

Spiritual mentoring



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Note: metaphors have been italicized for ease of recognition.

Introduction

Is this era calling forth a new model of spiritual mentoring?

Western culture is undergoing yet another transition in terms of its Story of meaning making. Whilst broad themes of a new cultural Story are now emerging, there is no longer a functional dominant narrative, or belief system, from which to source personal and collective identity, values, purpose, and the experience of belonging. For many, this time of cultural transition has given rise to an experience of inner disorientation in terms of meaning making. Also, many are experiencing a loss of connection and belonging in their world. Therefore, as with previous cultural transitions, this one is impacting many people in significant ways.

In response to the loss of a cultural Story, we are each required to discern our own internal source for meaning making and the experience of belonging. *Belonging* here refers to an ever deepening experience of connection in the three interrelated dimensions of: 1. the intrapersonal - within our own selves, 2. the interpersonal - within community, and 3. the transpersonal - that which animates our being, beyond personal identity. To discern our own internal source we are required to name and claim our own personal Story of meaning. We name our Story by way of reposing our spiritual questions within the light of our current knowledge and lived experience, and discerning coherent responses. And yet, it is possible to get stuck, or lost in the questions. How can we explore our spiritual questions without sinking further into the pit of confusion and meaninglessness? Spiritual mentoring is an effective practice for such a venture. Why? Because the intention of the spiritual practice is for mentorees to consciously express, explore, discern, integrate, and celebrate their own responses to their spiritual questions. As a result, mentorees can discover their own Story of meaning.



Photo by Kaye Twining

At this time many people will choose to repose their spiritual questions within the context of a world religious tradition. Therefore, they will seek out models of spiritual mentoring which are framed by an existing religious or spiritual tradition. Nevertheless, a growing number of people, myself included, no longer experience meaning and belonging within a religious tradition. One example of such a cultural shift is that in the 2016 Australian Census, 30 percent of people ticked the 'no religion' box.

Many who ticked that box know what they *do not* believe. And yet, many are unsure as to what they actually do believe. How and where can they engage in a spiritual practice which enables them to explore their spiritual questions? In response, is our era calling forth yet another model of spiritual mentoring specifically intended for individuals seeking a new personal Story beyond an existing religious/spiritual context?

The reason for writing

I write this paper as one who became an accredited spiritual mentor in 2003. The context for the training was a western Christian religious tradition. As such, the focus of the practice was an ever deepening relationship with God/Jesus/Spirit and the experience of belonging within a Christian faith community. Since that time I have continued in my own inner explorations and now find that my Story of meaning no longer sits within a western Christian religious tradition. In this way, I am one of the growing number of people within western societies who no longer profess a religious affiliation and no longer seek a relationship with a God. As such, I am living into a new personal Story of meaning beyond god or religion. Whilst my inner journey into a new Story is particular to me, I am travelling *the way* with many others.

Note: For more on my journey see: [www.treeoflife.org.au/Resources/The land I now inhabit](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/Resources/The%20land%20I%20now%20inhabit).

Living into a new personal Story has given rise to a number of questions regarding the practice of spiritual mentoring. Questions like: "Does spiritual mentoring have a role outside a religious framework?" If so: "What would be the overarching principle, if not a religious faith tradition?" And: "What would be the inner guiding reference point, if not a deepening relationship with God?" Furthermore: "What would be the underlying transformative question, if not: "Who/what/where/how is God in this?" Also: "If spiritual mentoring is taken out of a religious context, how may it be distinguished from the discipline of counselling?" In response to those questions, I write to outline my thinking on the topic of a new model of spiritual mentoring.

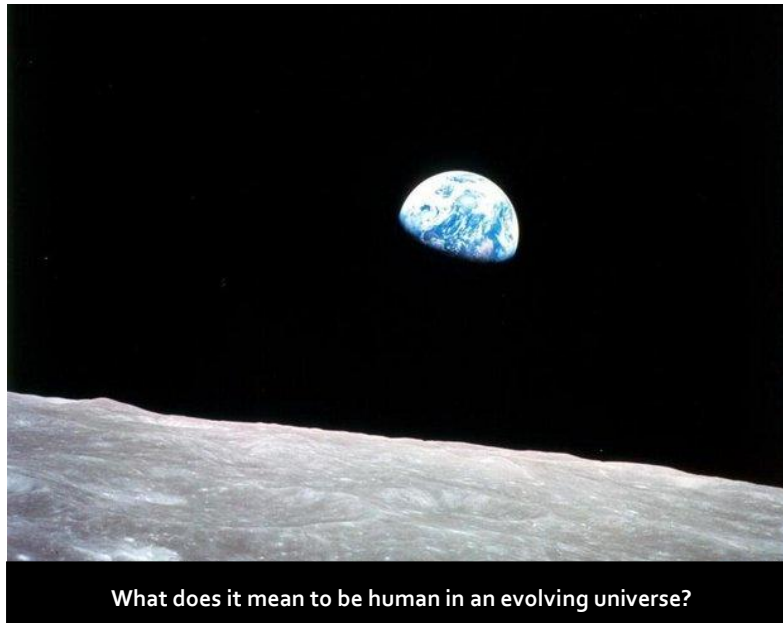
This paper outlines my personal reflections. Therefore it is not offered as a standardized formula for a new model of spiritual mentoring. It is simply one spiritual mentor's exploration of the questions. I choose to offer my thoughts within the wider public arena for the purpose of demystifying spiritual mentoring, whilst also explaining the significance of the practice. Also, it is my hope that this paper may continue to generate conversation within the wider spiritual direction community regarding the rationale and implications of such a new model.

What is spiritual mentoring?

An overview

Spiritual mentoring is an ancient practice which has been reclaimed for today. In its reclaimed form, the practice enables mentorees to undertake their own interior journey of exploring their spiritual questions in relation to meaning and belonging, within the presence of a trained and trusted mentor. Personal spiritual questions sit within the time honoured general themes of: "Where did we come from?" "What is our purpose?" "Is there a god/s?" "Are we enough?" "What is the nature of love?" "What becomes

of us when we die?" Also in each era of human history there are time specific spiritual questions. Within a western cultural context one such question has been: "What does it mean to be human in an evolving universe?" The next question may be: "What does it mean to be human in an artificially intelligent world?" As each mentoree explores their own questions and discerns their own responses, they articulate their own Story of meaning from which to source their experience of identity, values, purpose, and belonging. In so doing they can celebrate their own growing awareness of their Self-in-the-world.



What does it mean to be human in an evolving universe?

Photo by Apollo 8 moon mission

Even though spiritual mentoring focuses on Self awareness in the form of a coherent Story of meaning, the intention of such inner exploration reaches beyond a privatized experience of personal wholeness. A mentoree's Story of meaning also shapes how they will live in their world. Therefore, Self awareness not only gives rise to a mentoree's experience of genuine Selfhood, it also determines their values system, which in turn, shapes the way they live within, and act upon, their world. As a result, the practice of spiritual mentoring generates both the experience of personal wholeness, and authentic communal connection and response-ability. In this way, spiritual mentoring draws from, and flows back into daily life. For this reason, the practice aligns somewhat with the challenge of Mahatma Gandhi to continue: "being the change we want to see in the world."

As a spiritual practice which enables mentorees to discern their Story of meaning, spiritual mentoring offers a transformative process for Self discovery in the form of both Self knowledge, and the experience of belonging in the world. In terms of Self knowledge, spiritual mentoring does not focus on self improvement. Self improvement, according to spiritual mentor and author, Anne Hillman, is like "a change of clothing," in that it is usually limited to making changes to our external conditions and behaviours. Whilst self improvement is helpful in its own right, the practice of Self discovery within spiritual mentoring relates primarily to identity formation. In this way, mentorees contemplatively explore their unique *inner world*.

As mentioned above, Self discovery involves both Self knowledge and the experience of belonging. Why is belonging so important? One aspect of being human is the intrinsic longing to belong. Even in a western

individualistic culture, the desire to belong is fundamental. As such, we know ourselves to be communal creatures. We experience belonging through a coherent Story of meaning, or what author and poet, John O'Donohue, named as: "a shelter of belonging." He also argued that without an internal *shelter of belonging* we can become "a victim and target of our longing." How can our longing to belong make us a victim or a target? Our drive to belong can cloud rational judgements and in turn give rise to feelings, thought patterns, behaviours, and relationships which do not serve us, or our communities, well. Alternatively, we may well seek to numb our intrinsic desire to belong through addictions. Therefore, as a consequence of our intrinsic longing to belong, if we cannot experience belonging in healthy ways, we may well source it through unhealthy ones.

Note: As western culture is experiencing a transition in its Story of meaning, could it be that as a collective we are experiencing something of O'Donohue's *a victim and target of our longing*? Many of our current behaviours would seem to support such a view.

The practice

On a more practical note, spiritual mentoring generally involves a mentoree meeting monthly with a qualified spiritual mentor for about 45-60 minutes. There is usually a small cost involved for the mentoree. There is no set amount of times for a mentor/mentoree to meet together. Whilst the practice is commonly viewed as longer term, sometimes mentorees simply require a few sessions, or even one session, to explore and clarify their response to a particular question. Personally, it took around sixteen years for me to explore and integrate a new Story of meaning. Therefore, there is no set span of time for the practice. Mentors and mentorees meet together for as long or as little as each mentoree requires.

Contemplative in nature and conversational in tone

Spiritual mentoring is both contemplative in nature and conversational in tone. *Contemplative* here encompasses two particular elements. The first element is: relinquishing the desire to control the process of Self discovery, and in so doing, undertaking the venture without knowing the outcome. As a result, the process of Self discovery encompasses an attitude of nonjudgmental curiosity, patience, and being comfortable with the unknown, until it is known. The second element involves: a receptive disposition. A receptive disposition enables mentorees to perceive their inner wisdom's invitation towards personal wholeness and authentic living. *Authentic* here means: each mentoree living in accord with their values system. Within such an understanding of *contemplative*, the process of Self discovery takes the form of contemplative Self enquiry.

Note: for more on the process of listening for inner wisdom's invitation see: [www.treeoflife.org.au/Contemplative practices/Contemplative Self enquiry](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/Contemplative%20practices/Contemplative%20Self%20enquiry).

In line with the contemplative nature, *conversational in tone* here means that a session does not take the form of: pose a question and receive a prescriptive answer. Rather, a conversation involves both listening and responding. Within the spiritual mentoring context, mentors listen to mentorees explorations in a gentle, curious, nonjudgmental manner. Mentors also listen for their own inner wisdom's stirrings concerning responses which might be helpful. In terms of responding, mentors enable each mentoree to hear their own Self more attentively. Then, and only then, mentors may offer specific spiritual practices and/or resources. Therefore, *conversational in tone* takes the form of each mentor

metaphorically *accompanying each mentoree on the mentoree's path of Self discovery* towards the mentoree's own *shelter of belonging*.



contemplative in nature and conversational in tone

Photo by Kaye Twining

Differentiating spiritual mentoring from counselling

One distinguishing marker between spiritual mentoring and counselling is that counselling focuses on specific personal problems, while spiritual mentoring focuses on the natural human desire to give meaning to our living and experience belonging. Therefore, spiritual mentoring focuses on spiritual questions. Even so, because spiritual mentoring draws from and flows back into daily life, specific personal problems will no doubt arise. The specific personal problems will be explored, but will not remain the central focus. For this reason, there may be occasions when mentorees also seek counselling for specific personal problems which emerge through their practice of spiritual mentoring.

Because spiritual mentoring is not a form of counselling, the relationship between mentor/mentoree is not one of therapist/client. On the other hand, the relationship between mentor/mentoree is not one of guru/pupil, where knowledge is transmitted from guru to pupil. Rather, within the practice of spiritual mentoring each session is contemplative in nature and conversational in tone, with the intention of enabling mentorees to name and claim their internal *shelter of belonging* from which to source personal meaning and experience belonging.

A new frame of reference beyond god or religion

Evolutionary spirituality

We each view ourselves-in-Life through a particular frame of reference, or worldview. Our frame of reference both informs and limits our current view. Frames of reference are not static. They continue to change and evolve in response to our ever expanding knowledge and beliefs regarding the workings of the world and the human mind/body. Beyond an existing religious and/or spiritual tradition, one new frame of reference is the emerging field of evolutionary spirituality. 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 part is necessary to, and included within, the whole. An integral way of thinking gives rise to the principle of unity with diversity. Within such a principle we humans recognize ourselves to be both unique beings in our own right who are seeking our own experience of Self realization, and that we are intrinsically connected within, and response-able for, a much larger whole. The new frame of reference of evolutionary spirituality enables people to repose and explore their spiritual questions within the conscious awareness of: 1. that we each are part of a larger whole, and 2. current intellectual knowledge and scientific theories regarding the evolution of the universe.

Note: Even though there are various scientific theories regarding the evolution of the universe, the current dominant Story involves 13.8 billion years of evolutionary history.

Two broad themes within evolutionary spirituality

Evolutionary spirituality does not give rise to specific storylines which all must adhere to. Rather, at this point in time evolutionary spirituality offers broad themes to draw from. Two broad themes within the framework of evolutionary spirituality are: 1. the greater Story of Life, and 2. the human tradition. Such themes offer a new frame of reference with which to view ourselves-in-our-world.

1. The greater Story of Life

The theme of the greater Story of Life addresses our experience of belonging at the transpersonal level, by way of responding to the time-honoured spiritual questions of: "Where did we come from?" and "What is our purpose?" We come from and belong within, a dynamic 13.8 billion year Universe Story, or what futurist and author, Barbara Marx Hubbard named as: "Big History." Within the awareness of a Big History Story, we recognize that Life itself is the principle character and we humans are significant, yet support characters. Within such a view, the human species is recognized as but one unique manifestation of Life itself. Consequently, our purpose is to participate within the awe inspiring, dynamic process of Life itself, which is forever and continually in the making. We participate in Life's wondrous *transformative dance* of both being and becoming. Such an understanding of participation animates our daily lived experience.



participating in Life's *transformative dance* of both being and becoming

artwork adapted by Kaye Twining

Note: It is important to note that numerous theologians are exploring such concepts through the interpretative lens of their religious belief system. At the same time, it is also possible to step beyond such frameworks and, taking into account human history thus far, to start afresh and repose our spiritual questions within the light of the epic of evolution as the creation myth.

The recognition that we participate in the greater Story of Life also gives rise to moral response-ability. Why? Because when we consciously locate ourselves within a Big History Story, we can no longer view ourselves as separate, individual beings. In turn, we can no longer live from a values system geared towards individual rights and the flourishing of the individual alone. Rather, the view that we are each unique beings who participate within the greater Story of Life, gives rise to a values system geared towards the flourishing of all life. Therefore, the theme of the greater Story of Life in-and-of-itself calls forth personal and collective moral response-ability.

Furthermore, within the greater Story of Life is the recognition that the human species is but one species among the wider Earth community. As one species within the whole, we belong. Why do we belong? Simply because within the evolutionary process, conditions were sufficient to bring us into being. The question could be posed: "If we already know that we belong within the whole, why do we continue to experience a longing to belong?" It is one thing to intellectually know that we belong, but quite another to actually experience belonging. Also, the experience of belonging manifests in differing ways, in differing eras of history. Therefore, there is no once-for-all-time experience of belonging for the human community. Each new era of human history calls forth a new experience of belonging.

One metaphor which gives expression to the above understanding of human belonging is: *the sacred work of being human*. The *sacred work of being human* involves attuning ourselves to the Call within each new historical era to discern and take up our place of belonging. Responding to such a Call draws each one of us into an ever deepening experience of connection in the here-and-now, while at the same time continuing to participate in the emergent nature of Life itself.

Note 1: In terms of this current chapter of *the sacred work of being human*, numerous western authors have argued that the Call of our cultural era is to reStory our human place of belonging-with-in-the-whole. Such a Call breaks through and transcends the limitations of individualism which characterized the former Story.

Note 2: for more on *the sacred work of being human* see: www.treeoflife.org.au.

2. The human tradition

In addition to the theme of the greater Story of Life, evolutionary spirituality has given rise to the theme of the human tradition. The human tradition takes into account human history as a whole, including religious and spiritual traditions. Therefore, the human tradition draws from the rich tapestry of wisdom, beliefs, knowledge, values, and myths which have accumulated within the human experience from ancient times until the present. As well as taking into account previous understandings, the human tradition also transcends that which no longer resounds in the present context. In this way, the human tradition offers a new lens for viewing ourselves in our world. Such a lens enables us to locate ourselves

within the wider human community. In turn, we are able to integrate the wisdom of bygone eras, beyond either wholly accepting, or wholly rejecting, the belief systems in which the wisdom teachings originated.

Note: The concept that we live within a global village, which has emerged through the ease of travel and the World Wide Web, has both underpinned the idea of the human tradition, and given people ready access to the rich tapestry of belief systems and spiritual practices within the wider human community, past and present.

In light of the themes of the greater Story of Life and the human tradition, there can be no once-for-all-time Story of meaning. The emergent nature of Life itself continues to call forth new Stories of meaning for the human species. Therefore, human Stories of meaning, purpose, and belonging necessarily change and evolve over time. In certain eras of human history, particular Stories are even broken open. Such is the case in our cultural era. For this reason, it is important that we humans do not fully identify with a particular personal, cultural, or species Story. A Story is simply our interpretation of the facts as we currently understand them. Consequently, a Story is not an end-in-itself. Rather, a Story is the means through which we rationally source personal meaning and belonging at any given time and place in history. So, whilst our Story is our rational source of meaning and belonging, we are not our Story.

One difference between the frames of reference

A difference between former frames of reference and evolutionary spirituality, is that evolutionary spirituality does not seek to transcend the human condition, as most religious and spiritual traditions have done. Neither does it seek salvation in a world beyond this one, nor through the intervention of a divine character. Rather, the world is the place we call home; we belong because we are here; we each experience ourselves as unique beings in our own right, who are also intrinsically connected within and response-able to the greater whole; and within the understanding that the human species continues to change, evolve, and adapt, we are enough. Therefore we can fully embrace our humanity. It is enough to fulfill our potential as human beings-within-the-whole, within any given time and place in history.

In light of the above, evolutionary spirituality breaks through what Buddhist nun, Sharon Salzberg, named as: "the myth of not being enough." Such a myth characterized the former western cultural Story. In contrast, the premise within evolutionary spirituality is: to be human is enough. What would our new Story look like, premised on the understanding that *we are enough*, rather than the myth of *not good enough*? Perhaps we would consciously engage with our chapter of the *sacred work of being human*, and take personal and collective response-ability for the way we live within, and act upon, our world. Perhaps we would listen for and integrate into today's world, ancient wisdom teachings around living within the whole. For example: the 40-60,000 year old wisdom of the first peoples of Australia. Then, perhaps we would once again be able to *walk humbly within the wider Earth community with wisdom and compassion*.

It is no easy task to reStory ourselves. It requires a change in many of our deep seated personal and cultural assumptions. In this regard, I have found Robert E. Quinn's understanding of change to be helpful. He contrasted "incremental change" with "deep change." Quinn argued that

we view incremental change as: "a mechanical process, one that we can control. We think we know what adjustments must be made for the desired result to occur." In terms of reStorying, incremental change is like playing at the outer edges of the Story. In contrast, Quinn argued that deep change: "is fundamentally different because it requires people to develop new expectations. As people experience deep change, they move from their old assumptions to a new set of assumptions." In terms of reStorying, deep change cuts to the heart, or inner orientating reference point. Such change is certainly not mechanical in nature, not can we control the outcome. Our time and place in history requires of us to engage in the task of reStorying through deep change.

Quinn offered a metaphor which may both ground and sustain those who are seeking a new Story through *deep change*. The metaphor is: "building the bridge as we walk on it." *Building the bridge as we walk on it* requires a contemplative approach as mentioned on page 6.

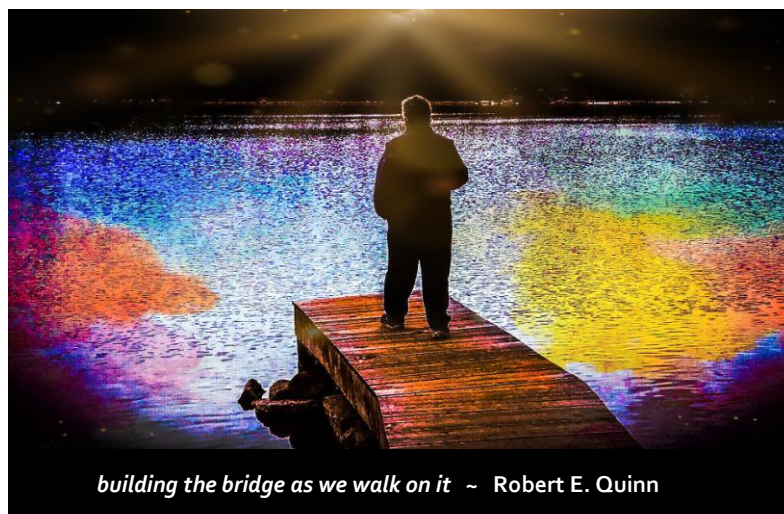


Photo by Kaye Twining

A new model of spiritual mentoring

Within the light of *this chapter of the sacred work of being human*, this section outlines my response to the question of a new model of spiritual mentoring. My response takes into account my former training in the practice of spiritual mentoring; the cultural transition of our era; the shift of some people towards seeking meaning and belonging beyond an existing religious framework; the new frame of reference of evolutionary spirituality, giving rise to the themes of the greater Story of Life, and the human tradition; and the questions regarding spiritual mentoring listed in the Introduction.

My explorations to date have given rise to the understanding that a new model would continue to offer the same transformative process that I have been trained in. Therefore, the new model would continue to be contemplative in nature and conversational in style. Where the new model would diverge from my training would be in the overarching principle, the inner guiding orientation, and the underlying transformative question.

Note: The new overarching principle and inner orientation are not goals to be pursued. They simply shape the overall intention of this model of spiritual mentoring for the mentor.

This section will proceed in the following manner. Firstly I will introduce something of my current understanding of the new overarching principle, the new inner guiding orientation, and the new underlying transformative question. From there I will outline the process of this new model, including the nature of discernment. Finally, I will outline the function of the spiritual mentor.

1. The new overarching principle: *To continue to embrace our humanity fully - within the gentling light of lovingkindness.*

1.1 The gentling light of lovingkindness

The overarching principle for this model of spiritual mentoring is that mentorees continue to embrace their humanity fully, by way of discerning and taking up their own place of belonging-within-the-whole. Mentorees do not undertake such a venture within a vacuum. Intrinsic to the Call to experience belonging is the dynamic life-force of lovingkindness. Loving-kindness is not simply a human emotion. Rather, as Hillman argued, love is "an evolutionary imperative" pulsating within the very heart of Life itself. Therefore, the source of lovingkindness is transpersonal, yet not super-natural. Lovingkindness is woven within the deeper rhythms of Life itself.

Even though lovingkindness does not emanate from humanity, it does call forth sincere, enduring relationships on the three dimensions of human belonging, i.e., the intra/inter/transpersonal. In this way, the dynamic life force of lovingkindness is fundamental to each mentoree embracing their humanity fully. Although lovingkindness is a dynamic power, its force is not experienced in the form of taking control of and/or annihilating our unique experience of Selfhood. Rather, lovingkindness invites each one of us to discern our unique Self-within-the-whole. Yet, we humans do not passively receive lovingkindness. Therefore, to respond to the Call to experience belonging, we are required to consciously choose to allow lovingkindness to become our inner orientating reference point.

When lovingkindness becomes our inner orientation, its powerful energy breaks through and transcends the hard edges of our human conditioning. *Hard edges* here refers to characteristics like: overall self-centredness; justice based on *an eye for an eye*; fears in the many forms of - fear of missing out, fear of the unknown, fear of failure, fear of the other, fear of death; and desires in the form of: greed, i.e., the never ending desire for more, and power and control over ourselves, others, and even Life itself. Such *hard edges* prohibit sincere, enduring relationships. In contrast, lovingkindness calls forth qualities such as: compassion, wisdom, mercy, courage, and forgiveness. Consequently, lovingkindness allows us to consciously break through and transcend our *hard edges*, and in so doing, experience genuine relationships. Therefore, even though lovingkindness is a powerful energy, its effects are experienced within humanity as a gentling of our natural *hard edges*.

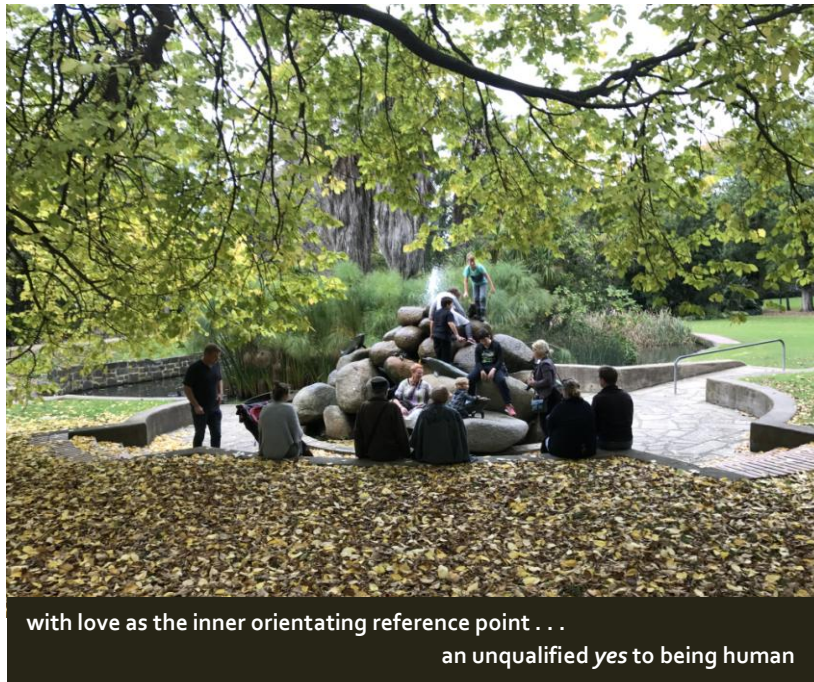
At this juncture it is important to mention that although the dynamic life force of lovingkindness is fundamental to embracing our humanity fully, it is not a cure all. In this regard, the Beatles' song *All We Need Is Love* does not hold true. Yes, lovingkindness does play a fundamental role in the experience of human belonging. At the same time, without a clear sense of identity and purpose sourced through a coherent Story of meaning, it can be nigh impossible to consciously choose and/or receive the gentling light of lovingkindness. Therefore, lovingkindness alone is not enough.

It is both a coherent Story of meaning and lovingkindness which gives rise to the experience of belonging.

Note: for more on Love see: [www.treeoflife.org.au/Resources/Love is . . .](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/Resources/Love%20is...)

1.2 Embracing our humanity fully

Within the awareness of *the gentling light of lovingkindness*, the overarching principle for mentorees involves an unqualified yes to being human. Therefore, mentorees consent to being human with all the attendant strengths and limitations involved, rather than seek to transcend the human condition and live on a plane of existence where the joys, sorrows, desires, fears, and anxieties no longer affect them. Furthermore, in choosing to consent to being human, mentorees are also choosing to take full responsibility for their own beliefs, values, and behaviors. Such an overarching principle can take form in the life of a mentoree in the following manner: the experience of personal wholeness (intrapersonal), authentic communal connection and response-ability (interpersonal), and joyful humility and reverence for the mystery of being human in an emergent universe (transpersonal).



with love as the inner orientating reference point . . .
an unqualified yes to being human

Photo by Andrew Twining

Choosing an unqualified yes to being human involves each mentoree engaging in their own *transformative dance* of being and becoming their unique human manifestation of Life itself. Such a *transformative dance* does not pursue transformation. Rather, the focus is on authentic living in daily life. As mentorees seek to live authentically, transformative shifts will emerge within their view, as and when appropriate. In terms of the movement between being and becoming: *Being* involves living daily life with a clear sense of identity, values, purpose, and belonging. *Becoming* involves transformative shifts which break through and transcend the limitations of each mentoree's current view of Selfhood. Therefore, the *transformative dance* of being and becoming enables each mentoree to embrace fully their current experience of Selfhood, whilst at the same time surrender attachment to a fixed identity.

2. The new inner guiding orientation: *inner freedom in the form of personal wholeness ~ through a stance of Self-in-love.*

In light of the overarching principle of embracing our humanity fully ~ within the gentling light of lovingkindness, the new inner guiding orientation for this model of spiritual mentoring becomes: inner freedom in the form of personal wholeness ~ through a stance of Self-in-love. Self-in-love does not refer to a narcissistic, ego-centred state. Neither does it require a negation of certain parts of ourselves which we have deemed as unacceptable. Rather, drawing from Hillman again, lovingkindness enables us to: "receive the whole of our humanity." In this way, the stance of Self-in-love enables mentorees to receive their present moment experience of their brilliance, their ordinariness, and their not so desirable aspects.

Being able to receive the whole of their humanity, mentorees no longer have to metaphorically *hide from* certain aspects of themselves. In turn, mentorees can feel *safe enough* to step beyond their present moment inner defense mechanisms. Stepping beyond such defense mechanisms, mentorees are then able to recognize and befriend their present moment experience of actual Self. In befriending their actual Self, mentorees are able to experience inner freedom in the form of personal wholeness. So, personal wholeness is not experienced through rejecting any aspect of themselves. Rather, personal wholeness is experienced when mentorees receive, befriend, and explore their messy, confusing, ordinary, brilliant, human existence. Furthermore, befriending their present moment actual Self then enables mentorees to see beyond their actual Self. In turn, transformative shifts are able to emerge within them. Thus, the stance of Self-in-love enables mentorees to befriend their actual Self while at the same time generating Self transcendence. In this way, mentorees are able to experience inner freedom in the form of genuine Selfhood, which is *held lightly*.

Inner freedom relates to a mentoree's experience of Selfhood in the form of personal wholeness. At the same time, inner freedom also relates to mentorees daily living, in the form of the motivation from which to live in accord with their values system. Such a motivation gives rise to a vastly different quality of experience than that of living a values system through a motivation of dutifulness, or following the rules because of fear of punishment. The two latter motivations can give rise to an experience of *inner defensiveness*, unwittingly expressed through: reactionary frustrations, feelings of victimization, anger, bitterness, world weariness, and/or stoically carrying a heavy burden which can ultimately lead to burnout. In contrast, the motivation of inner freedom gives rise to what theologian, Rosemary Haughton, named as: "the undefended Self, freely offered." Therefore, whilst the action might be the same, the quality of experience differs greatly when the motivation stems inner freedom.

3. The underlying transformative question: *What is the mentoree's inner wisdom inviting them to see, or see afresh, at this moment?*

3.1 Inner wisdom

How might inner wisdom be described? The following description draws from the understanding that we are each unique beings who are intrinsically connected within, and response-able for a greater whole. *Inner wisdom* refers to that part of human consciousness which is like an *unobtrusive conduit* between the greater Story of Life and personal identity. In this way, inner wisdom draws from Big History even as it enlightens each unique human being in their own experience of Self

realization. According to Hillman, inner wisdom is like an inner: "primordial whisper." Such a primordial whisper is experienced within each mentoree in the form of: inner stirrings, inklings, and insights which seem to emerge from a mentoree's inner depths. In line with the principle of unity with diversity, inner wisdom's function is not to draw mentorees to the same conclusions regarding meaning and belonging. Rather, inner wisdom's function is to guide each mentoree on their own inner journey of discerning their own Story of meaning and taking up their own place of belonging-within-the-whole.

3.2 Inviting the mentoree to see, or see afresh

Inherent within the underlying transformative question is the following: Is there any insight or understanding arising for the mentoree? Is the mentoree being invited to stay, move, change, or grow in some way? Perhaps inner wisdom is inviting the mentoree to let go a now redundant storyline, or an aspect of a fixed identity? Or perhaps the mentoree is being invited to name and claim some new aspect of their identity and purpose?

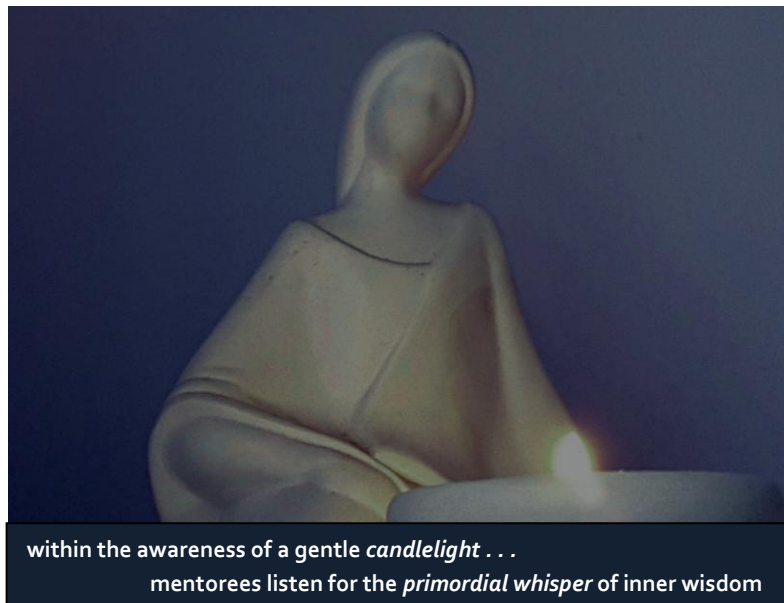


Photo by Kaye Twining

3.3 At this moment

In terms of the phrase *at this moment*, O'Donohue cautioned that our inner world: "was never meant to be seen completely." Therefore, he suggested that we approach our inner world through the metaphor of *candlelight*. He maintained that a candle shed enough light to "befriend the darkness, [even as] it gently opens up caverns in the darkness" which need tending at this moment in time. Therefore, when engaging in the practice of contemplative Self enquiry, mentorees do not approach their inner landscape through the metaphor of a harsh *spotlight*. To the contrary, within the awareness of a gentle *candlelight*, mentorees contemplatively explore that which is rising to the surface in that moment in time. For this reason, Self discovery does not focus on *seeing* the whole Self. Rather, Self discovery takes the form of noticing and contemplatively exploring that which is emerging in the present moment.

4. The process of this model

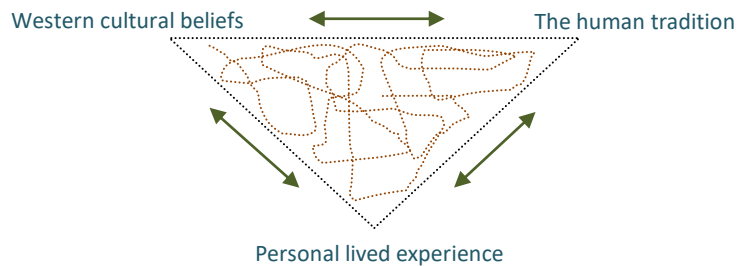
As with previous models of spiritual mentoring, the process of this model is both ordinary and profound. *Ordinary* in terms of drawing from, and flowing back into daily life. *Profound* in terms of mentorees *coming home to themselves*, by way of contemplatively exploring their spiritual

questions in the presence of a trained and trusted mentor. The process involves mentorees tenderly reflecting upon their *inner landscape*. Such reflection focuses on gently noticing and integrating inner movements towards inner freedom and personal wholeness, and dissolving counter movements. A metaphor for such reflection is: *walking the land*. As mentorees *walk the land* of their *inner landscape* they are engaging in their inner journey of Self discovery in terms of Self knowledge. In a broader sense, *walking the land* also guides each mentoree towards discerning their own coherent Story of meaning and belonging.

What is meant by the term *inner landscape*? Our inner landscape refers to our inner world. Our inner world comprises a dynamic inner community of selves. Our personal community of selves includes: the experiencing self, the narrating self, the unstoried/essence self, the shadow self, the witnessing self, and the wisdom self. Within such a view, the Self is more like a self system which consists of an inner community of selves loosely tethered, animated by an enduring, creative life force, or pulsing heartbeat within the very nature of Life itself. Therefore, each mentoree's inner landscape involves a complex system of selves.

Note: for more on the dynamic inner community of selves see: [www.treeoflife.org.au/ Resources/Is Authentic Self dead?](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/Resources/Is%20Authentic%20Self%20dead?)

Our inner landscape sits within a boundary of three interrelated dimensions of human meaning making. The interrelated dimensions both form and limit the horizon, or the interpretative lens through which we view ourselves-in-our-world. The following diagram depicts the triangular horizon:



Within the context of this model of spiritual mentoring, the triangular horizon comprises: 1. current western cultural beliefs regarding the way the world came into being/continues to be and how the human body/mind work; 2. the human tradition, which participates in the greater Story of Life which is forever and continually in the process of being and becoming; and 3. personal lived experience.

The pathway for *walking the land* is known through the metaphor of the *pathless path*, because there is no predetermined pathway. Consequently, both mentors and mentorees cannot see the pathway ahead. They can however, see where the path has led. Mentorees can see their path in the rear view, as they continue to reflect on where the pathway has led. In terms of engaging with the *pathless path*, each mentoree creates their own unique pathway through the spiritual practice of contemplative Self enquiry. In this way, contemplative Self enquiry is-in-itself the pathway.

Regarding *walking the land* via contemplative Self enquiry, the triangular diagram above implies a certain sense of aimless meandering. Indeed individual sessions may seem to take that form because at each session mentorees notice and contemplatively explore that which is stirring within

them in the present moment. As such, in each session a mentoree commences by sharing what is uppermost in their awareness at that particular moment. Consequently, a mentoree's exploration within each session is often messy and seemingly disconnected to the previous session. Over time however, the connections within each mentoree's Story become more visible to them. Therefore, whilst the pathway may seem aimless, it is actually twisting and turning its way towards a cohesive whole in the form of a personal experience of meaning and belonging in the world.



Artwork by Patricia Fraser

4.1 The nature of discernment ~ making judgments

At this juncture, it may be helpful to acknowledge a current cultural confusion around the idea of making a judgment. When it comes to discerning their Story of meaning, mentorees are required to make decisions. Therefore, in relation to giving meaning to their living and their dying, mentorees are required to decide which beliefs hold true for them at this moment of time and which beliefs do not. Consequently, discernment requires forming judgments in terms of personal truth. Even so, forming judgments regarding personal truth, differs greatly from being judgmental about the personal truth of others. *Being judgmental* is characterized by: criticizing the personal truth of others, simply because it contravenes our own. When mentorees are able to make judgments regarding their own truth, without being judgmental of others, they are able to metaphorically *stand in their own ground, openheartedly*.

Note: for more on the nature of truth see: www.treeoflife.org.au/Resources/ **A method for discerning personal inner truth & The nature of truth in an age of perspectives & Standing in our own ground, openheartedly** & The sacred work of being human/**The art of transformative living**.

4.2 The nature of discernment ~ contemplative in orientation

Discernment takes the form of contemplative Self enquiry. As mentioned previously the term *contemplative* involves the two elements of

relinquishing control over the process of Self discovery, and remaining receptive to inner wisdom's stirrings. Therefore, within such a contemplative orientation, discernment for the mentoree involves a reflective process of: non judgmentally noticing what is stirring within them in the present moment; letting it rest awhile; then gently deepening the experience by curiously wondering about it and asking open-ended questions of it. As mentorees deepen their understanding of their experience, they are more able to perceive inner wisdom's invitation towards inner freedom in the form of personal wholeness. In this way, mentorees can notice and explore their inner movements towards, or away from, inner freedom.

The reflective process commences with a mentoree's present moment affective experience in response to their questions. What does the term *affective experience* mean? In a general sense affective experience involves the joys and sorrows, fears and desires, each mentoree experiences in their daily life. In a more narrow sense, affective experience involves each mentoree's present moment emotions, bodily sensations, and thought patterns. Therefore, discernment involves a whole of body/mind experience. In this regard, Hillman argued that discernment: "brings the whole body's wisdom to bear on a concern and the body as a whole resolves it." Consequently it is a mentoree's affective experience which enables them to integrate inner movements towards inner freedom, and dissolve counter movements.

Why is a mentoree's affective experience essential to the discernment process? Theologian, Bernard Lonergan, argued that our present moment affective experience is the "drive and power behind authentic self knowledge." Therefore, rather than a mentoree's beliefs about life giving rise to Self knowledge, it is their affective experience which is the entry point for genuine Self discovery. Again, why? Because their affective experience is involuntary. As a consequence, unlike beliefs, their affective experience cannot be consciously manufactured. It simply responds and/or reacts to lived experience beyond their conscious control. Therefore, it is a mentoree's affective experience which reveals what is true.

Even though a mentoree's affective experience is true in terms of what is going on in their inner world at the present moment, their affective is *not the last word*. Their affective experience is simply a conduit which flows between the mentoree's inner community of selves, revealing where there is harmony and where there is discord between thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Therefore, it is their affective experience which allows insights, or *aha* moments to emerge into their conscious view. When the mentoree then contemplatively explores such insights, understanding occurs. So, a mentoree's affective experience is not an end-in-itself. Rather, a mentoree's affective experience is the entry point for discerning personal truth.

5. The function of the spiritual mentor

What does the term *mentor* mean within this context? Benedictine monk, Laurence Freeman claimed that the function of a spiritual teacher is: "not to tell us what to do but to help us see who we are." In line with Freeman's understanding, spiritual mentors assist mentorees to perceive their inner wisdom's present moment invitation towards personal meaning and belonging. In this regard, a mentor enables a mentoree to express,

explore, discover, integrate, and celebrate the mentoree's own growing awareness of their Self-within-the-whole. A mentor does not seek to rush a mentoree towards a resolution. Neither do they seek to fix, or rescue a mentoree from what is emerging within them in the present moment. Rather, a mentor trusts in the process that inner wisdom will reveal what is necessary for a mentoree, as and when the mentoree is ready to perceive it.

Within each session, the dynamic life force of lovingkindness is the orientating reference point for mentors, as well as mentorees. And yet, the term itself may never be explicitly mentioned within a spiritual mentoring session. Rather, lovingkindness is expressed in the form of a quality of presence within spiritual mentors; a quality of presence which is imbued with wisdom and compassion; inner stillness and outer responsiveness, and courage and commitment to continue to bear witness to each mentoree's explorations. Through such a quality of presence spiritual mentors are able to attune to each mentoree, and metaphorically *walk around in each mentoree's Story with them*. Such a quality of presence generates an environment of trust. An environment of trust enables mentorees to view themselves within the gentling light of loving kindness.

Why is there a need for a spiritual mentor? Surely it is possible for individuals to undertake this interior journey on their own? As mentioned in the Introduction, it is possible to become stuck or lost in the questions. Also, mentorees are often unable to identify and make sense of the diverse responses within their inner community of selves. Therefore, it is valuable to be accompanied in the venture by an accredited, experienced guide who can recognize the lay of the land. Even so, spiritual mentors do not guide from the front. They *walk alongside each mentoree on each mentoree's path*, being a presence of lovingkindness that bears witness to the mentoree's explorations.

Summation

We human beings seek to give meaning to our living and our dying. We also long to experience belonging in our world. We give meaning and experience belonging through a unified narrative, or coherent Story of meaning. Western culture is currently in between Stories of meaning, so there is no functional cultural narrative from which to source personal and collective identity, values, purpose, and the experience of belonging. Therefore, the Call of our cultural era is to reStory our place of belonging-within-the-whole. In response, personal spiritual practice is contextualized by the need to repose our spiritual questions within the light of current knowledge and lived experience, and discern responses which give rise to a new coherent Story of meaning. With such a Story of meaning in place, we may once again actively participate in the greater Story of Life.

We are able to discern our personal Story of meaning through the practice of spiritual mentoring. Spiritual mentoring is one way of nurturing a conscious life in the form of exploring our personal spiritual questions regarding meaning and belonging, and discerning coherent responses. Remembering that our Stories shape our values systems, which in turn determines the way we live daily life, spiritual mentoring involves both the cultivation of personal wholeness, and authentic communal connection

and response-ability. In this way, spiritual mentoring draws together both the inner and outer worlds of each mentoree.

There are many existing models of spiritual mentoring for those exploring a new Story within a religious tradition. At the same time, it would seem that our cultural era is also calling forth something new. The evidence for such a view is that simultaneous to a cultural shift towards a new Story beyond god or religion, there is also a new frame of reference emerging. The new frame of reference is that of evolutionary spirituality, giving rise to the broad themes of the greater Story of Life and the human tradition. Therefore, there is now a new frame of reference in which to re-pose our spiritual questions. As a consequence, it would seem that this era is calling forth yet another model of spiritual mentoring.

A new model holds to the contemplative and conversational process of previous models, yet differs in the following ways:

- The frame of reference: evolutionary spirituality, beyond a god and a religion.
- The overarching principle: mentorees embracing their humanity fully ~ within the gentling light of lovingkindness.
- The inner guiding orientation: mentorees cultivating inner freedom in the form of personal wholeness ~ through a stance of Self-in-love.
- The underlying transformative question: "What may inner wisdom be inviting mentorees to see, or see afresh, at this moment?"

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