



Individualism – Friendship – Community

What is true love?

17-18 November 2018

All the documents

**Desert Creek House
802 Desert Creek Road
Numbugga NSW 2550
www.desertcreekhouse.com.au**

A) Individualism and Friendship

01) 09.30 – Introduction (15')

Rules: 1) Try not to go astray in our sharing and discussion. Focus on the theme / on the questions. 2) Contribute with awareness to the evolution of the debate. 3) Do not confront others but you may challenge them. 4) Keep it confidential.

02) 9.45 - The welfare state + market – reciprocity (15')

We live in a world today that provides everything we need. We became consumers of facilities of all kinds. In all cases we get what we need and it is paid for by taxes or fees or prices. Money is a powerful instrument that regulates the quantities and qualities of what is provided. The problem is that we can only consume what is on offer and we have lost any possibility to influence or to decide what should be on offer. We have been indeed expelled from the network of human exchanges. We are reduced to be cogs of production and slaves of consumption. We can notice an important distinction between welfare state and market:

- **Welfare state.** Most public services are provided by the state: education, health, social security, compensation, transport, energy, communication, maintenance, planning, defence, etc.. The whole system of these public services is paid for by taxes. These services are more or less free or there is a system of solidarity based on numbers (the high number of citizens in a country or of insured people in a public or private insurance). Sometimes these public services are privatised but it does not change the fundamental fact that they are provided for us and financed by us.

- **Market.** Most of the material goods we need or basic practical services are provided by corporations or private businesses. We pay the price and we get the product.
- **Reciprocity** (This is a reminder from previous workshops). Outside these two main circuits (state and market), we have many types of exchanges that do not use money as a compensation for value. They are the free exchanges inside the family or with friends and neighbours. These exchanges have a special quality: 1) they are not paid for and 2) because they are a free gift that calls for return, the dynamic of exchanges goes on for ever. This is the pattern of traditional societies when I help you repair your roof and you teach Spanish to the son of my neighbour and he gives me vegetables from his garden. The circle is closed but, in this system, any exchange calls for more exchanges as compensation for the previous ones because these exchanges are based on free giving and there is no accounting, no precise yardstick like a currency to measure the value of what is exchanged. The measure remains intuitive and subjective. It is why these exchanges are more suited for expressing love or generosity, although these qualities are not necessarily excluded from welfare services or economic exchanges (especially if these exchanges are not aimed at profit making).

- Q: 1) Find adjectives to qualify each of these three forms of exchanges (welfare, market, reciprocity).
2) List the qualities in your life that do not depend on any service paid for by money (public or private money).
3) Which ones of these qualities are linked with relationships?

03) 10.00 - Relationships in the in-between (15')

Also a reminder from a previous workshop: Solar system: the grapefruit and the corn of sand. No matter but energy = relationship. Matter is almost insignificant in our universe. Only relationships truly matter. Relationships happen in the in-between, i.e. in the space

between people or between us and the natural or social context in which we live.

Q: Give examples of qualities that are found in relationships that do not focus on stuff (relationships without material intermediary or where the object is only a pretext).

04) 10.15 - Friendship – being involved (30')

Friendship is like pure relationship; it needs yet opportunities to develop which are often found in very simple facts of life, especially when we work for our own livelihood or subsistence or when we work together to provide a service or creativity for our community.

(Extract from the text I sent you at the beginning of the year and which was meant to be material for the present workshop)

As distinct persons we are not autonomous particles that fly through space; but we are all deeply connected with the land that nourishes us, with the social group that has given us the basic tools how to cope with our environment: this group taught us how to walk, how to talk, how to behave in a group, how to love and be loved, how to understand what happens around us and in us, how to interpret these basic facts and to choose what is relevant and what is not, how to establish a hierarchy of values. Our sense of responsibility consists in this faculty we acquire when we learn how to reduce our own range of possible choices to what honestly corresponds to our understanding of truth. Our western context has so strongly emphasised our ability to be free as individuals that it has consequently broken our links with the society we belong to, as if this society were here only to serve individualistic purposes.

Most spiritual traditions emphasise the role of the wider body: the people of God for the Jews, the Sangha for Buddhism, the Church for Christianity, the Umma for Islam. Truly our individual identification with our own distinct body-memory-mind is an illusion. although we are located in a physical and localised body, we are indeed all One. Yet our deeper sense of belonging to a wider body has been replaced by western individualism that breaks all restraining links.

Money (replacing kinship), technology (replacing meaning), individualism (replacing sense of belonging) are the tools of our own ejection from life and social interdependency that form indeed, I believe, the core of our experience in life. When we reverse this movement of expulsion and try to reintegrate our real place into a network of interdependent relationships, we have the opportunity to rediscover the true meaning of friendship. As long as we do not reverse this tendency, friendship will remain a leisure activity. We will enjoy good time together having a glass of wine, a delicious meal, a BBQ, a swim, a ride, a dance or watch a show, listen to a concert. But none of these activities will provide the opportunity to be truly concerned one with another or involved in each other's life.

During these good instants of leisure time that we share together we will of course be able to exchange about what we have experienced or what we have done, how we have felt and what we intend to do. But this sharing goes mainly through talk and nothing is there to test or confront the truth of it. I do not mean that the one who talks is lying. I mean that there is indeed no direct confrontation with any form of reality that would test the truth of it. When I write these present lines, they are only words. They ensue of

course out of my experience and my observations of what happens in me and around me. They are generated by my frustration in front of what I have called expulsion, and how we seem to be prevented from developing true relationships of friendship by the market system and the technological way of thinking which both impregnate and even define our culture and ways of living. Yet nothing confronts me with the test of veracity of my talk or writing. In this way of life there is no direct confrontation with the true nature of reality, and these lines are only words that I type on my computer and that are not confronted with the hard struggle of life in its materiality. Committed friendship is precisely what would allow to confront the truth (or untruth) of these words with the visible and invisible matter of life.

Friendship in this way means interaction and involvement of each one in the life of the other. Involvement should be here understood in a positive way as meaning a deep concern for what the other experiences and how s/he does that. Involvement does not mean intrusion or invasion. Privacy remains what people wish it to be, at the degree they wish it to be. Just more concern means more understanding, better listening, more empathy and also, inevitably, a wish to participate where there is room for participation. Friendship means in this way deeper sharing and involvement because there is something to share through life experience. If I'm involved with you in a building job, I will know you better than if I spend only time around a table, drinking and eating and talking. If you visit me when I'm sick, you will discover aspects of my person, of my fragility, you would never know without me being sick. Accompanying people in terminal illness is certainly a very powerful way to connect deeply on a level that touches the essence of life itself. Yet, without looking for such

extreme situations, we notice how a practical involvement in one another's life creates the spark that produces the real light.

Q: Examine the present forms of your diverse friendships and try to see how much you are involved into one another's lives.

05) 10.45 - Leading values of our society vs Community values (30')

Community is more than just sharing locally the same services when we live in the same town or region. True community is built through contributions from all members for a common good. These contributions are not defined by what is offered by the community but on the contrary by what members offer in their own initiative: especially to each other or to the community as a whole (more abstract). People participate to build their community when they act independently from what is provided and create links (i.e. relationships).

The change of mind comes from inside each of us. Either we choose conformism to what is and nothing happens or we practise freedom of spirit that depends only on our own creativity, and nothing else: it is rooted in our own ability to think and to express truth.

Q: Characterise with a few words (A) the dominant values of our societies (i.e. Australia in general) and compare them with the values that are inherent to the building of community – (B) as you think it should be or (C) in the example of our local place – Bega. Look how much they are compatible or incompatible (A vs B vs C).

11.15 - MORNING TEA

B) Evolution and Consciousness

06) 11.45 - Teilhard de Chardin: the Without and the Within (30')

Consciousness and complexity: Consciousness exists in all parts of the universe: mineral, vegetable, animal, human; its depth grows with complexity.

Teilhard de Chardin explains this statement in his book The Phenomenon of Man; each entity in the universe, whether a particle, an atom, a molecule, a mineral, a cell, a vegetal, an animal or a human being, has its external side ("the Without") which is its form in its material visible aspect; and it has also its interior side ("the Within") which is its own form of consciousness. Teilhard de Chardin says that, for science, it became clear that consciousness only appears in an evident way in human beings. This fact seems to exclude consciousness in other beings or entities. Yet consciousness can only exist in human beings if it has its roots further up in early origins, in a long previous evolution, according to the principle that nothing is created out of nothing, and that any phenomenon has its origin in a long and slow transformation of matter and species. This statement means that for each state of previous material development, i.e. for each state of Without, there is also a Within with its own corresponding stage of consciousness. As matter tends to evolve towards more complexity, consciousness evolves towards more depth. The degree of possible consciousness is thus proportional to physical complexity. It means that each entity in the universe has its own degree of consciousness which differs from the next. Teilhard describes how this subtle relationship between

matter and consciousness translates itself in evolution by two forms of energy: 1) the tangential energy which links any entity with its equals and 2) the radial energy which attracts each entity towards more complexity.

It is first important to clearly understand that matter (Without) and consciousness (Within) are not opposed, but on the contrary that they work together as the two sides of the same reality. The Without makes the Within visible; the Within shapes the Without as expression of itself. Without matter we would not be able to become aware of the content. Between the Without and the Within there is a constant play of dialogue. Because of what we see, hear, touch, smell or taste, we become aware of the hidden nature of things; we are in touch with the Within. When we look at the night sky, we discover the mysterious nature of the universe and its sacredness, and we are deeply moved. The Spirit influences matter but matter influences also the spirit, in an endless exchange of awareness and energy.

The description which Teilhard de Chardin makes of the presence of consciousness in the different expressions of matter is mind blowing. It says, approximately in his own words: "Coextensive to its (material) Without, there is a (conscious) Within for each thing". "When one looks back in evolution, consciousness seems to fade away in a spectrum of progressive nuances of which the origins disappear into the night". "Spiritual perfection (conscious centrality) and material synthesis (complexity) are only the two sides and linked aspects of one same phenomenon".

Teilhard describes the evolution of complexity and consciousness according to the two main energies which have already been mentioned:

- *the tangential energy, which leads any element to establish links of solidarity with all the other elements of the same order of complexity (or centrality), it means a trend towards more community,*
- *and the radial energy, which attracts each element towards a state of ever more complexity and centrality, it means also of deeper consciousness.*

This description and understanding of the role of consciousness in the universe, leads us to notice two main characteristics about the relation between matter and consciousness:

- *the more a being is materially evolved (complex) the more its consciousness is also evolved,*
- *and the more a being is conscious, the more it will establish connections with other beings of the same level of complexity - and even relate to other levels - and the more it will tend to develop its own complexity and consciousness.*

Growth of consciousness brings therefore community life. This is an essential truth: consciousness and community are linked as the normal fruits of evolution. Consciousness and community are both signs of a higher degree of maturity for the beings who practice them.

This link between complexity and consciousness and our awareness of the presence of consciousness anywhere in the universe mean that, as human beings, we can communicate with the other parts of the Creation, with the other beings. We can talk to the animals and the trees and the landscape and they can answer in their own way, because they have

consciousness. Of course they do not use our verbal language and do not understand each word we say, but they capture our attitudes and “listen” to the set of mind and the spirit which these words or sounds and body language express.

It is exactly what happens in our experience: if we dare to talk to animals and to wildlife, it happens sometimes that they stop, look at us and listen. It creates for a short while a kind of bond which is more subtle and mature than the mere bond of fear when they simply escape. The attitude of the surrounding wildlife towards us, as human beings, changes day after day when they observe progressively that our attitude remains peaceful towards them. They establish slowly a kind of trust and of personal bond with us, as the unique persons we are, while yet remaining wild and not being tamed.

Community arises in this way, and also similarly with plants, and with the whole natural surroundings. We can hug trees or let us be recharged by the vibrations of the land. We can also experience the distress of our environment when it has been violently disturbed by man or when it suffers drought. We have also to observe the limits of our relationship with nature, when we have to protect ourselves from its violence, when natural forces become too powerful for our fragility.

It seems very contrary to our representations to write these lines, describing how we can communicate with animals, plants, minerals and the whole landscape; but this is just the fruit of observations. This shows how we can change our relationship with the environment and with nature when we become more aware of what it is, especially when we

experience how our own level of consciousness allows us to communicate with other conscious beings in the Creation and to create links. The community of life is not an abstraction; it is a reality when we take care of it. Our awareness allows us to give it shape.

The development of our consciousness as Teilhard de Chardin describes it corresponds to a potential we never extend to its maximum. It is therefore essential for us to do our possible to develop our own consciousness to further stages of maturity. This is also part of our evolution toward more depth and more community. Already by attempting to do so we make this evolution a reality in our lives.

Q: How do you identify in your life the two forms of tangential and radial energy? Which are the experiences of what is described here above?

07) 12.15 - Teilhard de Chardin: more personification into a wider body (30')

Consciousness and community: *Because consciousness tends towards community, it abolishes the trinomial: individualism / competition / distance from nature.*

Summary: As it has been described, more complexity means more consciousness. More consciousness means more links, and this means more community and more unity. Evolution leads us to more differentiation, despite growing communion and unity, and to more subjectivity, in the way - positive or negative - we influence our world through our consciousness. This evolution means also more depth, i.e. more awareness of the spiritual dimension which governs the universe, and less focus on the material and visible side

of appearances. The natural laws of differentiation, subjectivity, communion and depth show how much our present modern tendency to more individualism, more competition, while breaking away out of our relationship with nature, is completely contrary to what our evolution into more maturity should be. On the opposite, if we reverse this trend of egocentrism, if we tend towards more consciousness, more community, we are lead to reconnect with nature and with the whole universe; we are lead to become a real diversified and conscious force of peace, justice and unity.

Our tendency for egoistic behaviours (what we call freedom) goes today against our deep and true nature, against our fundamental and natural vocation. Because it goes against nature, the way to individualism and materialism is also the path to our destruction as well as to the destruction of our natural and social environment. It is staggering to see how much our modern society, instead of developing deeper links between human beings, between humanity and nature, instead of providing more security, more justice, more peace, more happiness, creates in fact isolation, competition, aggressiveness, violence, destruction. Yet we have all the necessary means to implement a just world. Sadly, the richer we are, the further away from ideals of peace and justice we go. Isn't it paradoxical?

There is evidently a very strong perversion in our way of thinking, feeling and living. Deep in ourselves we know it and we feel that it is not right. This feeling has to develop and to become the energy for change.

As soon we grow into more community, into more mature relationship between human beings and in our relationship with nature, we notice how everything harmonises. We discover how it becomes suddenly the true path, although it is contradictory to the dominant trends of life which our market society stimulates.

Teilhard de Chardin adds another remark to his theory of evolution in complexity and consciousness. He says that we are meant to evolve beyond our state of individual persons towards a form of wider community that takes shape when we tend each of us towards more personalisation, at the same time as we tend together towards more unity. It means that unity calls for personalisation; and personalisation calls for unity. This statement is fundamental because it shows that our evolution towards more community does not consist in an indistinct way of melting into an undifferentiated whole that would absorb us as a unified mass. On the contrary the trend towards unity calls us to become more ourselves in our diversity. Personalisation means diversification; it means that unity is not based on assimilation but on differentiation that allows complementarity, i.e. exchanges. The wider body of community we are meant to form as a further stage of our collective evolution consists in a form of unity based on our differences and specificities. To be well unified, we have to be unique. Each organ has its function in the body. Our vocation is thus to become more ourselves in our uniqueness. In other words diversity (inclusiveness) is the key to community.

Q: What means personification? What is inclusiveness?

13.00 - LUNCH

08) 14.30 - Ken Wilber: 9 stages of consciousness (60')

The evolution of consciousness can be compared to a ladder we climb progressively when we mature and get to a higher level of consciousness.

Ken Wilber did a brilliant description of this maturation process in nine successive stages. Although it is a challenge, we can try here to summarise this description in a few words. It is recommended to go back to the source for better understanding (see Ken Wilber: A Brief History of Everything):

A) Birth of the self:

1. *Hatching of the physical self (4 months): the baby discovers that s/he is distinct from the physical environment.*
2. *Birth of the emotional self (15-24 months): the baby discovers that s/he is emotionally distinct from his/her environment (separate self especially from the mother).*
3. *Birth of the conceptual self (2-4 years): images and concepts emerge in the mind and represent an external reality (the idea dog as a concept or an image of what a dog is in reality).*

B) Rational stages:

4. *Birth of the role self (socio- or ethno-centric / 6-7 years): the child learns that the other is in a different position, sees the same objects under another angle (e.g. from the back or the side) and acts differently. S/he discovers his/her own roles (rules, scripts) in the social context and learns how to be in tune with them (conformism), i.e. in relation with others. It does not extend further than to the group to which one belongs (my tribe).*

5. *World-centric or mature ego (11-15 years): capacity to imagine different worlds and discovery of the impact of thoughts onto perception and behaviour and ability to examine one's own thoughts (introspection, thought about thoughts); develops judgement; critical attitude about inherited roles and values. Moral stance moves from conventional to post-conventional. Evolution from ethnocentric to world-centric: discovery of diversity and multiculturalism. Only a minority of people reach this stage.*
6. *Body-mind integration (centaur): adds up the parts and sees networks of interactions. The self is conscious of the body and the mind as experiences; discovery of the role of observer; the self is looking at the world, the body and the mind. It is integrated in its networks of responsibility and service.*

C) Transpersonal stages: *transition from the gross-oriented reality into the transpersonal domains*

7. *Psychic: Awareness not confined exclusively to the individual ego. The observer disappears because he becomes one with the surroundings. He does not look at the mountain; he is the mountain (nature mysticism). Experience of "I am".*
8. *Subtle: experience of inner peace, light and blissful state (divine mysticism); experience of pure love. Interpretation of this real depth-experience is yet needed..*
9. *Causal: to the source of the observing self or witness. Absorption in the non-manifest and non-dual; discrete identifiable state of awareness as un-manifest absorption or cessation; pure Self and pure Emptiness. No more Seer. One Taste.*

Q: Who do you think you are? All what you can describe you are, is not indeed the True Self.

All steps have three main characteristics:

1. *Each new stage (step of the ladder) leads from a more egocentric to a more hetero-centric perception which is able to integrate more diversity and interdependence of the parts; one becomes less focused on oneself and more aware of the others, how they are different from us, have other points of view and how we are indeed all related to and parts of the same whole.*
2. *Each new step integrates the qualities of the previous steps into the next and adds in depth of perception that becomes more complex (deeper Within in a wider Without) when more subtle aspects of reality are becoming more perceptible.*
3. *Each step represents a radical change of paradigm and generates a new interpretation of the world that also reinterprets and reorganises what has been learned or remembered previously.*

Pre-rational, rational, post-rational:

Not only we as persons evolve in this way but as well our society as a whole evolves according to a similar path from the more egocentric to the more hetero-centric, toward more depth and through successive changes of paradigms. One can distinguish three main stages in this global evolution:

1. *The pre-rational stage as the magic and superstitious behaviour of primitive societies which believe that nature is like a god that punishes them and that has to be made sacrifices to (the avalanche as a destruction wanted by the god, the goat thrown into to volcano to appease it).*

2. *The rational stage as the rational management of our modern society through science, technology and market, that considers the world as a mechanical entity (Newton) that has to be controlled and transformed.*
3. *The post-rational stage as the deeper perception of a larger Reality which is not visible but nevertheless integrates the visible world; it can be experienced when one observes the physical reality, when one becomes a witness in the way one is aware of what is, without judgement, and finally becomes one with the whole: "I am That" where the consciousness of I (as a distinct ego) disappears progressively to be reduced to the only state of awareness: the Seer can see the body, the mind, the ego, the natural world, but cannot see the Seer. The self is just another object in awareness. Non-dual state of Being. "That" is the essence, the unfathomable Reality, Emptiness.*

Similarly to the three stages pre-rational, rational, post-rational, we have the three stages Pre-conventional, conventional, post-conventional; and pre-personal, personal, post-personal. They usually correspond one another but not necessarily.

As each precedent stage is always included in the later ones, these three stages may well cohabit simultaneously. They do frequently, even in our modern society where behaviours may represent a vast range of levels of consciousness which may even combine in the same person.

Important: these further stages of consciousness are accessible to anyone. One just has to train.

Q: Why are we not used naturally to go there, if this sense of being part of the whole is indeed the true expression of Reality?

9) 15.30 - Maturity as a practice (30')

Reaching these further stages of consciousness is an empty exercise if it does not translate into a practice of love. Love is the true hetero-centric practice. Because she is practising Mother Theresa is more evolved than the writer who knows everything about these different levels.

Q: How does knowledge (the stages on the ladder and their practice on the cushion) and practice of love (in everyday life) relate to one another?

10) 16.00 - Self-obsession: Who Am I? (30')

We are often very anxious to get there. We are worried about ourselves: who am I? Am I on the right path? Do I do the right thing to progress on the path of consciousness? How far am I on this ladder? I'm sure each one of us has wondered where they stand on this ladder.

It is important to awake and to progress. If we do not we are no more alive. Yet this is a mysterious process. We have to make the effort (focus) but we have also to let be what comes to us and be opened to be transformed. By Grace.

It does not mean that we are waiting for the solution from elsewhere: we adopt too often an attitude as consumers. The balance is delicate: Being in charge while letting be. Learn to resonate to what is given.

Ken Wilber's ladder is only one way to describe it, one among many. Each spiritual teaching is only a description of the path; it is not the path or the truth. We need therefore to experience the path as a novelty, as a discovery through experience. This has nothing to do with the map (the ladder). So we should not be obsessed by the ladder and we may be free of any preconception.

Q: How do you experience this anxiety about the path? Is it self-obsession or just self-awareness? Are you free to discover new ways, unknown paths? Is there truly a ladder, with low and high?

11) 16.30 - Buddha nature - Image of God as spiritual DNA (30')

We can understand what the ladder means and what each stage represents, even if we have not been there, because we have a guide in ourselves, an inner compass: we know already where we are going, even before we reach the point (experience) and before we experience the new stage. Buddha nature or the image of God in us is this compass; this is our spiritual DNA, the mere potential of what we are and we are meant to actualise. This is the seed that grows and moves us forward.

Q: How do we know that we know before we know?

17.00 AFTERNOON TEA

C) Practice of love

12) 17.30 – Thomas Merton: Hell as hatred

THOMAS MERTON (NEW SEEDS OF CONTEMPLATION):

HELL is where no one has anything in common with anybody else except the fact that they all hate one another and cannot get away from one another and from themselves.

They are all thrown together in their fire and each one tries to thrust the others away from him with a huge, impotent hatred. And the reason why they want to be free of one another is not so much that they hate what they see in

others, as that they know others hate what they see in them: and all recognize in one another what they detest in themselves, selfishness and impotence, agony, terror, and despair.

The tree is known by its fruits. If you want to understand the social and political history of modern man, study hell.

And yet the world, with all its wars, is not yet hell. And history, however terrible, has another and a deeper meaning. For it is not the evil of history that is its significance and it is not by the evil of our time that our time can be understood. In the furnace of war and hatred, the City of those who love one another is drawn and fused together in the heroism of charity under suffering, while the city of those who hate everything is scattered and dispersed and its citizens are cast out in every direction, like sparks, smoke, and flame.

OUR GOD also is a consuming fire. And if we, by love, become transformed into Him and burn as He burns, His fire will be our everlasting joy. But if we refuse His love and remain in the coldness of sin and opposition to Him and to other men then will His fire (by our own choice rather than His) become our everlasting enemy, and Love, instead of being our joy, will become our torment and our destruction.

WHEN WE LOVE GOD'S WILL we find Him and own His joy in all things. But when we are against God, that is, when we love ourselves more than Him, all things become our enemies. They cannot help refusing us the lawless satisfaction our selfishness demands of them because the infinite unselfishness of God is the law of every created essence and is printed in everything that He has made. His creatures can only be friends with His unselfishness. If, in men, they

find selfishness, then they hate, fear and resist it—until they are tamed and reduced to passivity by it. But the Desert Fathers believed one of the marks of the saint was that he could live at peace with lions and serpents, with nothing to fear from them.

THERE is NOTHING interesting about sin, or about evil as evil.

Evil is not a positive entity but the absence of a perfection that ought to be there. Sin as such is essentially boring because it is the lack of something that could appeal to our wills and our minds.

What attracts men to evil acts is not the evil in them but the good that is there, seen under a false aspect and with a distorted perspective. The good seen from that angle is only the bait in a trap. When you reach out to take it, the trap is sprung and you are left with disgust, boredom—and hatred. Sinners are people who hate everything, because their world is necessarily full of betrayal, full of illusion, full of deception. And the greatest sinners are the most boring people in the world because they are also the most bored and the ones who find life most tedious.

When they try to cover the tedium of life by noise, excitement and violence—the inevitable fruits of a life devoted to the love of values that do not exist—they become something more than boring: they are scourges of the world and of society. And being scourged is not merely something dull or tedious.

Yet when it is all over and they are dead, the record of their sins in history becomes exceedingly uninteresting and is inflicted on school children as a penance which is all the more bitter because even an eight-year-old can readily see the uselessness of learning about people like Hitler, Stalin,

and Napoleon.

Q: Is not individualism a hidden form of hatred, of hell? How does one transit from individualism to community? Is it just a further stage of evolution or is it a deep and fundamental transformation from hatred to love?

13) 18.00 - Eros – Philia – Agape; and Selflessness (30')

In ancient Greek there are three different words for LOVE.

1) Love as EROS – desire

EROS is an egocentric form of love. It is centred on ourselves, on our own needs and perceptions. It is focused on our own desires. It does not consider much the other Yet it is a necessary dimension of love.

There are different forms of desire:

- *The most basic ones concern our needs for food, drink, shelter, pleasure, sexuality. They are part of our life, they are even a necessity for our survival. They are helping us to get what we need but they become most of the time a kind of imprisonment, because they make us needy, chasing these objects of our desires and looking for pleasure all the time. Desire becomes attachment. Pleasure reinforces attachment and dependency. Attachment is not love, it is only dependency. Often we confuse love and attachment. Detachment is the way to freedom; it does not mean indifference.*

- *But our passions and desires can also lead us to search for truth, to search for God. We can describe three degrees of desires: the one which is attachment, the one which is desire for healing and the one which is desire for God. Love as EROS can also lead us to God in a certain way, because it can be a deep need or longing for being connected to our*

Source. As EROS helps us to satisfy our basic needs, it guides us also to answer this deeper and basic spiritual need to find who we are, in our self. It seems contradictory, but EROS and search for God do not exclude one another. Nevertheless EROS is never a complete love, it is only the first step towards God, because of our basic needs for this deeper Reality.

2) Love as PHILIA - friendship

PHILIA (affection, friendship) is a form of love where we are more attentive to the needs of the other, but we nevertheless choose the ones we love because they are nice to us. Love is also a decision: we have to choose the ones we want to love, either because we like them already for what they seem to be or because we want them to become our friends or we choose even to love the ones who are not directly loveable. We know we have this power of decision of whom we want to love and that we can make it happen. Because of this ability to decide whom we want to love, PHILIA is more than EROS. We are all needy for love; we are usually looking for the ones who can provide us with love before we can give love to others. How many couples are bound by this kind of needy selfish love? It is only EROS. As long as we are looking for love for ourselves, it is difficult to find it, because love happens rather when we can give it to the other. First we have to give love. It seems impossible to provide love as long as we feel dry and in need for love. But when we discover that the universe is harmony, that God is the source of love and that we are already loved before we start even living, then it transforms our life; it provides us with this energy and strength to love the other before s/he loves us. Love can flow through us out of this mysterious source which is God. PHILIA is this choice for love; it can be very generous when it recognises

that God is the source of love in me. But it concerns in general only the ones I have chosen, i.e. the ones I already like.

3) Love as AGAPE - compassion

EROS, PHILIA and AGAPE are like three boxes, one in each other; AGAPE contains PHILIA which contains EROS. In our growth we learn to grow from the smaller into the next “bigger box”, as a further stage of development. By contrast with EROS and PHILIA, AGAPE is the form of love which does not select. It embraces the whole universe without distinction, the good and the bad, as the rain falls on everything and everybody. This form of love is real compassion, it means it is, literally, able to “suffer (passion) with (com) the other” (com-passion). This form of love accepts not to be reciprocated. It loves but does not need to be loved; it can love in secret as God does when we ignore him. We can love our husband / wife, our son / daughter without them knowing even we love them. We can love our brothers and sisters in humanity, it means every human being, every living creature, every sentient being, without need for return. Love is not always “nice”. It is our strongest energy in life; it is firm, it requires a lot from us, it is disturbing because it is all the time on the move. It is peaceful, but it never settles. God is a mother / a father. We can find refuge (rootedness) in her / him. But it is not a cuddle as it does not express itself in a physical form that would be graspable like a hug. Yet it is real as a real Presence; it is a true security because it is true love which allows us to find our true self, but it is not a form of regression, it is very challenging. It takes us out of our comfort zone. Suffering on our path to maturity is unavoidable, it is a harsh reality of our life. Love brings suffering if we are true to ourselves and to God, although

suffering is not equivalent with love. Love is the main stream in our life, suffering is only the conflict which love brings us into in our relationship with the world which does not recognise God as its way to justice. Love is peace but only when our joy can embrace our suffering, i.e. when the joy of love is stronger than anything else. And finally love is our decision. It is not something that arises sweetly in us; it is a choice to establish a true relationship with the world, the others, nature, God. It is mainly the acceptance that we are much more than an individual, because we are part of something much broader, the community of all sentient beings, the whole of the Universe, etc.

Q: In relation with these three forms of love, what is selflessness?

19.00 – DINNER

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SUNDAY MORNING

07.30 – MEDITATION

08.00 – BREAKFAST

D) The transition – Detachment and rootedness

14) 09.30 – 1st condition: a choice / breaking resignation. Getting out of the great contradiction (45')

Going up the ladder (Teilhard, Wilber) is a personal choice.

Community does not come from outside but from inside. It is not about them... but about us (me)!

The key is: How do I perceive the world? How limited is this perception? ego-centric or world-centric? I decide of my own imprisonment or making myself free.

The individualist perception vs the community dimension are 2 opposed understandings of life based (see diagram) on the fundamental contradiction between hate (as Merton describes it) and love (as shown above), or between different levels of awareness (the ladder of inner transformation): going from rational to post-rational, from personal to transpersonal.

The challenge is about leaving our shell behind (our comfort, our well-known world) to follow the guidance of our spiritual DNA (Buddha nature or image of God in us). Letting the energy act upon us: this is the big choice. We need therefore to see the necessary breaking point between old (wo)man / new (wo)man. Breaking is a decision, a personal choice.

This implies acceptance of suffering: seeing clearly the loss and the gain.

Q: Comment the diagram (opposite page): What is the transformation? What is the loss? What is the gain? How does it fit with the ladder metaphor?

15) 10.15 – 2nd condition: Four forms of necessary detachment (45')

Detachment is the key of transformation: going towards something new, unknown; it seems that our many forms of attachment are truly the shackles that imprison us. To break up our individualism we need to get rid of four (or probably more) principal forms of attachment: See here after the diagram.

A) Individualism: Me and the Others - division

Identity: Body-Mind-Memory. Our shell as a self-contained entity.
(my driver's licence card).

Focus: my comfort, my pleasure, my doing, my having, my image.

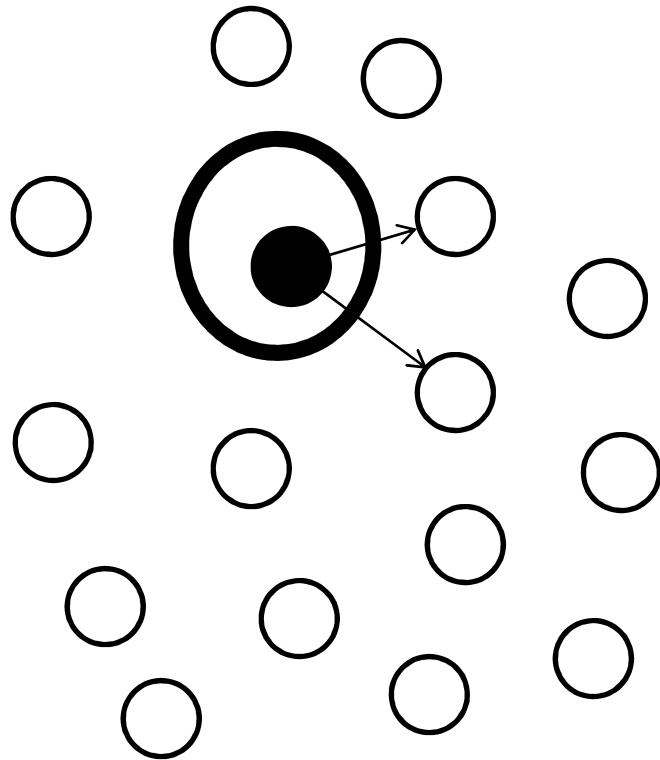
Friendship: leisure time only.

Image: False Self, social construct.

Meaning: egocentric perception of life.

Consequences: reduced perception, a wall around my ego.

Experience: the world I know, loneliness and self-obsession, imprisonment, consumption.



B) Community: the network of Life - union

Identity: a point of perception, consciousness and love.
(in space and time ?).

Focus: relationships – the space in-between people.

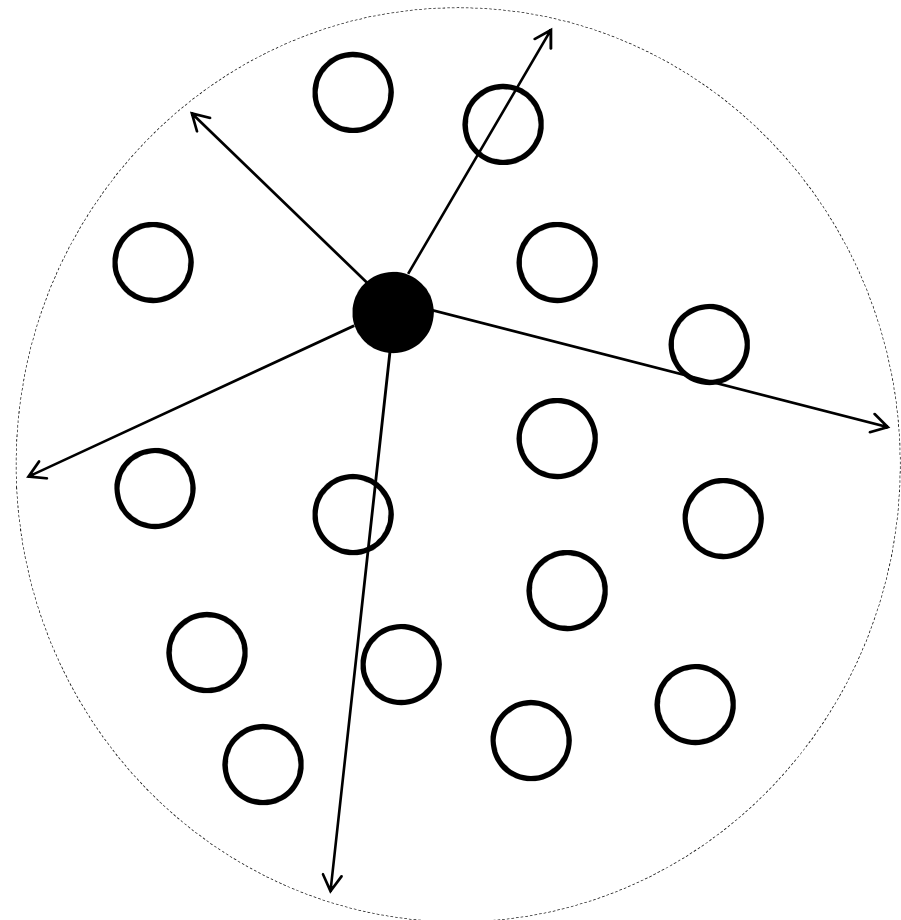
Friendship: being involved in one another's lives.

Image: True Self, my essence.

Meaning: Life as an ever changing stream of energy.

Consequences: large perception, all-including.

Experience: discovery, vibrancy, transformation, creativity, connection, unity.



A) Attachment 1: the 3Ps = Pleasure – Power - Prestige

Greed: we believe our happiness depends on what we can get. We want more of it. We do not see that this attitude paralyses us more than it opens us to true life.

B) Attachment 2: Projection onto the others

We project our expectations onto reality and the others. We expect others to behave in a way that fits our desires. We have so much the tendency to write the script for other people, how they have to behave and what they have to provide for us. But they have no reason to. We are then disappointed because of these projections onto others. We delude ourselves and prevent them from being who they are.

C) Attachment 3: Change in time

We remain stuck in the past. We refuse change. We do not want to let go of what is given now. We are attached to what was and the loss of it prevents us from seeing what is given in the present. We mourn our dead friend or partner instead of rejoicing about who s/he was and of living enriched by this gift. We grieve about our losses more than we appreciate the memory of what we have lost. We fear the future and the inevitable changes it will bring.

D) Attachment 4: Image of oneself

We have created an image of ourselves and cannot detach from it. If we cannot see ourselves as a well-defined entity, we feel lost and naked. Our true being is yet not our body-mind-memory; it is a point of awareness in space and time. We are nowhere or everywhere at the same time; only our body is in a given place and time. Yet we are incarnated and we travel in space and time with this body-mind-memory. What a strange tension!

Q: What is the image of ourselves when we are free of these 4 forms of attachment?

11.00 – MORNING TEA

16) 11.30 – 3rd condition: Rootedness - The Ground of Being (75')

We can only become detached if we may find another form of security: our rootedness in the Ground of Being. We need to find our root, whatever it is. Each one of us is in charge to find his/her own ground.

Q: What is for you this solid Ground that never moves, whatever happens?

A) An experience of conversion

Walter Ciszek, a Polish-American priest who spent 23 years in UdSSR, most of that time in prison or work camps in Siberia, writes about his experience and re-discovery of God:

Through the long years of isolation and suffering, God had led me to an understanding of life and his love that only those who have experienced it can fathom. He had stripped away from me many of the external consolations, physical and religious, that men rely on and had left me with a core of seemingly simple truths to guide me. And yet what a profound difference they had made in my life, what strength they gave me, what courage to go on!

Q: What does it mean: “with a core of seemingly simple truths to guide me”?

B) More details about what happened in Walter Ciszek at that time

Here is the more detailed story of this fundamental change of mind as he recounts it, which happened while he was incarcerated at Lubianka

(prison for political prisoners in Moscow under Stalin). This experience of deep transformation happens after, broken by years of interrogation, he is forced to acknowledge crimes he has never committed while he signs the report as formulated by the NKVD where they wrote their own version in pretending to summarise what Cizek had said during interrogations. After signing this report he returns in his cell, deeply ashamed and destroyed. He has then a kind of illumination or deep understanding:

I saw clearly exactly what I must do. I can only call it a conversion experience, and I can only tell you frankly that my life was changed from that moment on. If my moment of despair had been a moment of total blackness, then this was an experience of blinding light. I knew immediately what I must do, what I would do, and somehow I knew that I could do it. I knew that I must abandon myself entirely to the will of the Father and live from now on in this spirit of self-abandonment to God. And I did it. I can only describe the experience as a sense of “letting go”, giving over totally my last effort or even any will to guide the reins of my own life. It is all too simply said, yet that one decision has affected every subsequent moment of my life. I have to call it a conversion.

I had always trusted in God. I had always tried to find his will, to see his providence at work. I had always seen my life and my destiny as guided by his will. At some moments more consciously than at others, I had been aware of his promptings, his call, his promises, his grace. At times

of crisis, especially, I had tried to discover his will and to follow it to the best of my ability. But this was a new vision, a totally new understanding, something more than just a matter of emphasis. Up until now, I had always seen my role—man’s role—in the divine economy as an active one. Up to this time, I had retained in my own hands the reins of all decision, actions, and endeavors; I saw it now as my task to “cooperate” with his grace, to be involved to the end in the working out of salvation. God’s will was “out there” somewhere, hidden, yet clear and unmistakable. It was my role—man’s role—to discover what it was and then conform my will to that, and so work at achieving the ends of his divine providence. I remained — man remained —in essence the master of my own destiny. Perfection consisted simply in learning to discover God’s will in every situation and then in bending every effort to do what must be done.

Now, with sudden and almost blinding clarity and simplicity, I realized I had been trying to do something with my own will and intellect that was at once too much and mostly all wrong. God’s will was not hidden somewhere “out there” in the situations in which I found myself; the situations themselves were his will for me. What he wanted was for me to accept these situations as from his hands, to let go of the reins and place myself entirely at his disposal. He was asking of me an act of total trust, allowing for no interference or restless striving on my part, no reservations,

no exceptions, no areas where I could set conditions or seem to hesitate. He was asking a complete gift of self, nothing held back. It demanded absolute faith: faith in God's existence, in his providence, in his concern for the minutest detail, in his power to sustain me, and in his love protecting me. It meant losing the last hidden doubt, the ultimate fear that God will not be there to bear you up. It was something like that awful eternity between anxiety and belief when a child first leans back and lets go of all support whatever —only to find that the water truly holds him up and he can float motionless and totally relaxed.

Once understood, it seemed so simple. I was amazed it had taken me so long in terms of time and of suffering to learn this truth. Of course we believe that we depend on God, that his will sustains us in every moment of our life. But we are afraid to put it to the test. There remains deep down in each of us a little nagging doubt, a little knot of fear which we refuse to face or admit even to ourselves, that says, "Suppose it isn't so." We are afraid to abandon ourselves totally into God's hands for fear he will not catch us as we fall. It is the ultimate criterion, the final test of all faith and all belief, and it is present in each of us, lurking unvoiced in a closet of our mind we are afraid to open. It is not really a question of trust in God at all, for we want very much to trust him; it is really a question of our ultimate belief in his existence and his providence, and it demands the purest act

of faith.

For my part, I was brought to make this perfect act of faith, this act of complete self-abandonment to his will, of total trust in his love and concern for me and his desire to sustain and protect me, by the experience of a complete despair of my own powers and abilities that had preceded it. I knew I could no longer trust myself, and it seemed only sensible then to trust totally in God. It was the grace God had been offering me all my life, but which I had never really had the courage to accept in full. I had talked of finding and doing his will, but never in the sense of totally giving up my own will. I had talked of trusting him, indeed I truly had trusted him, but never in the sense of abandoning all other sources of support and relying on his grace alone. I could never find it in me, before, to give up self completely. There were always boundaries beyond which I would not go, little hedges marking out what I knew in the depths of my being was a point of no return. God in his providence had been constant in his grace, always providing opportunities for this act of perfect faith and trust in him, always urging me to let go the reins and trust in him alone. I had trusted him, I had cooperated with his grace—but only up to a point. Only when I had reached a point of total bankruptcy of my own powers had I at last surrendered.

That moment, that experience, completely changed me.

I can say it now in all sincerity, without false modesty, without a sense either of exaggeration or of embarrassment. I have to call it a conversion experience; it was at once a death and a resurrection. It was not something I sought after or wanted or worked for or merited. Like every grace, it was a free gift of God. That it should have been offered to me when I had reached the limits of my own powers is simply part of the great mystery of salvation. I did not question it then; I cannot question it now. Nor can I explain how that one experience could have such an immediate and lasting effect upon my soul and upon my habitual actions from that moment on, especially when so many other experiences, so many other graces, had had no such effect. It was, however, a deliberate act of choice on my part. I know it was a choice I never could have made, and never had made before, without the inspiration of God's grace. But it was a deliberate choice. I chose, consciously and willingly, to abandon myself to God's will, to let go completely of every last reservation. I knew I was crossing a boundary I had always hesitated and feared to cross before. Yet this time I chose to cross it—and the result was a feeling not of fear but of liberation, not of danger or of despair but a fresh new wave of confidence and of happiness.

Across that threshold I had been afraid to cross, things suddenly seemed so very simple. There was but a single

vision, God, who was all in all; there was but one will that directed all things, God's will. I had only to see it, to discern it in every circumstance in which I found myself, and let myself be ruled by it. God is in all things, sustains all things, directs all things. To discern this in every situation and circumstance, to see his will in all things, was to accept each circumstance and situation and let oneself be borne along in perfect confidence and trust. Nothing could separate me from him, because he was in all things. No danger could threaten me, no fear could shake me, except the fear of losing sight of him. The future, hidden as it was, was hidden in his will and therefore acceptable to me no matter what it might bring. The past, with all its failures, was not forgotten; it remained to remind me of the weakness of human nature and the folly of putting any faith in self. But it no longer depressed me. I looked no longer to self to guide me, relied on it no longer in any way, so it could not again fail me. By renouncing, finally and completely, all control of my life and future destiny, I was relieved as a consequence of all responsibility. I was freed thereby from anxiety and worry, from every tension, and could float serenely upon the tide of God's sustaining providence in perfect peace of soul.

Filled with this new spirit and transformed interiorly, I no longer dreaded the next interview with the interrogator. I saw no reason now to fear him or the NKVD, for I saw all

things now as coming from the hands of God. I was no longer afraid of making a “mistake”, since God’s will was behind every development and every alternative. Secure in his grace, I felt capable of facing every situation and meeting every challenge; whatever he chose to send me in the future, I would accept.

The change in me, in fact, was so striking that even the interrogator noticed it. [...]

[The passage that has been cut out here describes how the interrogator makes new proposals for collaboration, i.e. a mission as a spy in the service of the NKVD in Rome]

Through all this, I remained at peace. Where before, the notion of such cooperation would have upset and tormented me, I felt no such distress any longer. If these things were to be, then they were to be—for a purpose God alone knew. If they were not to be, then they would never happen. My confidence in his will and his providence was absolute; I knew I had only to follow the promptings of his grace. I was sure, completely sure, that when a moment of decision came he would lead me on the right path. And so it happened. When at last the interrogator asked me to sign an agreement covering the Roman business, I just refused. I had not thought of doing so in advance; in fact, I had simply gone along with everything up to that point. But suddenly it seemed the only thing to do, and I did it. He became violently angry and threatened me with immediate

execution. I felt no fear at all. I think I smiled. I knew then I had won. When he called for the guards to lead me away—and I had no assurance but that they were leading me before a firing squad—I went with them as if they were so many ministers of grace. I felt his presence in the moment and knew it drew me toward a future of his design and purpose. I wished for nothing more.

Q: How do you receive this testimony?

C) Who/What is the Ground of Being

I propose here a few characteristics of the Ground of Being. These traits are of course only my own way to describe this unfathomable Reality:

- The invisible Presence as a root of our essence.
- Love as discretion (hiding). Not graspable.
- A will that does not manipulate us but creates opportunities.
- A creation that has nothing to do with evil events.
- God’s will as a quality of being rather than a will for action.
- “A core of seemingly simple truths to guide me”.
- A firm ground to be rooted in: the Ground of Being.
- A leading energy: the Spirit in us (inspiration).

Q: And what is your perception?

13.00 – LUNCH

E) One Body – One Taste

17) 14.30 - One body – one boat: a single-minded community (60')

Q: How does the transformation (conditions 1-3) lead into community?

A) The giving of oneself:

What is given?

B) Friendship:

How to be involved in one another's lives?

C) Diversity:

Which choice of members? Which inclusiveness?

D) Consensus:

How to come to a common agreement? What about differences?

E) Commitments:

What is the rule / the commitments that hold the community?

F) The unfathomable quality:

What is the added value?

G) Love:

What does love have to do with community?

16.00 – AFTERNOON TEA

Individualism, Friendship, Community: What is true love? 17-18 November 2018

A) Individualism and Friendship

- 01) 09.30 – Introduction (15')
- 02) 9.45 - The welfare state + market – reciprocity (15')
- 03) 10.00 - Relationships in the in-between (15')
- 04) 10.15 - Friendship – being involved (30')
- 05) 10.45 - Leading values of our society vs Community values (30')

11.15 - MORNING TEA

B) Evolution and Consciousness

- 06) 11.45 - Teilhard de Chardin: the Without and the Within (30')
- 07) 12.15 - Teilhard de Chardin: more personification into a wider body (30')
- 08) 14.30 - Ken Wilber: 9 stages of consciousness (60')
- 9) 15.30 - Maturity as a practice (30')
- 10) 16.00 - Self-obsession: Who Am I? (30')
- 11) 16.30 - Buddha nature - Image of God as spiritual DNA (30')

17.00 AFTERNOON TEA

C) Practice of love

- 12) 17.30 – Thomas Merton: Hell as hatred
- 13) 18.00 - Eros – Philia – Agape; and Selflessness (30')

19.00 – DINNER

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SUNDAY MORNING

07.30 – MEDITATION

08.00 – BREAKFAST

D) The transition – Detachment and rootedness

- 14) 09.30 – 1st condition: a choice / breaking resignation. Getting out of the great contradiction (45')
- 15) 10.15 – 2nd condition: Four forms of necessary detachment (45')

11.00 – MORNING TEA

- 16) 11.30 – 3rd condition: Rootedness - The Ground of Being (75')

13.00 – LUNCH

E) One Body – One Taste

- 17) 14.30 - One body – one boat: a single-minded community (60')

16.00 – AFTERNOON TEA