

finding our way home



being and becoming

Kaye Twining

BTheolGradDip(Spiritual Direction)MA



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Finding our way home

the dance of being and becoming

Abstract

Who am I? Why am I here? How am I to live? These questions are driven by our **intrinsic longing to belong**. While the longing to belong is a constant, an inner **home of belonging** is not. Over our lifetime we may experience numerous *homes*. If that is the case, how do we **find our way home again and again**? The **dance of being and becoming** guides our way. But beyond an awe-inducing poetic term, what does the phrase *dance of being and becoming* mean? What **framework of understanding** enables us to consciously participate in the dance? This paper depicts **one person's experience and research** into the dance of being and becoming in the hope that readers will be encouraged to **name and claim their own home of belonging again and again**.



It's lovely to have a home, habits, etc. but when that beautiful home becomes a prison . . . it is time to walk out of the door or listen for the knock on the door. Poet, David Whyte, *A Great Invitation: The Path of Risk and Revelation*

photo by Dianne & Robert Tyzzer

Introduction

Setting the scene

Many years ago, I was interviewing for a pastoral care course at a hospital. During the interview, I was asked, "Who are you?" I heard myself reply, "I am who I am!" On leaving the interview, the question and response continued to echo, "Who are you, who are you?" "I am who I am." But, "who am I?" That moment initiated a spiritual adventure of naming and claiming who I knew myself to be. My adventure commenced by reviewing my life to that point. The culmination was finding my home of belonging. I knew who I was, what my purpose was, and how I was to live.

Fast forward several years. I was introduced to Eastern spiritual teachings on impermanence or the *not-self*. I was drawn to the teachings, however I unwittingly engaged with them from a Western dualistic mindset of either/or. I could *either* be trapped within an identity *or* surrender my identity and live with inner freedom. Even though I was drawn to the idea of impermanence, something about my engagement with the teaching seemed off. I wondered, "Why would I have to surrender the identity I had discovered through a rigorous inner journey?" "What purpose would it serve to surrender my home of belonging?" Consequently, my reaction to the spiritual teaching became, "Hmm . . . interesting, but I don't think so!" And yet, the idea of impermanence kept *knocking at my door* so to speak. I felt compelled to explore it further. Little did I know then, I was engaging in the dance of being and becoming. I was finding my way home again, and again.

The reason for writing

David Whyte's poem (above) struck a chord with me. His poem revealed how a once *beautiful* home of belonging could eventually turn into a *prison*. A home of belonging, therefore, is not a fixed entity. Over our lifetime we may be required to expand our home of belonging, or even leave one home and seek another. How do we find our way? We find our way via the dance of being and becoming. But beyond an awe-inducing poetic term, what does the phrase *dance of being and becoming* mean? What language gives expression to the depth and breadth of the experience? What framework of understanding enables us to consciously

engage with the dance? This paper outlines the nature of the dance of being and becoming with the hope that readers will be encouraged to seek and find their way home again and again.

The structure of the paper

The paper is structured in the following manner. Section 1. shares my experience of finding my way home again and again via the dance of being and becoming. My experience does not encapsulate the process per se. The intention of sharing it is simply to show how the process has taken shape in my life so far. Section 2. takes a theoretical look at the nature of the dance guided by a collection of insights gleaned from my experience and research into the topic. Section 3. outlines a practice for finding our way home via the dance of being and becoming.

I hope my thoughts will focus the reader's attention on the dance without controlling the process or defining the outcome. Each reader's experience of the dance will be unique to them, for the dance will follow its own pace and shape within each reader's lived experience and belief system.

Section 1: My experience of being and becoming

The dance of being and becoming is currently initiating me into a third *life*. I use the term *life* because the transformations I have undergone have profoundly restructured my home of belonging again and again. As a result, the person I once was now feels like a stranger to me. Even though I have lived two lives and am being initiated into a third, each life has been significant in that each life has been authentic in its own right, while also guiding me toward who I know myself to be today.

The dance of being and becoming thus far

My first life

I was born into a Protestant, evangelical stream of the Western Christian religious tradition. I knew that upon death, I would go home to a heavenly elsewhere community. Bound by the belief that heaven was my final resting place, my first life ushered me through various transformations, or stages of faith as named by that tradition. Within that life, my first home of belonging *turned* on an identity of *a child of the Father God*. My final home of belonging within that life *turned* on an identity of *a precious and passionate woman of God*. I lived each of the identities and homes of belonging with integrity, authenticity, and awe. I did not seek to leave that life. I am grateful to have experienced it.

The following poem recounts my experience of being and becoming within my first life. It covers a time frame of approximately fifty years.

Stanza One

When once asked in an interview,
Who are you?"
I hear myself say,
"I am who I am!"
On leaving the interview,
the words continue to whirl within my mind
"Who are you, who are you?"
"I am who I am"
but "Who am I?"
"How did I get to be who I am?"
I let my mind wander back through time . . . re-viewing my life.

Initially, I am formed by
belonging,
believing without question,
keeping the peace at any cost,
living as part of a "we,"
the "we" of family, culture, religion - all Christian.
I know God.
I know Truth.
Ask me and I will tell you.
I'm not selfish.
I want you to know the Truth too.
The Truth is the Christian God - the Father, the Son, the Spirit

Living life is simple.
Read the Bible,
live as Jesus did,
convert others into the Kingdom.
The demarcation lines are clear.
We Christians are in,
all others are out.
Thank God, I'm in.

Within this home of belonging
I am who I am.
I am a child of the Christian God.
My lived experience and identity are unwittingly named,
nay embedded in my cultural context of Christianity.
And yes, life is simple
Yet, there is no real depth of relationship,
not with myself, not with others, not with God.

Stanza two

A door opens . . .
I know not where it leads
yet, I feel beckoned on.
I step through the doorway.
I begin a theological degree.
I enter into a world of ideas,
philosophy, history, theology, biblical studies.
My world grows so much bigger.
So exciting!

Initially, the door stays open and
I travel back and forth between
this world of ideas about Truth

and my faith community's construct of God as Father.
Then, I feel a gulf between my "I" and the "we."
A chasm opens up,
a discord in the chord of belonging.
I journey through this world of ideas,
until one fateful day
I wake to the horror
God is dead!
God as Father, Father God as Truth is dead.
The only God I know is dead.
A chill runs through my being.

The door now slams shut with a violence.
I am locked out.
I no longer belong.
I am no longer simple, neat, compliant.
I am no longer a dutiful member of the exclusive club.
"Good riddance," I scream.
"I don't want you either!"
I'm hurt. I'm angry.
First at them,
then at God.
How could you do this to me?
I gave my life to you!
The wounding goes deep.

I turn the anger in on myself.
I feel embarrassed.
How could I be so naive, so stupid?
I make a promise to myself.
Never, never again will I be so gullible.
My heart will only give itself to what my mind gives assent
I will have an intellectual faith.
There is a drivenness to know more, more, more.

Within this home of belonging
I am who I am.
I am because I think, because I question.
I use my head to protect my heart.

Stanza three

Another door opens and I step through.
I feel myself fall . . .
falling deeper, faster, down, down, down into darkness.
I land with a thud
on the cold, damp, rocky floor
of the dark abyss of meaninglessness.
I feel abandoned.
I lay alone, in foetal position, in the darkness.
Who am I, if not a child of the Father God?
Who am I, if not a part of the community of faith?
I cannot go back,
Yet, I have no way of moving on.
I am trapped in the abyss.

Society is no help, they also are trapped,
trapped in post-modernity.
There is no framework *of being* from which *to become*.

I am meant to be a social being
yet, I need a "self" to be social.
In this post-modern era,
Who is anyone?
What is anyone?
Is there a God?
Is there an "I" to be represented,
or, only a reflection, of a reflection, of a reflection . . .
Am I just a character in a play?
Today I will play a mother
or, perhaps a sister, a lover,
a daughter, a student.
So many perspectives.
Yet there is a hollowness to them.

Who will I choose to be today?
How will I decide?
What criteria do I use?
How do I construct meaning
in a world that is just perspectives?
How do I choose what I will live for, what I will die for?
How can I be part of a collective "we"?
What is truth? What is reality?
Is the communal quest irrelevant?

This loss of self leaves a sense of annihilation.
The void of nothingness would be too much to bear
if it were not for a faint cry within
"Life is more than theatre."
"Life has meaning."
The invitation of *becoming* is heard.
My eyes become accustomed to the darkness of the abyss.
I perceive a way forward.
Ironically the way forward
is to stay still, stay silent.
And within the silence of the Abyss
I find rest within myself.
Within the silence
I encounter God as Presence.
Such Presence cannot be named
It can only be experienced
as "deep calling unto deep." (Psalm 42:7 NRSV)
I sense I am once again coming home to myself.
No longer a child of the Father-God image.
I am a maturing woman.

Within this home of belonging
I am who I am.
I am a precious and passionate woman of God
who breathes within the breath of
Participating Presence of Love.
Now there is light within the Abyss.
I see that I am not alone, as I had thought.
There are signs of many others who have been in this place.

Stanza four

Another door opens . . .
I don't hesitate,

I dance through.
If God as Presence is in the Abyss,
Then that Presence is everywhere.

The interior journey continues.
Continues as one individual,
in the company of many individuals,
all with an experience of the reality of God
all living deeply from their faith tradition,
while holding it open-handedly.
Individuals, listening to each other,
sharing their faith stories,
sharing their perceptions,
no perception privileged over another,
no perception more true,
each being deepened by the other
in authentic encounter.

Within this home of belonging
I am who I am.
I walk in Love with unprotected heart.

The invitation continues . . .
to embrace the ongoing dance of being and becoming.

My second life

My second life took me into a new and strange inner landscape. The *knock at the door* took the form of the question: "What does it mean to be human in an evolving universe?" Once the question surfaced within my awareness it would not be easily placated. So, I chose to allow the question to work its way through me. I was taken on another spiritual



artwork gifted to me by the late Patricia Fraser

adventure that took approximately sixteen years to reach completion. For more on my movement through the new landscape see my website page: [Resources / The land I now inhabit](#).

I had expected the spiritual adventure to stay within the boundary of my religious tradition, as it does for many people. Imagine my surprise when after many years of inner exploration, I awoke one day and found that I had moved into yet another home of belonging, a home beyond the boundary of god images and a particular religious structure. At first, I felt despair that my home no longer stood within a familiar landscape. And yet, my interior travels during my first life had taught me to trust the process. So, even though I was surprised and somewhat anxious I chose to explore this new home further and find a language that gave it context.

The setting: evolutionary spirituality

The setting for the exploration was evolutionary spirituality, contextualised by a systems view of evolutionary history. A *system*, according to biologist Daniel Christian Wahl, "Is less of a thing and more of a pattern of relationships and interactions" (*Designing Regenerative Cultures*). Drawing from a systems view, evolutionary spirituality has been described in the following manner: "An integral way of thinking and being in the world grounded in a personal, meaningful experience of the epic of evolution as one's own creation myth, or cosmological sacred story" (Wikia.com). *Integral* here means that each element is necessary and included within the whole. Evolutionary spirituality has enabled me to locate my new home of belonging within a greater Story of Life itself that resonates with both my mind and my heart. My new home is now located within Life's vast, creative dance of being and becoming.

Why is this change of setting important for my spiritual exploration? Because an authentic home of belonging *turns* on current knowledge and beliefs regarding the nature of reality and the origins of the world we inhabit. In Western societies, there has been a shift from viewing the nature of reality as a clock-like machine to that of organic systems within systems. A systems view has given rise to a principle of inter-connectedness via unity with diversity. The origins of the world we inhabit is commonly known to be an event that occurred approximately 13.8 billion years ago. A systems view of evolutionary history grounds my engagement with the dance.

Meaning-making tradition: the human tradition

My meaning-making tradition in this second life is the human tradition. The human tradition takes into account human history as a whole including secular, religious, and First Nations meaning-making traditions. As such, it draws from the rich tapestry of universal wisdom, values, and myths accumulated across time from ancient civilisations until the present. As well as considering previous understandings, the human tradition transcends those that no longer resonate in the present context. The human tradition offers a new framework for giving meaning to my living and my dying, a framework beyond a particular religious tradition.

In addition to a setting of evolutionary spirituality and the human tradition, the Buddhist teaching of impermanence permeated that part of my inner adventure.

My new home of belonging

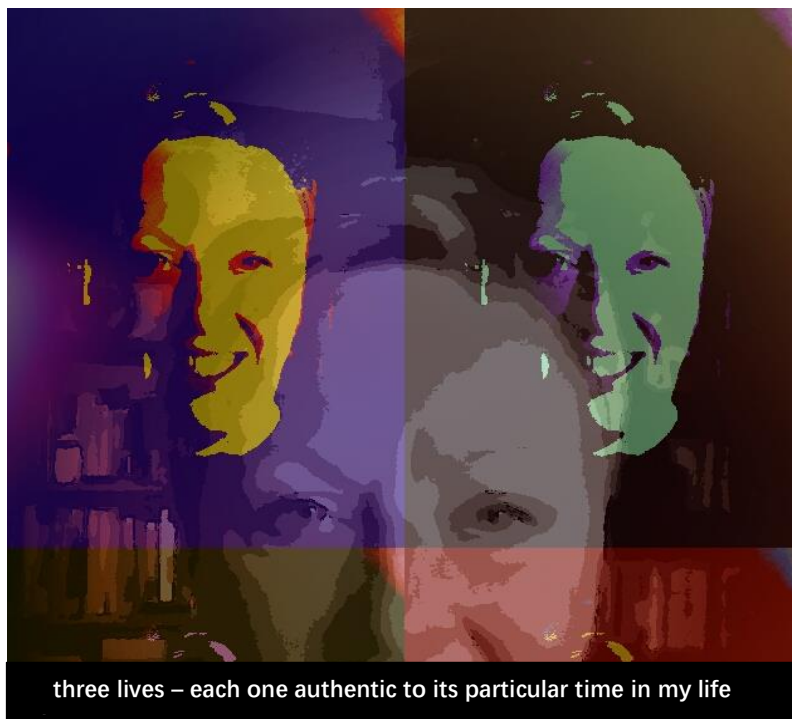
My new home of belonging comprises the following understandings: Earth is the place I call home. I seek no life beyond this one. I choose to fully live my humanity within the knowledge that while I am no more or no less than any other species on Earth, I am required to take my place within the whole. My meaning-making tradition is the human tradition. My inner-orientating reference point is the principle of interconnectedness via unity with diversity. I know myself to be a unique woman in my own right seeking personal realisation, who is also intrinsically connected and responsive to a much wider web of relationships - both human and non-human. As a result, I stand in my own ground, open-heartedly.

Within this home of belonging, I experience spiritual wellbeing in the form of inner freedom through personal wholeness, and authentic communal connection and responsiveness. My daily life is animated by joyful humility and reverence for the mystery of participating in Life's ongoing creative dance of being and becoming. I once again experience integrity, authenticity, and awe.

My third life

I once again experienced an unsettling inner nigggle which I recognised as a *knock at the door* of my home of belonging. "Enough already!" I cried. "Can't I stay in my beautiful new home a little longer?" Yet, I knew and trusted the process of the dance so I somewhat reluctantly chose to remain open to where it could lead now. Rather than another home of belonging, the transformation related to my outer world. The dance was calling me to figuratively *face outward rather than inward*.

In line with facing outward, my third life involves a shift in purpose. Author Charles Eisenstein defined purpose as "roles, functions, and relationships in our world." (*The Ascent of Humanity: Civilization and the Human Sense of Self*). A transformation of purpose stands to reason at this point in my dance of being and becoming. Why? Because our experience of identity determines our purpose in the world. My second life shift in identity is naturally restructuring my purpose in my world. Thus, my third life shift in purpose is a natural outworking of my second life.



three lives – each one authentic to its particular time in my life

photo by Kaye Twining

The following is an example of my shift in purpose. Within my first life, my purpose centred on personal salvation through faithfully serving a Western, Protestant Christian God-image within the context of a local church. Now in my third life, my purpose picks up the late Mahatma Gandhi's challenge to *be the change we want to see in the world*. The shift is from a personal quest for salvation to personally responding to the communal quest of seeking an equitable world for all. In line

with such a shift in purpose, the focus of my work in the field of spiritual practice education has shifted from personal spirituality to collective spirituality. Collective spirituality involves lifting the Western cultural gaze beyond individualism toward interconnectedness via unity with diversity.

Concluding remarks

The dance of being and becoming has guided me through a spiritual adventure of finding my home of belonging again and again. The dance was not divorced from my daily life. It was the ups and downs of daily life that raised questions for me to follow. Allowing the questions to work their way through to completion enabled transformative shifts to enter my awareness. So, the dance was shaped by my daily life, even as my life was being shaped by the dance. In this way, the dance both drew from and flowed back into daily life.

Various transformative shifts were incremental and therefore simply expanded a beautiful home. Some of the shifts, however, broke open a home, leaving me with inner disorientation and a crisis of meaning. At such times the dance guided me into a new home of belonging. My latest home of belonging has also restructured my sense of purpose in the world. Even though I have lived through numerous homes of belonging, who I know myself to be today is no more real, nor more authentic than who I knew myself to be in my first life. Each life is authentic to its particular time in my life.

My engagement with the dance has not been all sweetness and light. The dance has guided me through peaks of mystical experience and depths of darkness, with many twists and turns in between. Furthermore, at this time I have no outer home of belonging; I have no meaning-making community that celebrates and ritualises my current inner home. I long for such a community. And yet, I would not have my life any other way. I am extremely grateful that the dance has enabled me to live with integrity, authenticity, and awe at any given time in my life. I have fully lived.

Section 2: Insights I have gleaned

This section shares a collection of insights gleaned from my experience and research into the nature of the dance of being and becoming. The insights are responses to the following questions: What is the nature of dance? What is the intention? Does the dance focus on being or becoming? Is identity a problem or a solution? What is the role of agency and receptivity? What is the role of resilience? What elements comprise our being? What is the role of questions within the process of becoming? Why focus on the dance when our world is in crisis? And finally, is our era calling Western societies into the dance?

Insight 1. The dance is spiritual in nature.

The dance of being and becoming guides each one of us on a spiritual adventure of finding our home of belonging again and again. Engaging in the dance is the sacred work of being human. Within this context, spiritual wellbeing comprises a visceral experience of connection within the three interrelated dimensions of human consciousness, that is, within our skin; with others; and within a greater Story of Life that gives meaning to our living and our dying. When we experience connection within these three dimensions, our daily lives are animated by inner freedom and personal wholeness; authentic communal connection and responsiveness; and joyful humility, reverence, and awe.

The sacred work may take shape within one of the world's formal meaning-making (religious/spiritual) traditions, but not necessarily so. For example: the dance initially guided me through numerous homes of belonging within a Western Protestant Christian tradition. Then in my second life, the dance guided me toward a home set within the wider human tradition.

Insight 2. The intention is to fully live our humanity.

The spiritual nature of the dance is ever-constant, yet the intention and practice are not. What is the intention of the dance in today's world? According to spiritual teacher and psychotherapist, Loch Kelly, spirituality has shifted from a focus on transcending the human condition to a focus on "living a fully intimate human life" (*Shift into Freedom: The Science and Practice of Open-Heartedness Awareness*). Therefore, the intention of the dance has shifted from seeking a home of belonging on a plane of existence where the joys, angers, and sorrows of daily life no longer affect our lives. The intention now is to fully embrace our humanity with all its strengths and limitations. Consequently, the dance now guides us to a home of belonging within our lives.

Insight 3. The focus is neither being nor becoming, but an authentic home of belonging, at any given time.

The focus of the dance is neither being nor becoming. The focus is an authentic home of belonging at any given time. Why an authentic home? Without belonging we experience inner disorientation and even a crisis of meaning because we no longer know who we are, why we are here, or how we are to live. Without a home of belonging in our lives, we are tossed and turned by the shifting tides of life. With the focus on an authentic home of belonging, the rhythm of the dance is such that we embrace our **being** when it comprises a *beautiful home* of authentic identity, purpose, and values. We embrace our **becoming** when transformative shifts *knock at our door*.

While the longing to belong is an ever-constant melody drawing us toward an authentic life, the experience of belonging is not a constant. Therefore, at particular turning points in our lives, we are required to begin again, and taking into account our personal history thus far we are

to repose our spiritual questions within the light of our current lived experience; knowledge, and beliefs. Questions such as, “Where did I come from?” “What becomes of me when I die?” “Why is there good and evil in the world?” “Is there a god/s?” “What is my purpose?” “What are my values?” “What is the source of love?” “What does it mean to be human in an evolving universe?” The responses we each discover generate a unified belief system that enables us to expand our current home of belonging or transition to a new home.

Insight 4. The dance requires an identity that is held lightly.

This insight relates particularly to my exploration of the Buddhist teaching on impermanence set within the question, “Is identity a problem or a solution?” My exploration commenced with an understanding that impermanence equated to the spiritual intention of surrendering the ego and embracing egolessness. Surrender meant figuratively *beating the ego into submission* through self-denial. Within that construct ego and egolessness were viewed as dualistic opposites. Ego, aka identity, was not simply a problem, but the problem!

As the question of impermanence VS identity continued to work its way through me, I came to understand that the dance guides us beyond ego-identification rather than beyond ego itself. Within such an understanding I experienced the both/and paradox that we need to be able to name and claim our identity but also hold it lightly. The reason is that without an identity, we do not know who we are, why we are here, or how we are to live. Without an identity, we flounder rather than flourish in life. At the same time, we each hold our identity lightly in the knowledge that our identity is an ongoing process of being and becoming rather than a fixed entity. Spiritual teacher and author, Adyashanti, named this both/and process as, “the not self Self.” (*Emptiness Dancing*). My naming is *standing in my own ground, open-heartedly*.

Insight 5: The dance requires both agency and receptivity.

We can neither force, control, pre-empt, nor manipulate where the dance will guide us. We simply follow its lead. So even though we consciously choose to participate, we do so with the knowledge that we undertake the adventure without knowing the destination. What is the role of personal agency and receptivity within such a process? **Agency** involves the qualities of embrace and surrender. In contrast to the understanding of embrace and surrender in Insight 4, embrace here refers to choosing to undertake the sacred work of naming and claiming our current experience of identity, purpose, and values. Surrender involves choosing to relinquish attachment to a fixed identity.

Receptivity, on the other hand, involves remaining open to notice, allow, and explore transformative shifts when they *knock at our door*. Certain shifts are incremental and can be likened to expanding our home of belonging by adding a new room. At pivotal moments in our lives,

however, when particular life circumstances have cut deep and broken open our current home, the shifts reframe or restructure our entire experience of *home*. Examples of restructuring my home of belonging were the shift from a child of the Father God to a precious and passionate woman of God, then to standing in my own ground, open-heartedly.

Insight 6. Resilience sustains us in the dance.

What is resilience? Resilience is the ability to survive, adapt, and flourish in response to major disruption. Does everyone have resilience? In her book *Resilience*, the late Anne Deveson reported that researchers initially thought resilience was a quality or trait that some people possessed while others did not. They were wrong. Their research found that the human spirit was comprised of an innate self-righting life force. As a result, we each have this innate tendency for self-righting. The self-righting tendency can be experienced in two distinct ways. The first and better-known way is like springing back into shape. The second and lesser-known way is like an inner compass.

Springing back into shape

The dictionary defines the term resilience as the ability to *spring or bounce back into shape*. Such an understanding implies elasticity. It also implies



the ability to spring back to the same shape. One example of springing back into the same shape is that of the slinky, a child's toy. A slinky is a long spring that

can be pulled out to its full length and when let go it will spring back into its former shape. In a similar manner to the slinky, when the dance of being and becoming *knocks at the door*, a home of belonging may be stretched and then spring back into a similar shape.

An inner compass

There can be pivotal moments in the dance when we cannot spring back into the same shape. Life circumstances press down upon us in such a way



that our home of belonging can no longer absorb the shock and remain intact. Our home breaks open. We experience inner disorientation or the abyss of meaninglessness. At such times the innate self-righting life force of resilience is like an inner compass pointing us toward a new home of belonging. An example of this experience of

resilience was in my first life when I was figuratively *lying in the abyss of meaninglessness*, and I heard the faint inner whisper, "Life is more than theatre." "Life has meaning." That moment heralded an internal shift from a dire loss of hope, to a sense of possibility, grounded in reality.

Insight 7. Our *being* comprises both form and formlessness.

Our experience of *being* comprises both form and formlessness. Our **form** includes both our body/mind and our current experience of identity. Our identity is shaped by ongoing lived experience as well as the norms and beliefs of our family, local community, culture, and meaning-making tradition. **Formlessness** refers to the source or ground of all being,

which according to author Jason Gregory is like an “eternal centre around which all life orbits which has such a rapid vibration that it appears as rest” (*The Science and Practice of Humility*). The formless eternal centre transcends all forms yet at the same time is inseparable from them. As such, personal being and the ground of all being are not one, but neither are they two. For this reason, Adyashanti advised: “Ultimately the idea isn’t to go from identification with form to identification with formlessness” (*Emptiness Dancing*). The idea is to embrace both form and formlessness.

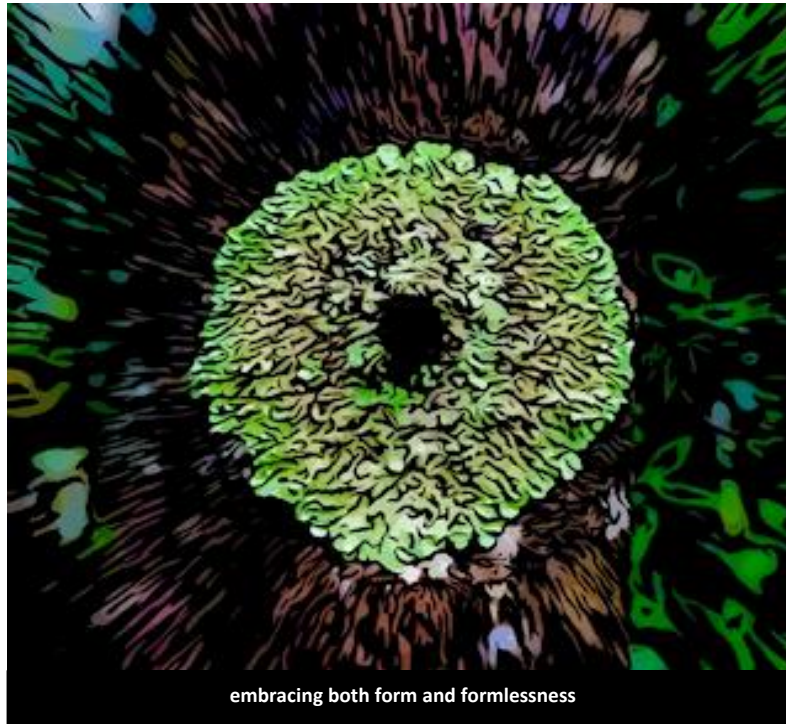


photo by Kaye Twining

To be able to embrace both form and formlessness, a further explanation of the nature of formlessness might be helpful. Rather than an empty void, the formless ground of all being is more like an untamed wilderness comprising the creative energies of faith, hope, love, and wisdom. **Faith** here refers to the human drive and ability to give meaning to our living and our dying. **Hope** refers to the possibility of both inner and outer transformation, grounded in reality. **Love** refers to an ever-deepening experience of connection with self, with others, and with Life itself. **Wisdom** refers to the rich tapestry of universal spiritual teachings that have accumulated within human experience from ancient times until the present.

In light of the above paragraph, formlessness is not a stage of awareness to be mastered by spiritual practice. Rather, in the words of author Anne Hillman it is like a “primordial whisper” (*Awakening the Energies of Love*) within the deeper rhythms of Life itself calling us to seek and find a home of belonging. Once formlessness has been experienced, we can then live in our world of form animated by the creative energies of formlessness. A similar understanding is picked up in the Buddhist teaching: before enlightenment wash dishes and peel potatoes, after enlightenment wash dishes and peel potatoes. So, personal *being* emanates from and is rooted in the formless ground of all being.

Insight 8. Open-ended questions light the way.

The process of *becoming* is known to follow a pathless path. Therefore, we cannot see the path ahead. We can simply see where the path has led as we reflect on our lives. If we cannot see the path ahead, how do we find our way? Open-ended questions light the way. Open-ended questions allow the light of transformative shifts to shine through into our awareness. What is the source of pertinent questions? Spiritual questions (see Insight 3.) naturally emerge within us in response to the highs and lows of our ongoing lived experience.

If we allow our questions to work their way through to completion with an attitude of patience, rational curiosity, and an openness to where the process is guiding, we will continue to grow in authentic self-knowledge. If, on the other hand, we suppress our questions, or engage with them with an attitude of probing, dissecting, or analysing, the process of *becoming* will be thwarted. For more on the practice of allowing open-ended questions to light the way see my webpage: [Contemplative practices / Contemplative self enquiry](#).

Insight 9. Our world requires deep change from the inside . . . out.

We live in turbulent times. The global social, economic, and climate conditions are demanding deep change in the cultural structures that shape the way we each live in our world. So why focus on being and becoming rather than the structures? Author Margaret J. Wheatley argued, "Nothing changes in life without a change in identity" (*So Far from Home: lost and found in our brave new world*). Our cultural identity is the centre-point for deep structural change because our cultural identity determines our collective purpose. In turn, our collective purpose determines our collective values system. Our collective values system shapes cultural structures. As a result, cultural structures are conditioned by our cultural identity. No significant structural change can take place without a transformation of our cultural identity.

Presently our Western cultural identity *turns* on individualism. Individualism views each individual as a solid, separate identity. Such an identity gives rise to a values system that seeks the flourishing of the individual over and above all else. In turn, Western societies act in the world in ways that shore up individual lives. Individualism has run its course of usefulness and is now contributing to the current global crisis. As such, individualism can no longer shape our cultural home of belonging. An authentic home must resonate with and respond to the needs of the wider world. Therefore, Western societies are being called into the dance of being and becoming; called toward a collective transformation from the inside . . . out.

The good news is that the collective transformation can be orientated around the principle of interconnectedness via unity with diversity. The new principle will in effect shift the cultural identity from one of self VS life (individualism) to self-in-life (interconnectedness). The new cultural

identity will naturally give rise to a collective values system that seeks the flourishing of all life. With a new identity and values system Western societies will be able to respond to global challenges with wisdom and integrity.

Insight 10: Western societies are experiencing a new spiritual arc.

Cultural worldviews continue to evolve in response to ongoing lived experience, knowledge, and beliefs. The shift within the Western worldview has been from a religious to a secular, then to a post-secular worldview. Within the religious worldview, a religious tradition was foundational to political, social, and cultural discourse. The shift to a secular worldview saw religion “relegated to the sphere of private belief.” (Clayton Crockett: *What is postsecularism?*) As a result, religion was no longer the foundation nor even welcome in public discourse. The shift from a religious to a secular worldview divested the institutional church of its power within the public sphere.

Within today's post-secular worldview, the shift is toward both secular and religious/spiritual belief systems being welcome within public discourse. In this regard, Crockett argued that without “investing power in the institutional church,” a post-secular worldview brings “back the religious and spiritual traditions into conversation with secular meaning-making belief systems.” The shift in worldview is ushering in a new cultural spiritual arc whereby each secular, religious, and First Nations meaning-making tradition will be both welcome and required to take its place in public dialogue in the knowledge that each tradition is unique and valued in its own right, yet each is also intrinsically interconnected and responsive to the values system of the wider society.

Section 3. Engaging in the dance of being and becoming



*Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am . . . the truths I embody, and what values I represent. Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak**

photo by Andrew Twining

The Introduction to this paper touched upon the moment that initiated my spiritual adventure. In effect, I was following Parker Palmer's advice (see the quotation above) to listen to my life tell me who I was, what truths I embodied, and what values I represented. That was the moment I began to engage with the dance of being and becoming.

We cannot plot a course in the GPS for our engagement with the dance. Thus, we undertake the sacred work without knowing the destination. We can, however, see where the dance has taken us as we reflect on our lives. The following practice enables us to reflect on our lives and notice where we are situated in the rhythm of the dance. When we know where we are situated, we can then respond accordingly. Because the practice is reflective in tone it requires an attitude of rational curiosity, patience, non-judgmental open-ended questions, self-compassion, deep listening, and the qualities of agency and receptivity.

Stilling exercise

Spend time with a stilling exercise that enables you to drop beneath your socially constructed mindset to the place where you perceive the primordial whisper inviting you toward authentic self-discovery.

Practice: Still your socially constructed mind in whatever way is appropriate for you, e.g. meditation, centering prayer, listening to music, walking, yoga, sitting under a tree, knitting . . .

Reflective practice

Engaging with the dance involves recognising where you are in its overall rhythm and responding accordingly. The rhythm of the dance broadly falls into the following three categories:

1. Your home of belonging is congruent with your current lived experience, knowledge, and beliefs. You know who you are, why you are here, and how you are to live. You experience inner freedom and personal wholeness; authentic community connection; and a greater Story of Life itself that resonates with your mind and heart. Your daily life is animated by joyful humility, awe, and reverence. Such a beautiful home may expand in response to changes in your inner world and outer environment, but it generally keeps a similar shape and appearance.

Spiritual practice involves an ever-deepening embrace of your current belief system, rituals, and spiritual practices.

2. Cracks are appearing in your home of belonging. Perhaps some new life experience is clashing with a long-held belief giving rise to a certain disharmony within your experience of *being*. If cracks are denied, fought against, or simply patched up, your home is in danger of becoming like a prison.

Spiritual practice involves:

Deep Listening. Any practice that stills your mind and prepares you to listen deeply. Deep listening, according to activist-scholar, Bob Stilger PhD, enables us to tune into “a field beyond all names where wisdom and insight live, ready to come to us when welcomed in.” (*AfterNow: When We Cannot See the Future, Where Do We Begin?*)

Spiritual exploration. Engage in spiritual exploration by tenderly and

nonjudgmentally posing open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allow the light of transformative shifts to shine through the cracks and break into our awareness. An initial question could be, "I wonder if I am being invited to surrender an attachment to a particular assumption or belief regarding my identity?" Pose the question, but do not seek to force or manufacture a response. Wait for a response to arise and figuratively *try it on to see how it fits*. If no discernible response arises initially, do not worry. Simply pose the question and let it work its way through you to completion as you go about your daily life.

Because this process can take time, even years, it can be helpful to record your responses along the way in a journal. For more on the reflective practice of self-discovery see my webpage: [Contemplative practices / Contemplative self enquiry](#).

3. Your home is severely disrupted, or even broken open. You are experiencing inner disorientation or a crisis of meaning. This is not a time for either surrender or embrace. This is a time for body/mind self-care, then slowly and gently engaging in the process of renaming and reclaiming your new home of belonging.

Spiritual practice involves:

Naming the time as a crisis. Naming this time as a crisis can set an internal switch that allows you to employ self-care.

Surviving the crisis. Crisis periods do not call for toughing it out or performing heroics in either your outer world or inner landscape. Rather crisis periods call for self-compassion as you do what is required to be done and no more. The task is to survive the time of crisis.

Start with your body. When experiencing a crisis your body may well react by engaging its inner fight/flight/freeze response. Or, you may experience a constant feeling of being on guard, with your body holding tremendous tension. Body relaxation or some bodily exercise can be helpful. Practices range from tensing then relaxing a body part; belly breathing; breathing in deeply and on the out-breath saying Ahh; having a massage or reiki session; any form of physical movement you can muster the energy for including walking, running, gardening, yoga, ta chi, swimming, or socking a boxing bag.

Conscious grieving. The shock of losing your home of belonging may leave you feeling like *the wind has been knocked out of your sails* so to speak. The practice of conscious grieving can be beneficial. Conscious grieving is a life-affirming spiritual practice that enables you to come to terms with what has happened. Then your gaze can be lifted toward new possibilities. For more on the practice of conscious grieving see my website page: [Resources / The gentle art of conscious grieving](#).

Rest in Stillness. When you are ready, engaging in a practice that enables you to experience the self-righting inner compass of resilience can be helpful. Practices include: mindfulness, sitting meditation, walking meditation, centering prayer, listening to music, sitting in nature . . .

Recalling and recording your experience of the dance so far.

A shift in your felt-experience and demeanour may signal you are ready to gently commence exploring a new home of belonging. If so, begin by recalling and recording your experience of your dance of being and becoming up to this time. Recording may take the form of prose, poetry, visual arts, or whatever way helps you to *let your life speak* to you,

In summary, as we engage in this reflective practice, we are not seeking to find a balance between being and becoming, agency and receptivity, or embrace and surrender. Rather we are seeking to recognise where we are within the rhythm of the dance and respond accordingly.



photo by Kaye Twining

*embrace the dance
of being and becoming*