselves. However for convenience what I am saying is, in every relationship, there comes a point of departure, when there is a severance, a change. From that point, a new relationship begins, which may not be obvious, or unacknowledged or may even be denied: However I posit, what Martin Buber, (1937) describes as the 'It' in the relationship has changed; or that the 'Thou' becomes an 'It'.

An obvious example is at physical death, which is an obvious point of departure. Here, there is a significant change in relationship(s). Worden (1991), suggests that bereavement and the process of grief brings about varied emotions, some apparently in conflict, all of which cause a changing relationship with the deceased. Worden asserts that, for a mourning process to be complete, there are four tasks that have to be gone through; the last task is a re-location of the deceased in the life of the survivor(s), which allows them to move on, with just memories of the loved one; *so enter a new relationship with the deceased*, (my emphasis).

There are other points of departure in my life that relate only to myself, when there was a severance of relationship with my old self. At these points it was necessary, for me to acknowledge the new self, and form a relationship with the new self. In doing this I meet a need for acceptance of the new self. For example, from a feeling of uncertainty about my ability, the new self finding, the confidence to write this dissertation. The confirmation that this had happened, was revealed in a dream four nights before the writing of the dissertation commenced. In the dream

I found myself sitting on a long bench, eating at a dining table. There seemed to be mixture of people there, members of my Buddhist Order and some academics. My younger daughter, Katharine, was sitting on my left, and a fellow order member, Kamalashila, on my right. He said something critical about Katharine. I immediately jumped up and threw him down, pinning him to the floor. I then banged his head on the hard floor. Suddenly there was panic in the room, all around me; other order members rushed to Kamalashila's aid. I looked up and said "Don't worry I won't hurt him, I just needed to teach him a lesson, I was just protecting Katharine."

Reflecting on the dream the following morning, my first thoughts were that the order member, Kamalashila, has for a long time represented an authority figure, particularly when I have been present in situations where he has been leading meditation. Even being his secretary for five months eleven years ago, didn't cure me of the projection, although I did begin to see the kindly side of his nature.

However, I realised in the dream, that he represented the authority side of my own nature that subjected Katharine to my parental authority when she was a child. Although as she grew up, I also began to protect her intellectual and academic inclination, with encouragement and practical help: I was not going to let anyone attack her.

Four days later, reflecting again about the dream, and my interpretation, caused me to wonder about the qualities and parts of myself that are out of awareness, or even denied, and are not necessarily on the shadow side of my nature. In the dream I was perhaps defending the proto-academic part of myself, that had to project onto my daughter, who has already shown her ability as an academic. I wondered whether the part I attacked was the authority within myself, that dismisses the possibility that I can successfully complete an MA. Somewhere within myself, the authority figure fails to have an empathic connection with the aspect that

wants to believe I can write a dissertation, and get an MA. Interestingly, I know part of my problem with the real Kamalashila, in the past, has been a feeling of not being understood for who I am. I perceived a lack of empathic understanding in our relationship. This was probably mutual.

I am strengthened in citing the dream experience as an example of self-empathy, as my need for confidence and understanding was met; in my decision to adopt the heuristic approach. 'Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, *and even dream states*'. (Moustakas 1990:28), (my emphasis) Five months later whilst attending a conference for counsellors working in the area of pastoral and spiritual care, I sit in a workshop following a guided meditation on the integration of the feminine and masculine within oneself. From my right side, the masculine figure emerges, not unlike a Buddha figure portrayed in the print of Odilon Redon's painting I have hanging in my living room. From this masculine figure, I find encouragement to stay with my purpose, not swayed, but firm and resolute. On my left side, the feminine, a figure of St. Jerome emerges. The Christian saint who reputedly took himself off to solitude in the desert, with only a lion for company, to translate the first edition of the Bible into Latin. He is depicted, in many paintings as the solitary scribe. From this guided meditation, I draw inspiration, and have an intuitive sense I can move forward with the dissertation. The guided meditation has provided me with self-empathy; my need for finding confidence, and inspiration were met.

Beginnings: Sunday October 10 2004

As I sit in my mountain hut on a solitary retreat, desire arises to be outside sitting in the sun. Today the clouds move quickly across the blue sky, constantly obscuring the sun. The wind rustles the pine trees. All these are distractions from starting to write this dissertation, the main reason I came here, to be away from my daily distractions back home in the UK. Last night, the fourth in a row, I was almost devoid of sleep due to tooth ache, and worry about having to have it attended to.

Reflecting about the nature of worry, I came to the conclusion that worry and anxiety are usually about desire to avoid what we perceive as unpleasant that might happen in the future. Sela-Smith (2002), encapsulates some of my own belief as a Buddhist.

The plane of pain avoidance and pleasure seeking is one that can never be satisfied. To avoid pain, one's focus must be on pain; therefore one, is never free from it. Even in the absence of pain, awareness of pain as something to avoid is present. Seeking pleasure is based on the belief that pleasure is not present, or that it can be taken away at any moment with pain (Sela-Smith,2002:301).

I know however much I want reality to be favourable to me and desire a more pleasant experience, or however much I want to avoid my life feeling unpleasant, Reality is just as it

is; I can not change it. Miles Groth writing about his experience of embodying an existential therapist, 'anxiety indicates the tendency to want to outwit the future' (Groth, 2001:94). For me, a freedom is found in seeing everything just experience: Suffering arises from my habitual tendencies to feel experience is either pleasant, and I am attracted to it, and want more of it: Or unpleasant, and I want to avoid it. To have self-understanding and awareness daily, I try to remember the Buddha's teaching in the Udana, (Buddha, circa 483 BCE)

‘.....In the seen, just the seen: In the heard, just the heard: In the imagined, just the imagined: In the cognised, just the cognised.....’

First aspect of my life story: An act of betrayal, and alienation from parents

Not being able to recognise an academic ability in myself probably goes back to the age of eleven. At that time in the UK state school system, an examination called the 'Eleven Plus' was used to determine the type of school pupils would attend after their primary education finished, at the age of eleven. The examination comprised of three test papers, Arithmetic, English and Intelligence. The result of this examination was communicated by post some weeks later, to indicate whether the child had a place at a grammar school, which was considered to be the academic school: Or to be given a place at what was known as the secondary modern school, where the non-academic pupils were given places.

I remember the morning in the early Spring of 1955, when the result came through the post, a normal school day. My father had already gone off to work. The letter said I had failed to get a place at the grammar school and gave the name of the secondary modern school I was to attend in the following September. This news felt like being condemned—to a dumping ground for failed children—and had a stigma I felt—even before I had to go.

I received the bombshell, and felt isolated, as I assumed all my friends would have passed, and would be going to grammar school. My mother's response to her only son was, "We didn't expect you to pass". This comment has stayed with me for nearly fifty years; I have carried it to my present age of sixty: I felt betrayed. It seemed to communicate a low expectation of my abilities. I now realise it relates to the authority aspect of the dream, that has doubted my academic ability.

There was no connection between my mother and myself that morning. At the age of eleven on that 'fateful day', there was a point of departure, or separation from my parents, particularly my mother. What I would now describe as a 'severance of relationship'. The mother-son relationship changed significantly on that day: Never to be healed in her lifetime.

A few years ago becoming aware of James Hillman's lecture on betrayal,, whilst in therapy, following the sudden end of a romantic love affair, I gained an understanding of what Hillman meant by betrayal. Using Hillman's ideas, I was able to work through the process he describes, is necessary for 'the one feeling betrayed', to move on in life, (Hillman, 1974). Hillman suggests that from a feeling of being betrayed, forgiveness towards the betrayer is an essential precursor, to learning to trust again: Further he suggests that trust, lays the foundation for learning to love again. Hillman also asserts that to love truly and deeply, one must be prepared to be betrayed again; that to attempt to circumscribe future relationships to avoid betrayal is not trust in its fullest sense.

Although I had used meditation techniques, after her death, I hadn't worked through the process Hillman suggests in my relationship with my mother. I still had a lack of empathic understanding of my mother. My memory of that day was that there had been no empathic understanding of myself. I was so overwhelmed with hurt, from the failure to obtain a place at

the grammar school, we were unable to connect. I would guess my need was primarily for sympathy and understanding. Whereas what my mother was trying to communicate was reassurance. My 'unmet' needs therefore left me unable to hear what she was trying to communicate 'reassurance'. I heard the words "We didn't expect you to pass" as an evaluation of their low expectation of me.

Within the last year, having had some training in 'Non-Violent Communication'; I have been able to reflect on my mother's comment and understood it in a different light: she was trying to be empathic with my disappointment, by meaning, 'I wasn't to feel I had let them (my parents) down'. I am now sure this would have been communicated from her love for me. Once I realised this, it felt freeing, as though a weight that had burdened me for so long, had been lifted. The hurt and disappointment, compounded by what I perceived as lack of understanding, has been submerged within my body for forty-nine years. Sadly, my mother has now been dead for thirteen years, so I can not directly communicate this to her, and to come back into a new mother-son relationship, which was severed on that morning. Nor with my father, who has been dead twenty six years; who I always believed sided with my mother, in my unhappy teenage years, that were to become the setting for an even bigger severance of family relationship. From now on I can relate to my mother, through a new understanding of her love for her only son, that she was trying to reassure, the frightened child. Also now, I can relocate her in my memory in a different way; so maybe the mourning process has been completed, suggested by Worden (1991).

On further reflection, I now realise my needs for understanding and reassurance was not met in a way I was able to accept, on that fateful day. Maybe whatever had been said, I wouldn't have been able to accept? Such was the intensity of the pain of disappointment I felt. This leaves me with a thought that on occasions, when emotional pain is so intense, words are not always the appropriate means of communicating empathy. Physical touch is maybe a better method of responding to something that is very deep and painful. It is perhaps the natural human response to intense emotional pain. It leaves me wondering, when I am with clients in the therapeutic setting, or working in a hospice environment with the dying, in their moments of fear of death, that there has to be a point, when words cease; touch is sufficient to communicate empathy. You are just there, with and for, someone. Martin Buber writing 'I and Thou' suggests that this begins at birth, '*the longing for relation is primary.....*' and goes on to suggest '*.....the drive for contact (originally, a drive for tactile contact),the innate You, comes to the fore quite soon, and it becomes ever clearer that the drive aims at reciprocity, at tenderness*', (Buber (1937) trans., Kaufman, 1970:79).

From this, I take Buber to mean that being in relation(ship), is a primary instinct in the human being, and is present before language is acquired. Later in writing about spirit, in relation to

language Buber states, *'Only silence toward the You, the silence of all tongues, the taciturn waiting in the unformed, undifferentiated, pre-linguistic word leaves the You free.....'* (Buber, trans., Kaufman, 1970:89). For me, this means that language is not essential to being in relation to someone. Further I am of the opinion that language may even become a barrier in being with someone near the point of death, when all that is required for empathic communication; is the presence of another, maybe communicated through touch. As touch is the first contact with another, a human being experiences at birth; maybe the first communication of empathy. Meeting the need for nurture and reassurance for the human newly emerged from the womb. Perhaps this is the essential last empathic communication, the human being needs, before leaving the world, in order to die, in relationship with being a human.

Exploration of empathy at points of departure in my life.

1. Severance of relationship from my biological family

The process of emotional severance of relationship from my biological family was marked by my physical departure from the family home on the eve of my wedding, to Carol, ten days after my twenty-first birthday. This marked the end of two years of turbulence, and increasingly strained relationship with my parents, which had caused me a lot of pain and suffering. During the previous year, Carol was banned from my home, after a row with my mother. The root cause of the problem was that Carol was nearly seven years older than I and not seen as a suitable mate for my mother's 'immature boy'. It seemed the barrier couldn't be broken, and so together we went ahead with our plans for marriage as soon as I was twenty-one, and didn't need my parents' consent.

Although, during the first five years of our marriage, we lived never more than thirty miles from my parents, my only contact was to send birthday and Christmas cards, and this out of a sense of duty rather than love. The hurt felt before the marriage had not mollified; the wound had not healed> There was no forgiveness by myself, nor by Carol, of my mother, and ipso facto my father. The severance seemed complete. I had cut myself off both emotionally and physically from my parents.

My needs for emotional and practical support were not met, nor even addressed in the marriage. I just carried on with life, as best I could, and distracted myself with career and improving the home. My deeper experience of isolation was probably out of awareness; I lacked empathic understanding that prevented a reconnection with my parents.

After five years of a less than harmonious marriage, Carol gave birth to Sarah, a much wanted child. At this time, I was working in local government, still studying part time, in order to become qualified as a civil engineer.

Despite the joys of being a father for the first time, i was finding the financial burden of buying a house, with the added responsibility of being the sole breadwinner, I found financially demanding, and at times it seemed overwhelming.

A few months after Sarah was born, we had an unexpected visit from a paternal aunt, who came to suggest that my parents would like us to visit them, with our newly born daughter. We consented, although I can't remember what process we went through in reaching that decision. I am guessing, it was probably made from a position of superiority and strength. *'We knew the marriage was right, here's the baby to prove it'*. Also I know the visit wasn't open-hearted, for myself; rather it was done out of a sense of duty, which was the characteristic mark of the relationship I had with my parents right up to their deaths: My father's eight years after this first visit, and my mother's thirteen years after his. My

relationship with my mother even through the years of her widowhood, was one of duty, not the loving son. The severance for me had been complete, when I left to get married, and the healing didn't start till after her death. Duty, lacked any empathy for my parents, and perhaps was founded on pity at times.

2. My created family: and its relationship with the past

Recently seeing an advert on the Underground for the release of an Elvis Presley 'new' single, to celebrate 50 years since the release of his first recording, triggered an unexpected process of association. My silent response on seeing the advert was, 'No, they are wrong, that song has been out before; I had it on an album as a teenager': Then the painful memory of anger, and hurt flooded back, as I recalled the first visit with our newly born daughter, after five years of estrangement.

I, the confident man, husband and father, age 26, on that first visit, looking in the garden shed for my bicycle, and not finding it. Asking my father where it was, and hearing his reply, "we have sold it". Then asking where my records and record player where? The reply was, "We gave them away to a charity shop, years ago". Despite the fact that none of these things had been a significant part of my life in the years just before my marriage, disappointment and anger, still flooded in. I had been looking forward to taking the records back to my home: I felt angry as I was denied the right to reclaim them. I felt betrayed again, just as I had at age eleven.

All that mattered for me, on that day, was to reclaim my material possessions, which in reality, I had little use for in my current world. My need for connection with my past, was not met. Also I had no empathy for my parents, and their needs were not met, for reconciliation and healing. That visit to my parents for them to see their first grandchild was marred by my overwhelming desire for old material possessions.

Recently, reflecting on that day, using the NVC process, I have been able to understand, on a very deep level, the pain my parents must have felt through the five years of estrangement. At some point, they had given up seeing me again: I had gone, they had lost their only son; reluctantly my possessions had been disposed of. At what point in their grieving process this occurred, I shall never know, as both are dead. I sense their process has similarities with parents, who after losing a child, through a physical death, can move on in their mourning process. Eventually changing the status quo of the child's room, moving the child's possessions: So my parents had moved on, and decided to sell my possessions. Yet, there was one significant difference for them there was always the hope; I would return, and be reconciled: I don't believe, I ever fulfilled that hope: I returned out of a sense duty, not love. I lacked the empathy to understand their pain, and needs, for connection and a loving relationship with me, and my wife. We never really 'met' to cry together and bury the past

and forgive. I wonder if they felt betrayed, as I had felt. I never forgave them until recently. However, I suspect my parents forgave, judging by their loving behaviour towards all of us in my created family.

Having come to this recent understanding, I now have a great sense of sadness, that I hadn't understood how my parents felt in those five years of separation. They had lost their only son; I had betrayed them. I returned on that day, but I didn't fully return till now. The prodigal son has only just returned, thirty-four years later, with a new understanding of their feelings. From James Hillman's (1974) lecture on betrayal I understand that I never went through that essential first step of forgiveness; therefore part of me was unable to trust and love my parents until recently.

I could see a circle of betrayal as I too experience similar feelings through the fourteen years that my daughter, Sarah, now thirty five, has been separated from me. Having just written this, I have had a new realisation. I feel betrayed by Sarah and I need to forgive her, in order to trust her, and love her. This has arisen from empathy for myself, in meeting my need for letting go of the hurt I feel.

My mother and father being now long dead, give me no opportunity to address the issue with them, other than I have in the past, in meditation and visualisation. I have used the Buddhist meditation practice of the metta bhavana, meaning developing universal loving kindness, quite consciously and progressively, changing my relationship with each parent.

First I start by loving loving kindness (metta) towards myself, then move on to developing metta with a different aspect of each of them. As a friend, then to the major part of them I hadn't really ever known; finally to the aspect of each of them I had difficulty with. The friend aspect, in the case of my mother was achieved by visualising myself as a very young child, a baby, that was nourished and protected by her. In the case of my father, it was done by remembering the practical things he did for me, and playing endless games of cricket in the garden at home.

Even before I could approach this process, shortly after my mother's death, I visualised her being reborn, and being cared for by a mother. With my father I addressed it by visualising him, fourteen years after his death, as a teenager being cared for in a family, and beginning to discover life; wishing him well in that process. I was able to do these meditations repeatedly, from my strong belief in the efficacy of the Buddhist tradition. For me also there had to be an exchange of self with other, to be able to work with these meditation practices. That is seeing oneself from the other's perspective, developing a sense of what it is like for the other. The depth of feeling generated in myself very soon turned to love for my father and mother, and a sadness that I hadn't be able to show love to them, before they died.

Carl Rogers described the process (Rogers, 1957) that I had to go through, in order to reach an empathic understanding of them; *'walking in the other's shoes'*, or as Martin Buber more poetically described the process, *'in order to look at the mountain you are standing on, you have to move across to the other mountain and look back'*. (Buber, 1937).

I am remembering my mother that fateful morning the results came through the letter box, trying from her love for her only son, to communicate empathic understanding of his hurt and disappointment: Now, as the sixty year old man, who tries to visualise the scene, I feel sad, because the only memory that has stayed through the years, is one of my feeling pain, and isolation, and separation. All the forgiveness meditation and gratitude meditation, for the nurturing of the baby and young boy, still left something unrealised, unsaid and uncommunicated. 'The need for the eleven-year old boy, and man, to have empathy for the mother; to be in her shoes on that morning: To understand her feeling of love, for her son; and how best she can give him reassurance, that he hadn't let his parents down; that he hadn't failed them.

However, I am left with the comforting knowledge, that in the years that my parents knew their grandchildren, my two daughters, they were able to demonstrate their love for them, which was reciprocated. I'm also left feeling sad I did very little to facilitate contact between my daughters and their grandparents whilst they were alive, through my own alienation from my parents, Despite being aware that the love of their grandchildren may have also been directed towards myself; in other words that they had forgiven me. This was confirmed when I was made aware by my wife, that my parents, particularly my father, had said, they were proud of my success. However, I didn't allow myself to acknowledge the love, nor reciprocate it.

When I, as the sixty year old man, accessed this from a new perspective, something shifted in me, and a great sadness replaced the anger and hurt. The need now, was to communicate this new understanding. The need is being met, in the heuristic self-search inquiry into the nature of empathy.

3. My father's death: A point of departure and a severance of relationship

A year after my parents' last Summer visit to us in Dundee in 1977, I was to receive a phone call from a work colleague, whilst I was in a meeting. He said my father had died. I was unable to really comprehend what he said, situated as I was in an open plan office, with no privacy, I became numb and mechanical. Immediately, I rang my wife for confirmation and left the office for home in order to telephone my mother for details. After receiving the details of my father's death, I went into practical mode, shutting out any feelings. The next day travelling 300 miles by public transport, I still didn't let in the death. I arrived at the house

where I had grown up, to find my mother in deep grief, fortunately being comforted by her sister, I seemed unable to respond to her at that desperate time. She had woken up the day before to find her husband, my father, dead beside her in bed. Apparently without any indication of being ill the night before, he died in his sleep, at the age of seventy, still enjoying life.

I declined my mother's suggestion to visit the funeral parlour, to view my father's body, saying 'I want to remember him when he was alive'. I have, in recent years regretted this decision, as I now know I never did say good-bye to him. The funeral at a crematorium, spent looking after my mother, didn't give me what I needed; at that stage in life I wasn't even aware of the necessity of a ritual of good-bye.

After the funeral, a few days later, after I had helped with all the practical affairs, I escaped back to Dundee, leaving my aunt to cope with my mother in her grief. I still wasn't the caring or loving son, except on a minimal practical level; I even lacked empathy for my mother at this very difficult time. In a sense, I now feel I betrayed her. My father's death hadn't been an occasion for reconciliation, or assuaging the hurt I experienced all those years before. I put my need for distance, (emotional space), from her pain, rather than providing the comfort she so sorely needed. It wasn't till thirteen years later, after her own sudden death, that I was to start coming into a loving relationship, with both my parents, through the medium of meditation.

Since training in bereavement counselling twenty years later, I have now come to understand that I hadn't allowed myself to grieve immediately after my father's death. I just returned to my normal routine. It wasn't till eighteen months later, when my Great Dane dog died, that I became very distressed with grief. What Worden describes as delayed grief had been suppressed, and was now displaced onto the dog, (Worden, 1990).

Dream of my father's death, 21st Nov. 2004, (written immediately afterwards, in the process of typing the life story).

I was in a room I didn't recognise, with my mother, searching for a watch, belonging to my father. He was lying in bed. I found the watch, a square pocket watch, made of silver, engraved with a pattern on one side. My mother asked me to check the reverse side to see if anything was engraved on it. The reverse had an inscription, a date, and the initials 'EJ', Ernest Jones, my father's, his father's, and his grandfather's initials.

This seemed to satisfy my mother, who took the watch from me, and we went across to where my father was lying in bed. As we reached him, he appeared to be very ill. He said something I didn't hear which he then repeated; thought I heard him say he had taken pain killer tablets. I moved round the bed to his head; as I lifted his head; he turned to look at my mother, and then died. She just sat there, unbelieving.

My father dying in my presence, in the dream, left me with a strong feeling of satisfaction, as though something from the past had been cleared. The sense of remorse I'd felt about not saying good bye shifted. The dream was the final point of departure in my relationship with my father. Also the remorse I have felt for twenty six years, about not coming back into relationship with him before he died, I now sensed ended. My need for reconnection with my father had been met within the context of a dream; and this allowed me to have empathy for him. Perhaps the significance of the watch in the dream symbolised time?

The dream has another echo of something very significant in my life at the moment. In the days previous to the dream I have sent requests to nine friends for help, to alleviate my current serious financial situation. My preparing and sending off the requests marked a significant shift in my opening up to others about my finances. Maybe my father's request in the dream for pain killers represent my requests for help to kill the pain I am experiencing. Sending them represents the end, or death, of my secrecy about my personal finances? I can see how this dream relates back to another dream I had the previous Spring. At the time I had written the conclusion to the literature review, about being stuck with the dissertation and in life.

In the dream.: I was outside a house in a conservatory. I was trying to get a ladder through a window in the glass roof up to a tall house which the conservatory was attached to in order to fix a telephone wire high up on the house wall. There were friends around although I couldn't identify them, I just had a sense they were there standing ready to help with the ladder. A smaller house was on the other side of the conservatory as though the houses formed part of a row. What was impeding me putting up the ladder was a torrent of water flowing through the conservatory, in from the front and out of another door at the rear. My father came to ask for a pair of wellingtons so he could go out and check what was happening; I could only find walking boots to give him. He just disappeared at the same time as I noticed that the flow of water was now coming from both directions; front and rear. The water from the rear was causing a dam of water where the two flows met stopping the water from the front. As I saw this I felt a sense something shifted, a sense of relief which is what awakened me from the dream.

My sense of the dream is that my attempt to fix a telephone wire is my process of starting to think about communicating and connecting with others, about my indebtedness. The torrent of water represents for me the overwhelming nature of my financial situation; how it felt to me then. The flow of water from the opposite direction, represents some hope of a change; the flow can be halted. I had a sense of relief when the dam happened.

For me the dream also represents a shift or release arising from a recognition of the unmet needs for security and communication arising from my feelings of isolation and helplessness.

The presence of my father in the dream, who has been dead for sixteen years, is significant as I had always kept my financial affairs from him, beginning in my teenage years. As time has gone on I have learnt he valued me, and would have helped me in any way he could, when I experienced difficulties.

However actually making a request, for financial help was not done for another ten months, although fairly shortly after the dream, I sought and received academic help from my supervisor . concerning my being stuck in writing the dissertation. His empathic understanding that I felt towards me caused a release, that was later to meet my need for progress; gaining confidence came later in the writing process.

It seems that my process in regard to the dissertation was made easier using the four ingredients of NVC. I had the observation of being stuck, the feeling of frustration, and my need for progress was translated into a request to my supervisor. However contrasting this with recognising my indebtedness, and my feeling of powerlessness and the needs for help and communication, took a further six months to manifest into requests.

4. Point of departure from the couple relationship: An increase in my created family

Looking back over 25 years of my marriage, I can see there are different points of departure when there was a severance of the current relationship.

At the time Sarah was born, the couple relationship ceased, and a family relationship was created. I now feel certain the new relationship caused significant shifts, in how we, as man and wife related to each other. These changes were never addressed in our marriage and may have contributed to my infidelity.

Katharine, our second daughter, was born two years after Sarah, again a much wanted child and the family dynamic changed again. Katharine was to be the last of our children, as Carol was advised not to have any more pregnancies, as she suffered with high blood pressure. So I stepped in as the ‘protector’ and had a vasectomy, at the age of twenty-nine. In doing this, I’m not sure whether I really appreciated the significance of what I was doing or even if I considered the possibility of a future other than being married to Carol, with our two daughters completing the family. My guess is that any individuality I may have had was subsumed into the couple-family dynamic. My overriding impulse was for consideration for Carol, and I now question whether my action was true empathy, as it may have had an element of pity.

5 Point of departure from England

A few months after Katharine was born, I started applying for jobs in Scotland, where we could make a new life, free from the suburban life we were then living, a few miles outside Liverpool. Towards the end of 1973, we found ourselves living in a rented cottage, within a stone’s throw of the beach, on the east coast of Scotland, an hour’s drive from Dundee.

Within weeks of arriving in Scotland, we were faced with a very cold winter, marked by a miners' strike and a fuel crisis, both of which were causes of electricity power cuts. In hindsight, I can now see that our different needs were not properly considered, mine seemed to be about increased progress in my career and increased financial security. Carol's were probably about security and comfort with two young children. Somehow her needs became lost in my process. My blindness in 'knowing' what was best for me and the family lacked empathic understanding for their needs. We had left a comfortable home in Cheshire, and all that was familiar to find ourselves in a city, although only 300 miles away, that had very different customs and a version of the English language with significant differences. These factors contributed to my feeling alienation and isolation, however hard I tried to integrate. The sale of our house in England took several months, and so we were unable to buy and move into our own home for a year. This added to the insecurity which I felt, and I guess Carol felt; which we didn't discuss. I am of the opinion that the significance of our unacknowledged insecurity added to the loss of the couple relationship I was already feeling.

6. Point of departure from marriage

The next significant change in the family-couple relationship, after six years of living in Dundee, was the discovery of my infidelity. My admittance of the fact was marked by Carol hurling a bread board across the kitchen, narrowly missing my head. This happened one Saturday morning, a few hours after my then ex lover had made a late night phone call to Carol saying that, "I had just left, and would be home shortly".

The events on that morning were probably the start of the end of the marriage. However it was eleven years before I actually physically left. Now fourteen years after leaving, I can only speculate that Carol felt betrayed by my infidelity. If she did, I doubt whether she ever went through what Hillman (1974) suggests are the necessary steps of forgiveness and trust to enable love to develop. The anger expressed at the time of the discovery of my infidelity came into the open, again eight years later, in the only joint marriage guidance session we ever had. Carol denied her anger and ended the counselling after only two sessions.

After the discovery of my infidelity, I put aside my active engagement in politics, and devoted myself to being a family man for the next ten years.

I subsumed a need I had to engage with the world in a way that could be beneficial for others; part of me became lost. My consideration for the family, after the traumatic events, became paramount, fuelled by my fear of the uncertainty of life, outside the family I loved. I discovered empathy for my family in the process. This took me to a career move that satisfied all our needs, by leaving Dundee, and moving to Shrewsbury, a town in England, where Carol had long standing family connections, and the children had a better environment for

friendship and education. However, despite these conditions, after eight years Carol was to break out on her own, and maybe get 'her own back', as she later described her own infidelity. Maybe the betrayal she felt ran deep, and gave her the justification. If I am correct in supposing that the process of forgiveness was not undertaken, then it would explain why Carol didn't have sufficient trust in our marriage that could allow her to open up to me when I became aware of her infidelity. So I entered a period of deep pain that was to last for two years, and throughout I pleaded with her, to give me something that would help; all to no avail. I later described that period of my life, as being in the 'freezer'. The intense coldness I experienced in our communication, drove me into a pit of despair with my needs for comfort and security not being met. At times I felt suicidal. The love I felt for my daughters was the main reason I held back from taking any steps towards suicide. Empathy for them kept me functioning. I felt isolated and had nobody to whom I could communicate my feelings. Finally, in desperation, trying to make myself 'better' for Carol, I sought therapeutic help. At times I felt undermined by Carol, when I spoke to her about what had happened in these early therapeutic meetings, and my need for authenticity wasn't met. Finally I found a process that involved the breath, rather than talking, and this caused me to begin to make shifts that were the beginnings of a self-healing process that caused a process of integration and discovery of self-autonomy: Through meeting these needs, I had at last begun to have empathy for myself. The process of discovering my individuality was the main factor in my leaving the marriage. For me, the couple relationship had died, and no longer mattered.

Fourteen years after leaving in April 1990, immediately after our twenty fifth wedding anniversary, there is still a relationship with someone who is now an ex-wife which for me has the flavour of caring about another human being whom I spent twenty five years living with in a marriage. For Carol's part, I don't know, what the nature of the new relationship is, in our separation and divorce. I sense there is still anger and hurt as she faces old age without a husband, and still has to rely on me for money from my pension each year.

In Spain when I wrote the last paragraphs I had to stop writing and later I wrote the following:

I return to the table, on the terrace, after my point of departure, from what I have just written. There had to be a severance, and I had to get away from the page. Closing the notebook was not sufficient, I needed to get physically away from the writing process.

As Miles Groth (2001) asserts, we are in a continual process of change, and this affects how we are in the world, whether connected to others, or to our created work. Our relationships are in constant state of flux, ever changing, and reaching points of departure and severance.

7. Point of departure from family life

Although I can recall several significant events in the last years of my marriage, there isn't a discernible emotional point of departure; it is confused in a spatio-temporal continuum. In 1988, a year before my redundancy, we purchased, on a bank overdraft, a family apartment in Birmingham. This purchase was made with object of selling our house in Shrewsbury twelve months later and the family moving to Birmingham; meanwhile I was to live in the apartment during the week and thereby avoid the daily stress of commuting fifty miles each way. Within a month of signing the purchase contract, whilst on holiday in France, Carol decided she wasn't going to move to Birmingham. She was prepared to live in a rented cottage in Shrewsbury. This decision I believe, was fuelled by an affair she was having, although I had no facts to confirm it, I only had a sense it was taking place.

During the following year I began to establish myself in the apartment with basic necessities for sleeping and eating there during the week. Eventually the family home in Shrewsbury, began to mean less and less to me as my emotional base shifted to Birmingham where I was co-managing a small meteorological company. Added to this, during the four months, before my redundancy I had begun to find a deeper sense of myself, at the Birmingham Buddhist Centre, just round the corner from the apartment. I felt I had come home.

The first six months, after my redundancy, my continuing to live on my own in Birmingham during the week, and travelling to Shrewsbury at weekends to join Carol, in her rented cottage, didn't seem to bring us any closer. My need for harmony in the marriage didn't seem to be met, despite my continued attempts at therapy, 'to make myself better'. I remember, as I packed my bag each Friday, to return to Shrewsbury, I did so with an increasing reluctance. There was a resistance to leaving what had become my own space. For the first time in our marriage I had something that was my own, apart from space to tinker in the garage. Returning to family life in Shrewsbury increasingly held no attraction, and I was finding it increasingly confining. It began to feel like a burden. My need for space was not met in Shrewsbury. I seemed to be just going through the motions of marriage and family life that hindered a yearning, a need for independence.

My actual physical departure from the marriage six months after my redundancy, and the sale of the family home, was painful for both of us, however difficult and unsatisfactory the marriage had been over the previous three years. Carol didn't want me to go. My emotional pain continued for another two years, maybe more. Twenty-five years of emotional entanglement is not easily unwound. After I left, I continued to make weekly 'supportive' social visits back to Shrewsbury, but they provided little comfort and little emotional connection between Carol and myself. These meetings were the cause of pain for both of us; each time I left to return to Birmingham, neither of us had had our needs met: Carol's, to want

a permanent return of the old me: Mine for autonomy, and to see Carol let go of me, and for her move on. This is still my basic need, in regard to Carol, after fourteen years, and I still wonder whether there has been any forgiveness of my leaving. My recent new marriage will mark another severance and a departure for both us.

Some may argue that six months is a short time span, to leave a marriage that had survived twenty-five years. Yet, I had an urge, a gravitational pull, away from family life that seemed irresistible. Any solution Carol suggested, such as her moving to a town nearer Birmingham, where we could live together and I could get a job in my old career in the public sector was, I felt, unsatisfactory. It didn't meet my needs for autonomy and space as it would have meant selling the apartment I had quickly established as my home, the place where I could begin to find peace. So, I found I could easily reject her suggestions. These suggestions seemed likely to be a compromise in my journey to discover myself. For this quest, I felt confident it was necessary for me to leave the family. I was never influenced by anybody, and no Buddhist friends ever encouraged me to leave the family. I know they felt and expressed compassion for the family, I left behind. It was my decision, made to meet a need for autonomy. However painful it was for the family I have never once, in the last fifteen years since I made the decision to leave the family, had any regrets, despite the struggles and suffering for all of us, on the journey I started. What I did was quite traditional in Buddhism. I went forth, from family life. The 'Going Forth' was what the Buddha had done, 2500 years before. The difference being the Buddha had no path to follow, he had to discover one. Whereas I was more fortunate. His journey to Enlightenment, had created a path I could now follow.

Going forth from my family was a point of departure I felt sure was essential for me in order to relieve the existential suffering I experienced that had come into awareness. My desire for a spiritual freedom had arisen.

8. Points of departure in career

I left grammar school at the age of sixteen, without any real academic success, to start a career in civil engineering, in the context of municipal government. I did this without any real understanding of what civil engineering meant. To me it looked promising and secure employment. These being the criteria, by which my father viewed the world, since he'd had a spell of unemployment, in the mid 1930s, in Liverpool, ten years before I was born. After that experience he never took any chances in life, I guess to protect his family. My choice of my first job satisfied his need for confidence, knowing I had chosen a career that was safe and secure; and also had the possibility of progression. His work hadn't. The thought of its suitability for my aptitude and skills was never discussed, or even considered by him or myself. I didn't know myself sufficiently then, or knew what I wanted to do. The job just

satisfied my dominant need for freedom from school routine, and have some income. I left school, never to set foot in the building again, although passing it countless times in the course of the next ten years. In leaving I severed my relationship with school, and everybody in that world, including my fellow pupils, setting up a pattern that was to be followed throughout my career with work colleagues.

My career path remained in local government for twenty-six years, training and qualifying as a civil engineer. By moving to different local authorities, I satisfied my need for making progress up the career ladder, and to large extent satisfied my need for creativity. In 1986, whilst attending a residential management and personal programme for local government personnel, ironically funded by my employer, I became more disillusioned with local government. Whilst on the course I was headhunted by the two founding directors of a small meteorological company they had created from their academic research. The company was financed and owned by the University of Birmingham. So I left the security of the public sector in order to market the ideas they had about improving winter weather forecasting for highway authorities, and eventually airports. Their interest dovetailed into my own interest in this field. All three of us wanted to establish a more economic and environmentally friendly service, in dealing with frost and ice on the highways and runways. For three years this provided me with a satisfactory outlet for my creativity. Mainly due to my efforts in marketing, the company was successful, and eventually reached the point when Birmingham University decided to sell it, not to ourselves however, in the form of a management 'buy-out', but to another company.

With this, I was to receive my first lesson in the uncertainty of working in the private sector; my redundancy in 1989, three years, after leaving the security of local government. This came at the same time as our decision to sell the family home in Shrewsbury, with me continuing to live in the apartment in Birmingham, during the week, and Carol staying in Shrewsbury, with my two daughters. with myself .

Tensions that had arisen in our marriage over the previous two or three years were added to by the stress of commuting and then six months of uncertainty about our company's future. I seemed to have little rest or relaxation in those six months; was beginning to feel increasingly distraught about the uncertain future; my needs for security and financial well-being were being challenged. I don't remember receiving empathy, so I felt more and more isolated. Fortunately, I encountered Buddhism mid way through this period, four months before my redundancy. I discovered the message in Buddhism, that saved my sanity in that very difficult period.

The University's decision to sell 'our' company after six months of secret negotiations with a Finnish manufacturer of meteorological equipment, was eventually finalised, at midnight one evening. The deal was done, and the next morning the employees were to learn their fate. I sat in my office, waiting for the English representative of the company to speak to each of us, telling us what the effect of the take-over would mean. In the event, it was only me he spoke to individually. He came into my office to see me, handing me an envelope and asked me read the contents: Reading the letter, drafted by their company solicitor, I discovered I was being made redundant immediately: I was offered £11,500, in lieu of notice, and would have to sign an agreement that I wouldn't make a claim to an industrial tribunal. Also I was to agree to continue with the clauses, in my current contract of employment. These stated that I wouldn't engage in competition with them, nor obtain work with an employer engaged in similar work. Finally, I was advised in the letter to seek legal advice.

The term 'severance pay' is commonly used to describe payments made in redundancy situations. This was what it felt like: My working relationship had been very painfully severed with the small friendly company I had built up, and had very worked hard over three years to establish in the market. Despite the severity of the blow, I found resources to empower myself, and become master of the situation. I suggested I would leave right away, after clearing my desk; also I made a request to have the use of my company car for two weeks. Jonathan the letter bearer, instantly agreed to this. He seemed somewhat relieved as I had made it easy for him. Once I had read the letter, he didn't seem to know how to make the next move. As he left my office, I offered to shake his hand and said something like 'I guessed it wasn't personal on his part'. I had known him for three years; we had built up a personal relationship, collaborating on winning contracts.

In hindsight, I think this action of mine was a way of assuaging my pain, by being polite and wanting calm; the real emotions were being held down. Although I sense I had some sympathy for him by understanding, he didn't appear to have been trained beyond giving me the letter: He hadn't offered any exit strategy for me. The strategy I offered was to protect myself. My predominant need was to assert myself and gain control of the situation. However my needs underneath for safety and space were beginning to emerge. Any other step, I could have been given, would have been too humiliating for me, after the redundancy letter. I needed to regain something of my autonomy, by offering to leave the building as soon as possible, rather being asked to leave. Also by doing this, I met my need for dignity, and his need for completion, as he seemed very unsure. This episode demonstrates I believe, a natural ability I have to make empathic connections, even in the most difficult situations.

It seems strange looking back how I could have both achieved some dignity, and solved a practical problem, so quickly, in what was a very painful and difficult situation, for myself.

I am open to another factor being present, a deep inner resource within myself that can respond quickly, with imperturbability, when I am faced with a crisis. I have been aware of this in other situations when faced with a crisis.

As I finished typing the last paragraph from the notes I had made in Spain nearly two months before, and read the next part, I had to leave the computer. I couldn't continue. It was as though I had reached a point, through a parallel process, when I had to get up and leave. I knew I had to break away: I left the room, and checked out what I most needed. A cup of tea? no, I needed to meditate. I sensed, I needed something, that could give me self-empathy, through the metta bhavana meditation practice, (universal loving kindness for self, and others). I began to meditate and tried to develop more self-love; then moving on through the next three stages, to others in my life who spontaneously came to mind; then to the world at large; finally suffering in the world.

Returning to the typing process four hours later, I wondered what had happened that caused me to feel I had to leave the process. I sense I touched the memory of the morning of the redundancy. It effectively marked, after twenty nine years, the end of my career on a pay role as a civil engineer. Although I continued to work spasmodically for some years afterwards as a self-employed consultant, that morning marked the end of something that had been very significant in my life. I had stayed in one career, which had been killed by someone else's hand. A significant part of my identity had died. As with any death, the grief manifested in different ways over the next few years. I feel fortunate I had been presented with the tools in Buddhism, just four months before, to enabled me to work with the grief. I had a very significant teaching with my redundancy, in impermanence: Just as I was to have at the dissolution of my marriage.

9. Point of departure from the old-self: finding freedom though pain

It took two days to get over the initial shock of my redundancy, before I could face telling my family. I had to go through a process, before I could bring myself to the humiliation of admitting, that I had lost my job; admitting I had failed, and was now faced with an uncertain future, with huge financial responsibilities.

However I sensed I had found a new strength, deep down inside me, that I drew from Buddhism. What I realised, in the ensuing weeks, was a new sense of freedom, despite the burden of the practical reality of my situation. This sense of freedom had come about from my first encounter with Buddhism, four months before. Freedom meaning the liberation or emancipation from human suffering. This word had spoken to me directly; it had touched the core of my being: I had come to Buddhism in a state of very intense suffering. There had been no spiritual search, just a longing to escape, and find something that would alleviate the pain. Now I had found it, I felt I had come home, an expression I was to hear spoken by many

others in the coming years. I had arrived at the Birmingham Buddhist Centre one Spring evening, to learn to meditate, with suffering written all over my face, as I was later told by the man, who welcomed me at the door that evening. He became a very close friend in later years. Fortunately the meditation practice taught on that first evening, the metta bhavana, starts from self-empathy. This was what I needed then, and is what has sustained me over the years, and allows me to connect very deeply with others in the world. This was my introduction to the Path of Freedom: Self-love, and connecting through love with others in the world, who also suffer. The connection is made from the love of humanity Shelly refers to in the quote I gave earlier, which is the source of empathic understanding, creating an interconnectedness. Through this process I no longer felt isolated.

Two days after my redundancy, travelling to Shrewsbury, I was feeling very shaky, knowing that I still hadn't been able to tell my wife. Maybe I was in some sort of denial. I sensed however, first I had to go through what I would now know as a process, before I could tell my family; even before meeting with my lawyer. So I decided I had to tell my tale to my former head of the department, where I had worked for five years, before leaving local government for private industry. Meeting him in his office, I told him I felt very unsure, although I was not asking for a job. I described how, in leaving the safety of the public sector, I had jumped off the cliff, without any security. Now it felt like I had been pushed off another cliff, and had hit the bottom; not feeling very intact.

An hour or so later, I sat and told the story of my redundancy to my lawyer, not knowing what he could do. The lawyer very quickly pointed out that I had been put into a very difficult situation, a redundancy with a constraint to my future employment, by the enforcement of clauses in my severed contract. I would need further legal advice, and probably, an action in the High Court. This proved to be correct: Employment of Counsel and an action in the High Court. The process to reach a settlement was demanding and frustrating; it required patience. This was to become the keystone of my spiritual practice, through all the trials and tribulations I have encountered in the ensuing years. The Court action took eighteen months, and was finally settled by agreement, within weeks, of the date of the trial. A settlement in my favour was a payment of £6,500, from which I had to pay legal expenses, of £4,500. More importantly, I obtained release from the clauses in the contract, and now had the freedom, to work in whatever way I chose. I had found freedom in a mundane sense. My life wasn't controlled or constrained by others. This was something that was essential for me, in my spiritual quest. The terms of the settlement were based on the fact that I had been able in those eighteen months to find self-employed work for myself and to have earnings equivalent to my former salary.

The last words my lawyer said, as our first meeting was over, “Now you must tell your wife”: So I drove the ten minute drive to our house, not knowing how I would say, what I had to say. I felt apprehensive about the reaction I would get, knowing our marriage was already strained. We sat in the garden in the shade from the early August sun, and drank a cup of tea; eventually I shakily blurted it out. I had no solutions for the first time in the twenty-six years that I had known Carol: I felt exposed, and naked.

Carol’s immediate response was very understanding and kind; I felt she connected with my deep suffering, and my sense of hopelessness, being expressed for the first time. I now felt understood, for the first time in two years: I sensed we really met from her empathic understanding. She then called our two teenage daughters to hear the sad news. My daughters expressed their sympathy going out to me, probably not really understanding what the practical effects would be. This was outside their personal experience. Just as it was for myself, and Carol.

Even before we discussed the practicalities of what we could do, in the pain we now all felt, there was a new kind of encounter and relationship. I can see how my need for support, and understanding was met that day and in the following weeks and months. This was a true empathic encounter, despite the intense suffering we felt.

Sadly, the connection we made on that day, was not to continue, as I continued on the spiritual path I had discovered in Buddhism. On reflection I now sense my redundancy, six months before I left the family, was not only deeply significant for myself: It probably affected the other family members, in ways that weren’t obvious to me at the time. A sense of security for all of us was lost, for the first time in our family history, probably heightened by the planned sale of the family home, within weeks of my redundancy.

I suppose the question that now arises for me is: Could I have been more empathic in leaving the family six months later, and still staying true to my own need, for gaining freedom, out of the inner necessity that impelled me. Whilst all the other family members’ need, was for me to remain there? I guess that is a question that will remain unanswered. Whether this was an act of betrayal by myself? I don’t know. I can perhaps understand Carol feeling betrayed, as there was a new calm in our marriage for the first time, after two or three years of stress.

Despite losing her own house, she was re-establishing a family home, in a rented cottage for herself and our daughters, which she continues to provide. After I’d left the family, Carol used to tell her friends she had lost me to Buddhism, without really knowing what this meant. I guess it satisfied her need for the explanation I couldn’t give.

Sarah and Katharine had also lost a home that meant a lot to them; and were for the first time in their lives, living in a house that didn’t offer them the security and comfort they needed as teenagers. Maybe they too felt betrayed by my leaving at that period in their lives?

I realise in writing this after fifteen years, all I can do is to use my imagination, and attempt to be in the shoes of the individual members of my created family, and try to see it from their perspective, as I had to with my parents, after they died. Hopefully, by doing this, find a new and deeper empathic understanding of what it was like for them, by imagining their needs at that time.

10. Point of departure from an old way of being: A taste of freedom

The taste of freedom I began to experience from within my suffering, during the months immediately after my redundancy, was to cause a deepening in my practice of Buddhism, although it offered no practical solutions to my problems.

However, magically, one solution to our practical situation arrived two weeks after my redundancy. I had a call from an international weather forecast company in Scotland, offering me the prospect of work. A few days later, a flight to their HQ in Aberdeen and a very brief interview resulted in my being offered the opportunity of becoming a consultant to the company. They wanted me to help them market a new winter weather forecasting service to the highway authorities in the UK. This not only provided me with financial security, it offered an opportunity to be free from applying for jobs. I was to become self-employed, something I'd considered for years and hadn't had the courage to undertake. I hadn't had to return to being on a pay role; I had found a new freedom that marked my severance from being an employee; and arrived at a very significant point of departure after twenty-nine years.

Also, I was now being offered another form of freedom, to plan my own work schedule, and for the first time create space for myself; something I hadn't done, throughout my very driven career, in being the sole breadwinner in the family.

The freedom of living on my own for the first time in my life was initially painful. The new freedom of self-employment helped me work through the process of grief, and loneliness. I felt empowered in my new freedom, and worked very hard. It gave me an opportunity to be creative in my relationships with others, including potential customers or clients, many of whom I had known from my previous employment. Also I was beginning to enjoy the freedom of the post-marital state.

However I knew the real Freedom could only be attained with continuous practice of Buddhism. To help me in this quest, I decided to ask for ordination into the Western Buddhist Order at the end of 1990. I felt confident that being in the Order would give me a context in which I could practice with others who had the same goal of self liberation. The request for ordination was made at a time when things were going well in my new career, although this wasn't to last, and after two years the contracts became spasmodic and I was faced with renting out the apartment and to moving into the community in the Birmingham Buddhist Centre.

However, I felt confident I was making progress in other aspects of my life, and I can relate my progress to what Buber states in 'I and Thou' (Buber, 1937), to a meeting with God, not in a religious sense. A meeting outside all religions, when the human being comes into relationship with his true nature: My understanding of this means, at these moments, the human being is free from the conditioning that causes alienation from himself and others. Buber further asserts that alienation from a true self is what causes relationships to be of an 'I and It' nature, in which others are but objects in the relationship. (Buber 1937). Whereas, when the human is free from conditioning, and experiences their true nature, the 'I and Thou' relationship is possible. In this relationship, human beings are experienced in their humanity and have no past history: There is only a meeting in the present moment, free of diversity, and attributes. This I would describe as a meeting of 'Sameness' or equality in the beauty of love. This is the meeting, I understand from Shelley's, use of the word love. (Shelley 1820). Also I believe this meeting is possible, when we 'Realise', our Buddha-nature, that is referred to in Zen Buddhism.

11. Points of departure from personal history: New Beginnings

I decided to move further away from my civil engineering career and so left Birmingham in the Autumn of 1993 to begin working and living in a Buddhist retreat centre in Sussex, an unfamiliar part of England; leaving behind everything that was familiar: Family, friend, career and territory: This was more significant than the move to Dundee, twenty-two before: This time I was doing it alone.

After four years of working very hard in the retreat centre I became ill, and experienced a departure from the good health I had enjoyed all my life.

The strain of taking on the management of the retreat centre in the Spring of 1997 during a period of staffing difficulties, lead to my becoming ill in the late Autumn.

Despite being aware of the symptoms, I ignored the illness for months, until friends encouraged me to see a doctor who arranged for me to see a specialist at the beginning of 1998. Even though the diagnosis was ulcerative colitis, a stress related illness, I still didn't attend to my primary needs for rest and relaxation, and attempted to carry on as usual. This resulted in my physical condition gradually becoming worse, and eventually I had to admit defeat, after six months, and leave the retreat centre.

I now realise two other factors contributed to my becoming ill, an increasingly obsessive interest in modern sculpture, and falling romantically and neurotically in love with an artist, who happened to be a married woman.

After leaving the retreat centre, I went first to the west coast of Ireland, for five weeks for a complete break. Even during the break, my obsession with art continued, which had begun to take over my life by now. I had even began imagining I could become an artist. My break was one of activity, and my habitual pattern continued: 'Doing' rather than 'Being', and so I didn't get enough rest. The priority, on returning to England, was finding a place to live, where I could practise art.

A year after becoming ill, the short lived romantic love affair ended abruptly, and I was thrown into a very deep state of grief. After a few psychotherapy sessions for my grief, I gained some insight into myself, and my habitual, and often obsessive way of being. This caused me to decide to change my habitual patterns, although not until I had had another bout of illness. This time I had taken on too many projects, believing I had fully recovered.

Now, after a year of practising art, I finally began to understand my basic needs were for rest and letting go of 'Doing', and just 'Being': At last I had discovered self-empathy. So my flat eventually became the place where I was forced to just Be; and recover from colitis and the chronic fatigue symptoms that followed. At last I had met my needs for spiritual progress.

Four years of illness and recovery also brought me to the beginning of the process with which I am currently engaged: A heuristic self-search inquiry into the nature of empathy. The foundation for this was laid with my decision, just after the Millennium, whilst on a solitary retreat in Cornwall, to work with the dying and bereaved. A few months later, I found myself sitting for six days, at the bedside of a friend, as he lay dying in the last stages of cancer, in a hospice. Conducting his Buddhist funeral service provided me with an opportunity for creating a celebration of his life that became the start of the mourning process for the family. I had begun to meet my new-found ambition to work with the dying and bereaved. This was continued a few months later as a volunteer, in my local hospice, as the co-ordinator of their Buddy Scheme.

Volunteering brought rich rewards for me, during the next two years, as I organised and trained other volunteers, in how to befriend others. Mostly the rewards came from sitting with one Buddy in particular, a long term patient. After a traffic accident, he had been left with a severe brain injury, paralysed from the chest down, 95% blind, and with a severe speech deficiency. I visited Michael, on a weekly basis for two years, sometimes taking him in his wheelchair into the woods to listen to the birds. However, mostly just sitting and talking with him; encouraging his sense of touch, by giving him objects to feel. Through my visits, his need for human contact and friendship was met: I know this from the responses he gave me. This satisfied my need, for meeting another human being from love, free of utility: I believe on many occasions we had an 'I and Thou' meeting, that was marked with mutual joy. I had come into mutual empathic understanding with someone, who was blind and virtually speechless, through just being together, with touch as the main medium of our communication.

From this experience, I have learnt that speech is not necessary for empathic connection, and as Buber (1937) writes, the 'I and Thou' relationship can happen in silence. Maybe, there are times when the absence of words, just presence, is what is required for deep empathic connection. Maybe this, coupled with a hug, was what I needed, as the eleven year old child, on that fateful day, when my exam results came through the post?

Maybe I did get the hug, and I have chosen to block it from memory, because of my pain? In writing this, I am left with a question: Is touch a more appropriate means of communicating empathic understanding than speech when there is acute distress or fear? For example, when death approaches, the final point of departure of the body from the present life: the severance of relationship between the mind and the physical body?

Synthesis

a) The writing process

Before I started to write, I did not know what would emerge; there seemed to be what Kandinsky describes as an 'inner necessity' in writing about the creative process in 'Concerning the Spiritual in Art, (Kandinsky, 1910). Also there seemed to be parallels with the process when I had sculpted a few years before whilst recovering from illness. So I just let go of the thought, that what I was writing may not provide material for the dissertation, and began the illumination phase of a heuristic self-search enquiry, (Moustakas 1990)

The life story was written over a period of seven days; I wrote at great speed in notebooks, with hardly a break in writing. Each day I came to a natural conclusion; at that point I felt satisfied and complete, and I had to get away from the notebook. I neither read the work, nor made any revisions, except for a few words as I went along.

There seemed to be an urgency in the writing process, as though I had to communicate something that had lain buried, and was now emerging very quickly. When I sensed I'd reached a natural break, there was an urgency to get away from the writing process, to remove myself from being immersed in my story; to physically remove myself by going for a short walk.

The walk usually resulted in something new emerging into consciousness, that I had to note down for the starting point the next day. The new material that emerged, very often had little to do with what I had just been engaged in writing, except for remembering to add a sentence or a short paragraph to what I had just finished. I noticed the writing flow didn't seem to be a continuous thread in my life, as if the writing process triggered other recollections that became the issues to communicate the following day. Just as, this piece about the writing process is the result of a reflection that arose spontaneously, during a walk, after I had completed the last part of the life story. The process I was immersed in seemed well described by Moustakas (1990), as the illumination phase: Perhaps confirmation of my being immersed, in a heuristic self-search inquiry could be self-transforming (Sela-Smith 2002). In the writing process, I found a new confidence in myself, that allowed me just to communicate what arose, without restraint; and hope that what I wrote about my life could be seen by others, in relationship to the topic of the dissertation, empathy. In some ways, writing this piece, marks an empathic understanding of my writing process, and my need to communicate an acknowledgement of my capabilities.

b) Summary and conclusion

The dissertation to discover the nature of empathy, or what I prefer to term empathic understanding began with a literature review and reached a point when I felt unsure of how I could proceed and make progress. At this point I discovered the Moustakas heuristic method, (Moustakas, 1990) and decided to adopt this as a methodology, using my experience of

empathy in my own life, as means of a heuristic self-search inquiry. In adopting this approach I felt it essential that events in my life story had to be revisited and told, and that I attempt to remember my feelings then, and record any new ones that might arise in the process.

The events of my life I describe in the dissertation, commenced with myself as a child in pain through misunderstanding my mother's words of reassurance, said from what I now understand as her love for her son, in his acute pain. I then recounted my understanding, from memory, of my relationship with my parents, including the continuing one, after their death. How the relationship with my parents was influenced by my relationship with Carol who was to become my wife, and mother of my children; how that changed with time into separation and divorce. How my career and events that arose from it, impacted and interwove with these relationships. How my departure from marriage, family life and career was influenced by my spiritual search in Buddhism.

I have tried to describe the insights I have gained from writing my life story, paying particular attention to the needs, met and unmet, that I sense are the foundation for empathic connection, or its absence. I have included what I call self-empathy, when only myself was involved. For me, this is an important key to empathy, understanding one's own needs, met or unmet.

My previous difficulty with much of the writing in the psychotherapy literature, following my first reading of the techniques of empathy and my attempts at their application, arose from feeling that what I was attempting didn't ring true. I now realise for me it lacked congruence, and that something was missing. This I now understand as an 'interest in people.' Further I believe, however much the techniques of making empathic connection are learnt, without a passionate interest in other human beings, real empathy can not manifest.

Also for me, the closer the relationship comes to what Martin Buber has described, as the 'I and Thou' relationship, (Buber 1937), then the deeper the empathic understanding. Rogers (1975) was perhaps highlighting this problem when he wrote 'Empathy: An Unappreciated Way of Being' saying that there was a lack of understanding of the concept of empathy. According to Bozarth (1984) for Rogers empathy was intertwined with unconditional positive regard, and this meant love.

Rosenberg's view concerning making empathic connections takes a slightly different approach in stating, 'that it is our nature to enjoy giving and receiving in a compassionate manner' (Rosenberg 1990: 1). This is close in my opinion, to Buber's view, 'that relation is primary' (Buber 1937).

In writing about events in my own life, I have identified when I have felt or given empathy at various critical situations and how this has through my new reflections arising from my understanding on NVC, been related to met and unmet needs, and the consequent feelings. My attempt to understand empathy from the premise of 'needs,' both met and unmet, became significant a year before I started this dissertation by training in non-violent communication

(NVC) skills, also known as compassionate communication. Despite my enthusiasm for this approach, I still feel it falls short of an interest in other human beings from a basis of love, as in the concept in the Greek word: Agape. The love that Shelley points to in his description of empathy I used earlier.

My conclusion is that love is at the heart of genuine empathic understanding.

Also I am of the opinion that empathy cannot begin without a genuine interest in others; and that attempts to be empathic without a genuine interest in others, solely remain a technique of making connection, and are perhaps to some extent incongruent, unless there is a recognition and understanding of Kohut's assertion, 'the empathic understanding of the experience of other human beings is as basic an endowment of man as his vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell' (Kohut, 1997:144). So that the process becomes a natural one and becomes a 'way of being', a presence described by Emma with which I commenced my introduction.

In concluding with a possible answer to my question: **How does a human being communicate empathic understanding to another human being?**

In my opinion, love of humanity is the essential ingredient for empathy which seems to be present in Emma, and is what Shelley suggests is essential and morally good.

A new question that arises for me. How does this become recognised by all human beings and manifest in action by them?

Appendix One

1. Aniruddha's story: How NVC saved my life and money

(Taken as told, without any grammatical corrections; as English is not Aniruddha's native tongue)

I was feeling frustrated because I waited for my Indian family friends for 3 hours at Hotel Wembley Plaza. At 11.30 pm I left the hotel. On my way back to Wembleypark tube station, from nowhere this tall black guy (**TBG**) stood in front of me and in a very scary and fearful voice said

TBG: "Give me all your money and give it to me now"

For a moment I went blank and said to myself, that is it Aniruddha, you are finished. I knew there was no time to be wasted, because I remembered that just few days back, one of my friends in Bethnal Green was attacked in a similar situation with a sharp object on his back head when he tried to escape without giving the money. He was bleeding and was running to save his life). Even at that cold windy night I was sweating, and my legs were frozen. With lot of struggle and effort I was somehow able to connect with myself and empathise with him, and myself. I was feeling scared and helpless. I was feeling vulnerable and I was needing safety, security and courage.

I looked at him and said

ANIRUDDHA (AN): "Are you feeling desperate, and you are needing all the money I have".
(At that time I had £230 in my wallet)

Tall black guy (TBG): "Don't you talk to me, just give me all your money. Aren't you scared?"

AN: "Of course I am feeling scared and shaky. At the same time I want to help you and meet your need for money".

TBG: "Just give me the money, I am hungry and I want to eat chicken".

AN: "So you are feeling hungry and need chicken to eat".

I took out all the coins (£9.50) from my pocket and said

AN: "There you are, have your chicken, I wish I could give you more">

TBG: "Aren't you scared?"

AN: "I am feeling scared, also I am feeling concerned about how I will go to Bethnal Green to my community, I haven't got any money left."

TBG gave me all my coins back, and said

"You are a very generous person. I need only £2 for my chicken".

I gave him £2.

He said “God bless you” and disappeared in the dark lane.

When I remember the whole incidence I feel scared and vulnerable because my need for safety, security and freedom is not met. I still feel scared to go out on my own. I feel suspicious about anyone while walking on the street. I am needing more support, trust and confidence. My request to myself is not to go out alone late night.

Lesson learnt: I learnt how important it is to stay connected, with self and others, in such situations.

(Written by Aniruddha several days after the incident)

Appendix Two

A study of my process in the attempting to acquire knowledge of empathy in the literature review.

In considering the manner of acquiring knowledge I found another problem. If knowledge depends on communication and dialogue, this requires a relationship between the 'knowledge bearer' and in this case myself, the researcher. I knew from personal experience that language can either enhance communication, or can be divisive. In Stern, (1985) I found a partial explanation of why this can happen, '(language) also moves relatedness into the impersonal, abstract level intrinsic to language, and away from the the personal, immediate level, intrinsic to the other domains of relatedness'. He then suggests, '(language) causes estrangement from one's own personal experience where representations of things can be talked about and what is talked about may not be experienced' (Stern, 1985:162-163).

Here may lie some of the explanation why my first route by an acquisition of knowledge to discover the nature of empathy foundered. Stern's explication suggests that feelings may be disassociated from the thinking-verbalising self. Sela-Smith (2002) asserts that there is a core within the human being that she labels, 'I who Feels', that she relates back to the pre-verbal stage of human growth when the infant has experiences through the senses and internally organises them, until thought processing opens up through the use of language.

I would venture to suggest that even after language has been acquired, the disassociation continues; and as language is learnt through another, often the primary carer, the learnt language may not be an accurate representation of the experience of the child. I would also suggest that the child and young adult may never learn a vocabulary for the expression of the feelings they experience if they grow up in an environment without feelings being expressed. I can recall seeing clients, one in particular with acute grief, who had no language to express her feelings of what she was experiencing. My encouragement to her to express feelings foundered largely on the fact she hadn't learnt a vocabulary that included feeling words: I suspect not an uncommon issue.

Stern (1985) perhaps provides evidence of this when he states:

(language) can have an alienating effect on self-experience when what is experienced at the level of core and inter-subjective relatedness is not able to be verbalised. Then non-verbalised global experiences are sent underground into misnamed and poorly understood existence, and the verbal becomes accepted in awareness while what is experienced is out of awareness, (Stern,1985:175).

An explanation of the process of empathy may be here? From my experience when there is empathic understanding either within the self (self-empathy), or between self and another, often it is accompanied by a body sensation or shift, as though the tension of disassociation of feeling experience in the world and expression has been broken or released. Focusing can

achieve this effect, as can the process of NVC. Through either of these processes, the offered word, or 'handle' for a feeling or a need, provides the key and is the cause of the shift or release. Language has then become congruent with the reality of experience.

If Stern is correct in what he asserts and it seems to be in accordance with Rogers' theory of self-actualising (Rogers 1957), then the problem that remains for me is: How do I overcome my own disassociation from experience within the limitations of language as described above?

Appendix Three

The methodology: An afterword

I approached writing about events in my life from the position of what Sela-Smith (2001) describes as *I-who-feels*. and completed the six phases of heuristic research identified by Moustakas.

1. Initial Engagement

Moustakas describes the task of initial engagement

A discovery of an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications. The initial engagement invites self-dialogue, an inner search to discover the topic and question. During this process one encounters the self, one's autobiography, and significant relationships within a social context. (Moustakas, 1990:27)

In a sense the first phase began several years before I started the dissertation, with my search to understand Carl Rogers' approach to empathy (Rogers 1957), and continued with my later introduction to Marshall Rosenberg's approach to empathy through non-violent communication (Rosenberg 1999). The seed of the question had been planted; was awaiting something that would cause it grow and develop, and maybe bear fruit. In deciding to use the opportunity of writing a dissertation for an MA I was readdressing a question that had deep meaning for myself. To discover the meaning of empathy, or empathic understanding, as the presence of empathy or its absence, for me becomes critical to social meanings, the more individuals and societies become polarised. Also my research question, in a sense was not sufficient for myself; there was another related question: Does empathy lead to personal freedom?

2. Immersion

The second phase, immersion, I can relate to the period of the literature review as I became involved searching for something new on empathy. Moustakas describes this phase: 'Once the question is discovered and its terms defined and clarified, the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states'. (Moustakas, 1990:28), and continues, 'the researcher is alert to all possibilities for meaning and enters into life with others wherever the theme is being expressed' (Moustakas, 1990:28). I can relate easily to what Moustakas writes, although sometimes I have found this to be a cause of frustration as I found other essential activities impinged on my purpose and fascination with the subject.

Whilst the nature of empathy was initially the question, the more I returned to the process of immersion the deeper the question became; it then broadened out into two related themes, 'relationship' and 'severance of relationship', (points of departure). I was strengthened by Moustakas writing 'Virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion' (Moustakas, 1990:28).

3. Incubation

The third phase, incubation, began with my introduction to the Moustakas method and Sela-Smith's critique from her position of '*I-who-feels*' approach to self-search inquiry.

Moustakas (1990:29) describes this phase:

Incubation is the process in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the question.....During this process the researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic in any direct way or alert to things, situations, events, or people that will contribute to an understanding of the phenomena.

Moustakas (1990) quotes from Polanyi (1964) in describing how a mountain peak is reached.

Our labours are spent as it were in an unsuccessful scramble amongst the rocks and in the gullies on the flanks of the hill and then when we would give up for a moment and settle down to tea we suddenly find ourselves transported to the top.....by a spontaneous mental reorganisation uncontrolled by conscious effort,
(Polanyi,1964:34)

I could relate to this phase having spent a considerable period immersed in the literature of empathy trying to discover its meaning. I then needed to withdraw, as what I was researching seemed limited and was not illuminating my understanding.

4. Illumination

Discovering what I had been trying to accomplish lead me naturally into the fourth phase, illumination in which Moustakas suggests: For Moustakas:

The process of illumination is one that occurs naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition. The illumination as such is a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question.....When the researcher is in a receptive state of mind without conscious striving or concentration, the insight or modification occurs.....Illumination opens the door to a new awareness, (Moustakas, 1990:29-30)

In my case the first insight or modification was the decision to use myself as the subject of the research; this then lead me to make the decision to undertake the writing process in Spain; where, I hoped I would be free from distraction. There illumination process continued revealing events and aspects of my life, often long forgotten, which came into awareness as I immersed myself in the self-search inquiry: Scenes from the past became vivid that seemed to create an environment for new insights. The deeper I was engaged in the process of immersion in my life story the less I was conscious of the academic process.

For me the illumination process, described by Moustakas, has parallels in the 'Sudden Awakening' experience in Buddhism particularly in the Zen tradition. There is the famous story told of the experience of the Zen Master, Dogen (1200-1253), who, when he heard the

phrase ‘drop off mind and body’, ceased striving in meditation and immediately realised Enlightenment, or Buddha Nature.

5. Explication

Moustakas describes this phase as similar to illumination except the researcher goes into more detail ‘to understand and explain the meanings’, and goes on:

The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning.....In the explication process, the heuristic researcher utilises indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognises *that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference.* (Moustakas, (1990:31), (italics my emphasis).

He asserts ‘perhaps the most significant concepts in explicating phenomena are focusing and indwelling’. This process was not new to me, only the nomenclature, as I had for many years in my practice of Buddhism had a daily practice of reflection, separate from formal meditation, although often informed by it, as all phenomena are conditioned and do not arise independently.

Here, Moustakas in identifying self-disclosure, raises an issue that has been problematic for me in considering heuristic research. The issue has not been an unwillingness to reveal my life story, which I have told in other contexts, rather a failure to appreciate that its autobiographical nature is relevant to the research. Also from my initial training as a person-centred counsellor I have become conditioned to limit self-disclosure as this moves the focus away from the subject, the client, in the counselling relationship, or in the case of researching, the topic of empathy.

6. Creative Synthesis

The final phase according to Moustakas, is reached:

Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis. (Moustakas, 1990:32).

In a sense this process began when I started to type and edit the ‘life story’ I had written in Spain. From the new meanings and understandings that arose from the insights in the process of explication I was able develop an overview of some of the significant events in my life and their relationship with the research question. The process appeared to be continuous, and I suspect will continue beyond the submission of the dissertation for assessment. Moustakas in writing about the validation of heuristic research, quotes Polanyi (1969:30), ‘certain visions of the truth, having made their appearance, continue to gain strength both by further reflection and additional evidence’.

Here I can see parallels with the creative process of the sculptor and painter although they would describe the final phase as one of resolution, in which the work has come into final completion. There is school of thought that says the work of art is never complete and always more can be done, retouching even remaking. After the painter Georges Braque died, paintings were discovered in his studio dated 20 years before and unsigned indicating he hadn't considered them resolved or complete. Maybe he wasn't satisfied with them. An episode in the life of the sculptor, Alberto Giacometti I consider also illustrates there is a continuity of the creative process. He borrowed some of his sculptures that he had sold some years before for exhibition at the Vienna Biennale. Once they were in place he then proceeded to paint the previously uncoloured works, without asking permission from their owner. My guess is that Giacometti, in his mind still retained possession of the creative process of the works and considered he had a right to choose to continue the process. Also maybe this is a reflection of unsatisfactoriness: All conditioned phenomena are inherently unsatisfactory, according to Buddhism.

I find Moustakas' summary immediately following his description of the sixth and final phase rewarding in that to a large extent it echoes my own understanding of how things are.

Behaviour is governed and experience is determined by the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and judgements housed in the internal frame of reference of a person. Meanings are inherent in a particular world view, an individual life, and the connections between self, other and world, (Moustakas, 1990:32)

My main qualification as a Buddhist would be that all phenomena are in a state of flux and therefore impermanent, including self, other and world: Everything is constantly changing. This makes the notion of a substantial fixed self, other and world inherently a delusion.

References

- Barnes A, Thagard P, 1997 *Empathy and Analogy* Philosophy Dept. University of Ontario
- Barrett-Lennard G T, 1962 *Dimensions of therapist responses as causal factors in the therapeutic change* Psychological Monographs, 7 (43)
- Bozarth J D, 1984 *Client-Centred Therapy and the person-Centred Approach: New Directions in theory in research and practice* pp59-75 ed. levant & Shlien, Praeger Pub.
- Bozarth G D 2001 *an Addendum to Beyond Reflection: Emergent Modes of Empathy* ed. Haugh & Merry: Empathy, Ross on Wye: PCCS Books
- Buber M 1933, *Between man and man* London: Paul Keegan
- Buber M 1937, *I and Thou* trans. Kaufman W, (1970) Touchstone edition Rockefeller Centre, New York
- Buddha S, 483 BCE, *Udnana: Verse of Uplift (Minor Anthologies of the Pali Cannon* Transl. Woodward F L 1985, London, Pali Text Society
- Cooper M, 2001 *Embodied empathy* ed Haugh & Merry: Empathy, Ross on Wye: PCCS Books
- Douglass B, & Moustakas C, 1985, *Heuristic inquiry: The internal search to know*. Journal of Humanistic Psychology 25(3), 39-55,
- Etherington K 2004, *Becoming a reflexive researcher: using ourselves in research*, London: Jessica Kingsley
- Etherington K 2004, *Heuristic Research as a vehicle for personal and professional development* Counselling and Psychotherapy Research vol 4 No.2
- Gendlin E, 1996, *Focusing-Orientated Psychotherapy* New York: The Guilford Press
- Gergen, K.J. & Gergen M. M. 2002, *Enthegraphic representation as relationship* In A.Bochner & C. Ellis (eds) *Ethnographically speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics*, Walnut Creek,CA: Mta Mira Press
- Groth, M 2001 *Embodied Theories* Ed Spinelli E & Marshall S, London: Continuum
- Hillman, J 1964, *Betrayal* Guild of Pastoral Psychology, Lectures; vol 28
- James W, 1902 *The varieties of religious experience: A study in human nature*. New York: Random House
- Kandinsky W, 1910, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* trans. Stadler M. I, 1977, Mineol: Dover Publications
- Kahn M 1997, *Between Therapist and Client* New York: W.H Freeman & Co
- Kohut H, 1997 *The Analysis of Self* New York: International Universities Press
- Mahrer A, Boulet D, & Fairweather D, 1993 *Beyond Empathy: Advances in the clinical theory and methods of empathy* Clinical Psychology Review vol 14 No3 pp 183-198
- Maslow A, 1962 *Toward a Psychology of Being* Princeton: Van Norstrand
- Merry A, 2004 *Supervision as Heuristic Research Inquiry*, Person-Centred Approaches to Supervision, Eds Tudor K & Worrall M, PCCS Books Ross on Wye

- Moustakas, C 1961 *The Touch of Loneliness*, Engelwood Cliffs, NJ:Prentice-Hall
- Moustakas, C (1990) *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology and Applications*, Enquiry Park California: Sage
- Murray H A 1938 *Explorations in Personality* New York: Oxford University Press
- Polyani, M. 1962 *Knowing and Being*, (M.Grene, Ed) Chicago:University of Chicago
- Raskin, J N 2001 *The History of Empathy in the Client-Centred Movement* ed Haugh & Merry: Empathy, Ross on Wye: PCCS Books
- Richardson, L ,2000 *Writing :A method of inquiry* In N.K. Denzin & J.A. Lincoln (eds) Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Rogers C R, 1957 *A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships* Journal of Consulting Psychology pp 95-103
- Rogers C R, 1957 *Empathic:An Unappreciated Way of Being* Counseling Psychologist, 5, 2-10
- Rogers C R, 1980 *A Way of Being*, Boston: Houghton and Mifflin
- Rogers C R, 1961 *On Becoming a Person*, Boston:Houghton and Mifflin
- Rosenberg M B, 1999, *Nonviolent communication: A Language of Compassion* Encinitas: Puddle Dancer Press
- Rothschild B, 2004 *Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal* Vol 15, No.9 Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- Sela-Smith, S, (2001) *Heuristic Self-Search inquiry: A clarification of the Moustakas' Method*, Unpublished dissertation, Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center.
- Shelley P B, 1820 *A Defence of Poetry* London: C& J Ollier
- Shlien J, 1997 *Empathy Reconsidered:New Directions in psychotherapy* eds Bohart and Greenberg, American Psychological Association
- Sontag S, 1992 *The Volcano Lover* London: Jonathan Cape
- Stern D N 1985, *The interpersonal world of the infant: A view from psychoanalysis and developmental psychology* New York: Basic Books
- Truax C B, Carkuff R R 1967, *Toward effective counseling and psychotherapy* Chicago: Aldine
- Worden J W, 1991, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy* 2nd edition, London, Routledge
- Zimring F, 2000, *Empathic Understanding Grows the Person* The Person-Centred Journal, Vol 7 No. 2, 2000

