The Context for the Inquiry

Visualisation Meditation

This power of creative imagination is not merely content with observing the world as it is, accepting a given reality, but is capable of creating a new reality by transforming the inner as well as the outer world. 2

Lama Anagarika Govinda

Visualisation meditation is a method of applying imaginary experiences consciously aroused by a person while in a relaxed and quietened state of mind. The activity is intended to achieve some degree of psychic transformation for the practitioner. The basic essentials of the practice can be quite simply described like this;

_The ability to imagine is all you need._ 3 - With your eyes closed, allow your mind and body to settle into stillness. - Allow your body to relax. - Let go of things in the mind. - Then, after a while, as body and mind grows quieter, begin a simple noticing of things inside. - Notice the position and feel of your body. - Be aware of the rise and fall of your breathing. - Allow a warmth to surround your heart. - Empty your mind. - Gradually an inner stillness grows. - There is a sense of settling into a deeper state of consciousness. - You begin to feel in touch with an inner peace.

_In this state of inner quiet you open your imagination._ - You bring forth a vision, its form chosen and shaped by you. - Arising from somewhere deep within your psyche, it may be seen, or perhaps not seen but felt, or maybe sensed in some entirely different way. It has meaning and significance. You further shape it, move it, interact with it and, as you do, something begins to change in your inner world._

This, or something very similar, is the basic procedure in what is commonly known by its practitioners as visualisation. It goes under other names including imagery and one I

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particularly favour, creative meditation. Visualisation, the more widely understood term, is one which I think has the disadvantage of suggesting the imagined experience of seeing, something which is not regarded by all practitioners as a necessity. The imaginary use of other senses to achieve the same ends is possible and is a special feature in some applications.

In recent times, ways of working with images conjured within the mind have become increasingly known and applied around the world partly through the spreading influence of Eastern spiritual movements, especially Buddhism. It has also become available through developments stemming from sources such as the work of Freud, Jung and other psychotherapists. It appears in a variety of self-improvement systems, in motivational training, in accelerated learning, transpersonal education, and in dream processing. It is a part of holistic medicinal practice and it is also an important feature of some expressions of the New Age movement. A diversity of methods and applications ranges from the cultivation of spiritual insight to the development of prowess in sport.

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the spiritual and secular systems there is considerable cross-fertilisation with some Western psychologists referring to concepts in Tantric Buddhism and some Tibetan lamas tending to explain themselves in terms of Western psychology.  

The Conceptual Underlay of the Visualisations Used in this Inquiry

The genesis of the principal visualisations which are the context for this inquiry has been situational and collaborative. All have their origin in inspirations given to me by other people and these have been applied by me to fill some real-life needs, either my own or those of people close to me. The intended outcomes of these visualisations are related to the world views of some forms of Buddhism, views which have had a growing importance in my life since the early 1960s.

In the popular mind Buddhist visualisation is usually thought of in association with meditation practices originating in Tibet. However my connection is not at all with Tibetan Buddhism but mainly with the foundational texts of schools relatively unknown in the West, though once strong in China and Japan. These are the Tendai and Kegon, both of which have dissimilar ontologies from that of Tibetan Buddhism. The texts which have provided the theoretical basis and the themes and which have shaped much of the imagery in my visualisation work are the Lotus and Flower Ornament Sūtras, both of which have a unique standing in Buddhist canonical literature.

These two inspirational texts are part of the literary heritage of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. According to this tradition the first sermon preached by the Buddha after his Enlightenment was an undistilled revelation of the essence of that enlightenment. It was an "... unfolding of the vision of reality that the Buddha realized while in the state of

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13 Tendai and Kegon are the names by which these schools are known in Japan where they continue to exist as independent institutions. See Steinliber-Oberlin, E. *The Buddhist Sects of Japan: Their History, Philosophical Doctrines and Sanctories*. London: George Allen and Unwin. 1938.

14 All schools of Buddhism aim at enabling people to attain enlightenment. There are however differences in their descriptions of this goal and the ways in which it is to be reached. All the schools are therefore soteriological in that their practices are understood to have "... transformative power and will lead, somehow necessarily, to specific religious goals." Gimello, Robert M. "Maapa and Culture: learning, letters and Liberation in Northern Sung Ch'an." in Robert E. Buswell Jr and Robert M. Gimello eds., *Paths to Liberation: The Maapa and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 1992. p.3. See also Conze, Edward, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*. Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1967. p.213.

15 Mahayana, Sanskrit for 'Great Vehicle', is a designation for the schools of Buddhism which encourage practitioners to aspire to the enlightenment of all other living beings as well as their own.
This revelation was developed by his later disciples into the text known as The Flower Ornament Sūtra. Its main theme, presented in discourses and striking visual imagery, is the interconnected, interpenetrating and interdependent nature of all phenomena. According to this sūtra, we live in a universe composed of radiant interreflection which is at the same time both form and void. Chang Chung-Yuan describes it like this:

This world of luminosity, absolutely free from spatial and temporal limitations and yet no less the world of daily affairs is called dharmadhatu. In dharmadhatu the boundaries of each particularity melt away, and the reality of each becomes interfused with every other being.

This is a startlingly beautiful vision of reality which has curious parallels with some recent trends in physics, lending itself easily to scientific metaphor. Thomas Cleary, who produced the first translation of the sūtra in English says:

The Flower Ornament Scripture is like a hologram, the whole concentrated in all the parts, this very structure reflecting a fundamental doctrine of the scripture, that this is what the cosmos itself is like, everything interreflecting, the one and the many interpenetrating.

The interreflecting cosmos, of course, includes this ordinary existence of ours which is where the events of the sūtra occur. Li Tongxuan tells us: "...it takes place in the human world to illustrate that the garden of the human world is the very garden of the reality realm, and that the world of living beings is the world of true awakening." The

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17 Sanskrit, Avatamsaka Sūtra
18 See Cleary, Thomas, trans., The Flower Ornament Scripture: Translation of the Avatamsaka Sūtra. Volume 3. p.4. "Naturally many perceptions of the “meaning” of the scripture are possible, according to the history and condition of the interpreter. This is noted in the scripture itself and is a basic understanding of the school of hermeneutics founded on this scripture in the Far East."
extraordinary visions illustrating these themes in the sūtra evoke an emotional and
aesthetic response which Daisetz Suzuki expresses in these glowing terms:

To my mind, no religious literature in the world can ever approach
the grandeur of conception, the depth of feeling, and the gigantic
scale of composition as attained in this sūtra. It is the eternal
fountain of life from which no religious mind will turn back athirst
or only partially satisfied.\textsuperscript{23}

The sūtra thus provides a totality of religious experience, being simultaneously a vision of
ultimate truth and a manual for its attainment as a personal realisation. As A. J. Prince
puts it:

This vision is at once the starting point, the path, and the goal. It
is the goal insofar as it represents the nature of reality as perceived
by the mind of those who are enlightened - i.e. by the buddhas. It
is also the starting point in both theory and practice: in theory,
because it is the implicit presence of Enlightenment from the
beginning that makes its ultimate realisation possible; and in
practice, because it is only through faith in the realm of
Enlightenment .... that one can enter on the bodhisattva-path
which culminates in that same Enlightenment. And finally the
path itself is simply a progressive realisation of that same vision
through constant meditation on it, and practitioners are sustained
in their progress by the same faith which inspired them to begin.\textsuperscript{24}

Despite the brilliance of the Buddha’s first revelation, the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition
tells that there were very few among Buddha’s hearers who could even begin to appreciate
it. Seeing this, the Buddha subsequently expounded a series of simpler teachings, over a
span of many years, more suited to the ordinary level of understanding.\textsuperscript{25} These discourses

\textsuperscript{23} D.T. Suzuki quoted in. Capra, Fritjof, The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern
\textsuperscript{25} This tradition is generally accepted among Mahāyāna followers in China and Japan. See Gregory, Peter N.
Press.1987. p.4.;Donner, Neal, ‘Sudden and Gradual Intimately Conjoined: Chih-i’s T’ien-t’ai View’, in
Peter N. Gregory, ed., Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought. Honolulu:
were developed into the many scriptures which form the basis of most Buddhist sects existing today. The tradition goes on to tell how, towards the end of the Buddha's teaching career, he again returned to the theme of his great illumination, drawing all his former teachings together into one comprehensive unity. This teaching was later evolved into the Lotus of the Wonderful Law Sūtra.  

The Lotus Sūtra resembles the Flower Ornament in containing a great deal of mythic imagery much of which is presented in the form of parable. Included are descriptions of miraculous displays which at first reading seem to have no purpose other than to dazzle us with spectacle. However, as Sangharakshita says: "They are visual symbols and like the myths and legends their real import is spiritual." As Jung informs us: "Whenever we have to do with mythologems it is advisable to assume that they mean more than what they appear to say."  

The Lotus is unique among sūtras in the extent to which mythic symbolism outweighs its theoretical expressions of doctrine. It is as if explanatory wording was considered insufficient to convey the profound insights of the great Enlightenment and so to achieve a level of apprehension deeper than any explanation could convey, imagery is evoked with words being merely the means of evoking it. "...it is obvious that its deeper meaning cannot be verbalised." says Hall, "The real message was the impact of the total scene, which takes on the dimensions of the ultimate mandala." Thus, as the Tanabes suggest, the entire sūtra can be regarded as a message to our intuitive and interpretive faculties. They say: "The text, so full of merit, is about a discourse which is never delivered... It is a surrounding text, pure content, which invites not only interpretation of what is said but filling in of what is not said."  

As the Buddha's final revelation of universal truth, the Lotus of the Wonderful Law Sūtra presents an optimistic vision of the evolution of the human individual and the whole of humankind, indeed all that lives, through a transformational process which has no limitations: Niwano says, "...the Lotus Sutra reveals and explains the infinite possibilities

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26 Sanskrit, Saddharmapundarika Sūtra commonly referred to in English as the Lotus Sūtra
open to human beings ... they have an infinite capacity for elevation ..." 31  "The Lotus Sūtra expounds unqualified universalism. It leaves out no one, men or women, saints or sinners, sages or the ignorant, humans or non-humans, believers or non-believers," says Montgomery.32 "...the spiritual message of the book is revolutionary in character," remarks Soothill.33 The sūtra proclaims that everyone is to become a Buddha, a being who, as Hurvitz explains: "is not to be delimited in space and time." 34 Ikeda describes the vision thus, "The self becomes the cosmos, and in a single instant the life flow stretches out to encompass all that is past and all that is future." 35 Manly Hall writes, "The cosmos is revealed, like the unfolding lotus, forever evolving, forever maturing, and forever fruitful. Lives are bound together in an infinite pattern of mutual benevolence. The cosmos is revealed as the eternal teacher of all that lives." 36 Admirers of the Lotus Sūtra speak of its all-embracing message with unashamed enthusiasm. "This is the most wonderful of all sutras." insists Master Hua37. Its devotees find the "discourse which is never delivered" an astonishing and unending source of inspiration. Nikkyō Niwano describes his feelings on discovering the sutra like this:

I was profoundly shaken by what I had learned. The impression made on me was of astonishing vibrant freshness. ... the more I read the sutra, the more impressive and profound it seems. Is there another teaching with this power? Is there another book that can be read with amazement and growing emotional impact every day for forty years? 38

There are some interesting feminist perspectives in both the Lotus and the Flower Ornament Sūtras which make them stand out from much other religious literature originating in India, flavoured as this tends to be with male elitism. For example, most of the major revelations in the closing part of the Flower Ornament are delivered by women

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36 Hall, Manly P. op. cit. p.78.
or female deities while in the Lotus the most dramatic attainment of enlightenment is demonstrated by a small girl.\textsuperscript{39}

In both the sūtras a theme, of significance to me in the development of my visualisations, is the encouragement of feelings of reverence toward ordinary people or other beings. Particularly significant is a story in the Lotus Sūtra which tells how the Buddha, in a past life, developed his spiritual powers by constantly revering the divine potential of extremely ignorant and uncouth people.\textsuperscript{40} An example of a similar egalitarian attitude of reverence is suggested in these verses from the Flower Ornament Sūtra:

When seeing a Buddha’s tomb,  
They should wish that all beings  
Be honoured as the shrine  
And receive the offerings of celestials and humans.

Reverently gazing at the shrine,  
They should wish that all beings  
Be looked up to by all  
Celestials and humans.

Bowing their heads to the shrine,  
They should wish that all beings  
Be exalted beyond the view  
Of gods and men.\textsuperscript{41}

That seemingly ordinary people can be a source of spiritual insight is suggested in the final section of the same sūtra in its description of the progress of a young pilgrim towards enlightenment. He travels through the land seeking out and receiving profound teachings from such unlikely sources as sailors, young children, merchants and courtesans.

\textsuperscript{39} See Katō, Bunnō, Tamura, Yoshiro, and Miyasaka, Kōjirō, trans. \textit{op. cit.}, 1975. p.211. See also my commentary to Scene Four.


\textsuperscript{41} Cleary, Thomas, trans., \textit{op. cit.} Volume I.  p.328.
As both the Lotus and the Flower Ornament Sūtras feature a richly symbolic imagery it should not be surprising that, during the great flowering of Buddhism in medieval China, they were both made use of as visualization manuals. This is also the way I have chosen to apply them. I find in these two books a wealth of inspiration as between them they create for me images of myself and all beings engaged in a process of interrelated cosmic evolution. They are therefore my primary visualisation texts. Although I assume that somewhere there must be someone still using these sūtras for these purposes, at the time of writing I have not been able to discover anyone doing so outside of my own group.

The Karuna Meditations Contrasted with Other Buddhist Methods

The meditations I present for the Karuna Foundation, assuming the world view of the works described above, differ from the more popularly known Tibetan methods in several respects. The Tibetan practice of meditation is largely geared to the understanding and experience of śūnyatā, the fundamental emptiness of existence. The two texts I have described, and the Buddhist schools that derive from them, also utilise śūnyatā as a key doctrine but from it they both evolve further and, some might say, more subtle understandings.

There are differences in method between visualisations from the Tibetan traditions and those I present for the Karuna Foundation. Tibetan visualisation techniques normally require that the imagery should arise from the contemplation of stylised art forms. The Karuna visualisations invoke imagery out of word pictures from the sūtras combined with aspects of the real-life environment of the meditator. The principal meditations feature real people rather than the mythical deities featured in the Tibetan methods. The intention here is that, divinity is recognised and honoured in the ordinary people of the ordinary world. The veneration of common human beings as if they were gods, or more correctly the heartfelt recognition of their inherent godliness is, to my knowledge, not duplicated in other Buddhist visualisation traditions yet it is justified within the doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism.


44 Theravadin Buddhism has the seeds of the practice in its canonical works in the advice given to Sīkāla in the Sīkālovada Suttanta. Sīkāla is encouraged to venerate all the people in his life in the same way that he has been worshipping the six quarters of the universe. See Rhys Davids T.W. & C.A. Dialogues of the Buddha.
Revering, honouring, celebrating, these are among the feelings that the visualisations are intended to cultivate. The imagined activity in the Karuna meditations is thus assumed to be charged with a strong quality of feeling. There is a process intended to bring about a "heart deliverance", a sublimation of emotion with a subsequent shift in the interpretation of the world of the practitioner. "I deeply revere you. I dare not slight and contemn you." affirms the Buddha-to-be in the Lotus Sūtra. Niwano, commenting on this, says: "To discover and respect others' buddha-nature is indeed the primary object of the bodhisattva practice, and living Buddhism consists of this." 

The Karuna meditations have other features. The imagined icons are not static nor are they from the outset necessarily visual. In my own experience, seeing is often less significant than an undefinable sense of presence. Quite frequently the meditation is carried along by a sensation of motion. The icons are mobile. They walk, they glide, they fly, they dance, and deep in the reverie the meditator also moves, flies and dances with the icons.

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Translated from the Pali of the Dīgha Nikāya Part III. London : Luzac. 1921.p.72. The most widespread Buddhist view is that as spiritual attainment is the province of monks, only they are worthy of special veneration. The Tendai Buddhist position is that; "...Since each being carries within itself the absolute nature of Buddha, the most fallen of men can hope to reach Buddhahood." See Steinilber-Oberlin E., op. cit., p.78.


Investigating and Understanding Creative Meditation Experience

Of course we all have an understandable desire for crystal clarity, but we are apt to forget that in psychic matters we are dealing with processes of experience, that is, with transformations which should never be given hard and fast names if their living movement is not to petrify into something static. 49

C.G. Jung

How does one research creative meditation? How can we inquire systematically into 'processes of experience' which do not lend themselves readily to quantitative study? This was the main concern in my first attempt at discussing my research with some prospective co-inquirers. At the time of the conversation transcribed below I had a general picture of what I might try to do and the direction I thought the investigation might go, however none of this had been thought through in detail and I was nowhere near being able to justify my emerging epistemology. This discussion brought these issues out into the open and helped me to begin addressing them. 50

Participants in the discussion were -

Robert, a social policy researcher, Mark, a science teacher, myself.

Mark: I would like to get down to talking about the main objective of this research. What do you see as the main objective?

Malcolm: If I put it in as few words as possible, the main objective would be the transformation of the human condition by exploring the use of creative meditation.

50 Taped discussion at North Sydney. April 1990.
Transformation, improving the human condition, including my own, that is one way I could express it.

Mark: I'm not happy with that. It might be an eventual result of the research but surely not the immediate main objective.

Malcolm: I think it could be both. In researching creative meditation, I think that knowing more about the human condition needs to be a big part of the immediate objective and a big part of the eventual objective. So, if improvements could come out of that knowledge, wouldn't they be a worthwhile aim for research?

Mark: No. No. If this is to be a scientific study you have to look at something that can be quantified. I would have thought that the whole thing was about this; if I were to instruct you to meditate upon something, let me think of an example. For example, you might want to grow more hair, and so I tell you to imagine yourself with enormous amounts of hair and then you would make measurements to see if what you had done in the meditation had any physical effect. It seems to me that what we are doing is to see whether there really is a connection between an action in your mind and physical reality.

Malcolm: I hope the research would take in something wider than measuring physical changes such as the growth of hair. To me, creative meditation involves a whole ecology of body, mind, feeling and the social and physical environment - everything. I'm hoping to work with people who would like to explore all of that. It's like an adventure but it's the sort of thing that doesn't lend itself to precise measurements.

Mark: Well if that is the case then it should be just called a great adventure but I don't see that as science. If you don't want precision in your study then I don't think you can call what you are doing scientific.

Malcolm: It depends on how you want to define science. If we say that science is theory based on the evidence of experience then what we would be doing would be science, even if I admit that much of what we would be looking at could not be quantified.

Mark: All right then if you are not going to quantify your research what will you do?

Malcolm: At the moment I would like to use a faculty which has been made use of in nearly all innovative work in science and elsewhere and that is the willingness to go where intuition leads, to find what is to be found.
Robert: So you're saying that the nature of this research is exploratory.

Malcolm: Yes it is exploratory. I want to involve myself with people who are eager to try out creative meditation and see what consequences there are and to see what unexpected changes there can be in their lives.

Robert: So what you are really telling us is that you want to join with people and share what they say they are experiencing without taking the tape measure out and making exact measurements.

Malcolm: Yes.

Mark: Well if that is the case I don't think the research would be worth anything. I'll explain why. If you are going to research something that can't be measured and can't be repeated then what's to stop you or anyone just sitting down and inventing a whole lot of nonsense to write about. You could make any wild claims that came into your mind and no one would know one way or the other if they were right.

Robert: I don't go along with that. From my point of view I have all kinds of experiences which I can't quantify but I'm quite happy to say that I've had them. For example if I said to a physicist, "Quantify my love life. Give me a quantum mechanical explanation of how I'm in love." You couldn't do it. I think that what Malcolm is talking about is a lot of processes which don't necessarily fit as neatly the mode of investigation that we've had when you try to say what a molecule is doing. It's like trying to use physics to explain biology.

Mark: What I thought we were investigating was the power of the mind to influence physical reality. For example, I have often watched Chinese people playing Mah-jong and I have seen some of them, when they needed one more tile to complete the game, concentrate on the number of that tile, saying for example, 'Six! Six!' and turning the tile over and it's a six. And some of these people seem to do that over and over. Now that sort of thing is what I thought we were looking at, a person concentrates on something they want to happen and it happens. That sort of thing can be set up as a controlled experiment and observed and measured.

Malcolm: Well, that might be interesting to do and I suppose curiosity might lead some of the co-researchers into doing something like that but it wouldn't really prove anything. I am a bit wary of attempting proofs in this kind of work.
Mark: Why should you be wary of proving things? Why should you be reluctant to say, "Look, this is what I believe. This is my hypothesis and I'm going to set out to prove it." What's wrong with that?

Malcolm: Well, I suppose it's because the only thing I could really prove is that there are people who believe in the effectiveness of creative meditation and other people who don't. The people who believe it have subjectively proved it to themselves. I don't think there's much value in attempting to convince sceptics who would not accept anything as proof.

Robert: It's a bit like Galileo's critics who told him to put his telescope away because what he was seeing just couldn't be there.

Malcolm: And that's why I'm not concerned about attempting to prove something to people who have closed their minds to what I am doing. I'm interested in working with people who want to deepen their creative meditation experiences and develop new applications out of their interpretations of what they experienced.

Mark: I'm still not satisfied. If I was in your position I would be setting up experiments to prove my hypothesis. It seems to me that you are setting out to keep everything vague so that we can't even see your hypothesis. I don't think you have really made a clear concise statement about your hypothesis. If it was something that was clear to you it should be possible for you to do that.

Malcolm: OK, then my hypothesis is that people can change their perception and experience of themselves and their external world by engaging in creative meditation. My question is whether we can explore that possibility further. Proof might be interesting but I have my doubts as to how useful that proof might be. You know, it's like the dispute about whether smoking causes lung cancer. In spite of all the research that has gone into trying to prove the hypothesis one way or the other there is still a substantial body of people on both sides of the argument whose opinion will not be swayed by any results of any research. Their minds are already made up.

Mark: All right. Can you say clearly and concisely what you think this research is for?

Malcolm: It's to find a better understanding of what I and the other researchers are doing and to find better ways of doing it.
Mark: So you mean that if you can scientifically investigate creative meditation and gain greater understanding through your studies then you might use that to change your techniques.

Malcolm: Yes, it's partly like a situation where a vaccine is available which works reasonably well. If a scientist came along and said, "I want to find a way of making this vaccine work extremely well," and then he began a research program, we would surely think that was worthwhile. He wouldn't have it in the front of his mind that he was trying to prove anything. He would be more concerned with finding a way of furthering human wellbeing. I like to think that this research includes something like that.

Robert: So this is a study which improves a technology.

Malcolm: Partly that's it but there's more to it than just technology. It's a study of what happens when a group of people collectively examines its own experiences. Here is this group of people, which includes me, all interested in creative meditation and I encourage us all to ask ourselves questions about that. There's a shared inquiry which leads to shared realisation which probably leads to changes of many kinds, including perhaps greater happiness for everyone concerned.

Mark: I'm sure that a lot of scientific researchers would not be thinking of their work in terms of finding happiness. They would say their main purpose was a search for truth. Science generally is concerned with uncovering truth.

Malcolm: Yes, I admit that a lot of scientists would look at their work that way. I think that research which discovers truths that produce nuclear weapons certainly doesn't have much to do with achieving happiness for people. But at the same time, happiness itself could be an object for research. It is definitely part of the vision I want to follow.
Dancing in Paradigms Apart

...there is created in the laboratory a situation which is artificially restricted to the question and which compels Nature to give an unequivocal answer. The workings of Nature in her unrestricted wholeness are completely excluded. If we want to know what these workings are, we need a method of inquiry which imposes the fewest possible conditions.\textsuperscript{51}

C.G. Jung

This discussion with Mark was a useful, though rather uncomfortable, experience for me. Instead of the sharing of enthusiastic curiosity about creative meditation that I had anticipated in our conversation, I found us facing each other across an ideological gap, the gap between traditional positivist science and the new trends of inquiry within the social sciences. Mark and I had chosen to have almost no common ground to stand on. We were speaking out of different paradigms, frustrating each other by utilising completely different epistemologies. It was as if we were setting out to demonstrate and enforce the kind of split referred to by Lincoln who believes that:

...accommodation between paradigms is impossible. The rules for action, for process, for discourse, for what is considered knowledge and truth, are so vastly different that, although procedurally we may appear to be undertaking the same search, in fact, we are led to vastly diverse, disparate, distinctive, and typically antithetical ends.\textsuperscript{52}

Perhaps it could have been otherwise and in contradiction of Lincoln, we could have been more generous in entertaining each other's point of view. We might have attempted to enter each other's paradigm with sympathy, not necessarily to abandon our own but to enlarge on it, a "fusion of horizons as Gadamer would call it. For, as he says of such processes, "To try to eliminate one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd... to acquire a horizon of interpretations requires a fusion of horizons."\textsuperscript{53}

The choice Mark and I made to focus our attention on the gap between us instead of attempting to 'fuse' our horizons, eventually proved very useful for me. I consequently felt a need to reconsider and state in more detail why it was more appropriate to conduct an inquiry into meditation experience in my way rather than in his. I needed to explain why I seemed to be 'keeping everything vague'. I felt it necessary to justify my non-use of controlled experimentation, quantification and theoretical proof, all of which are part of the methodology of positivist research whose tenets Mark follows.

Experimental research of the kind suggested by Mark has, in fact, been applied to visualisation and to other forms of meditation practice with some interesting results. As an example of this kind of experimentation, a study was conducted at the University of Illinois, to test the effectiveness of visualisation on improving basketball game playing skills. In this experiment, a group of students was divided into three teams of equal ability, one of which undertook basketball 'training' through a daily visualisation practice in which they imagined themselves scoring perfectly. Two other teams were prepared as control groups, one of which practised the skills physically while the other was not permitted any training at all. The results showed that the two 'trained' teams made similar improvements in scoring ability in contrast to the non-improvement of the untrained team. 54

In another study conducted by Kasamatsu and Hirai of the University of Tokyo, electroencephalographs were used to measure changes in brain activity during the meditation practice of a group of Zen monks. From their experiments the researchers noted that:

... the monks developed a predominance of alpha waves ... the alpha waves increased in amplitude and regularity, particularly in the frontal and central regions of the brain. Subjects with a great deal of experience in meditation showed other changes: the alpha waves slowed from the usual frequency of nine to 12 cycles per second to seven or eight cycles per second, and rhythmical theta waves at six to seven cycles per second appeared. 55

Controller experiments like these, and Mark's suggested test of visualisation in a hair growing experiment, satisfy the tenets of conventional scientific inquiry. The

phenomenon being studied is observable and measurable and it is possible for more than one observer to agree on its existence and characteristics. The results of such studies, are capable of independent verification and allow certain conclusions to be drawn. In one instance it becomes safe to assert that meditation induces changes in brainwave activity and in the other it can be claimed that visualisation of a physical skill can bring about an improvement in that skill. This information has its own special usefulness but the usefulness has certain limits. Curiosity is far from satisfied if we are mainly concerned about what takes place in the inner world of the research subjects.

The Limitations of Positivism

On Mark’s side of the paradigm gap, where reason is paramount, the mystery of the unknown is a challenge which must be dispelled through measurement and description. On my side of the gap, measurement and description is the proper approach to knowing things which can be reasoned about but in our daily round of living there are mysteries which stand outside the realm of reason and which do not lend themselves to measurement or description. If these are to be penetrated, they must be approached in other ways. I wanted to allow for these non-reasoning approaches in my research and when I indicated this in our discussion, Mark could not help but infer that I was ‘setting out to keep everything vague.’

As Mark demonstrated, traditional science is dismissive of ways of knowing other than its own. Dazzled by its own successes, it has come to see itself as the sole arbiter of what can and what cannot be called knowledge. Its unswerving faith in the power of reason is embodied in Stephen Hawking who casts aside all modesty to claim his field of study to be at the threshold of finding a theoretical formulation for all existence:

... the study of the early universe and the requirements of mathematical consistency will lead us to a complete unified theory within the lifetime of some of us who are around today, ... Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason - for then we would know the mind of God.

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If Hawking is correct and all things knowable can be known through reason then I would be obliged to cease 'keeping everything vague' and work at dispelling all mystery in my inquiry by the same means. However, Hawking's optimism is not universally shared and there are some scientists who recognise that, within his own paradigm, the base for such unbridled confidence is being eroded. While persisting with their attempts to roll back mystery through scientific method, there are scientists in the vanguard of research who admit that they are achieving the opposite. The more effectively they manage to scrutinise the universe, the more it seems to become inscrutable. The production of theories and formulations out of reductionist interpretations offers workable answers to some questions but then seems to point to further enigma.

One such emerging enigma is the capacity for self-organisation which seems to be at work within the universe. Biologist Rupert Sheldrake has pointed out many examples of self-organising properties of living organisms which are inadequately explained by the mechanistic principles of classical science. To him, traditional science is "like a Procrustean bed into which biological evolution has been forced to fit." 58 However, the bed of Procrustes is under strain from the effort. As Paul Davies says:

... the ability of the physical world to organize itself constitutes a fundamental and deeply mysterious property of the universe. The fact that nature has creative power, and is able to produce a progressively richer variety of complex forms and structures, challenges the very foundation of contemporary science. 59

Self-organisation is only one increasing mystery; the question of what the universe is actually made of is another. Classical physics with its reductionism coped effectively with this question while it studied inanimate matter in visible lumps. Explanations of the universe as an assemblage of distinct and measurable 'bits' served well until reductionism went into the sub-atomic world. There it began eroding the ground beneath its own feet as it found that the old familiar rules seemed no longer applicable. Quantum physics now goes from mystery to more mystery, as it grapples with questions couched in traditional styles of thinking. David Bohm comments: "In quantum theory we're now asking a certain kind of question and we're getting a certain kind of answer. We may be putting ourselves into a trap, you see, by restricting ourselves to this way of thinking." 60

Schrödinger says of the great puzzlement: "Most painful is the absolute silence of all our scientific investigations towards our questions concerning the meaning and scope of the whole display." 61

Reduced to simple statements the propositions of quantum physics sound as bizarre and irrational as the world-views encountered by Alice in her visit to Wonderland. Particles seem to change their position without moving.62 An object can choose to be either a wave or a particle depending on how it is observed.63 Two widely separated particles seem to respond to each other’s movements instantly with no apparent connection.64 Decades of observation have confirmed these paradoxical phenomena with no agreement among the observers as to why they occur. As Nick Herbert puts it:

... fifty years have gone by and the structure appears stronger than ever. Physicists’ reality crisis consists of the fact that nobody can agree on what’s holding the building up. Different people looking at the same theory come up with profoundly different models of reality, all of them outlandish compared to the ordinary experience which constitutes both daily life and the quantum facts.65

Classical physics was confident that it could provide a clear description of what the physical world is really made of. However, in its search for the ultimate building blocks of matter, quantum physics has discovered instead mysterious shadows. As Davies and Brown comment: "Following the logic of quantum theory to its ultimate conclusion, most of the physical universe seems to dissolve away into a shadowy fantasy."66 And, as Ken Wilber notes, the shadows seem to lead inward to mysticism, :

... with the new physics, the shadowy character of the whole enterprise became more obvious ... physics deals with shadows;

to go beyond shadows is to go beyond physics, is to head toward the meta-physical or mystical ... 67

It follows that, by default, traditional science is telling us about a universe which is ultimately beyond conception, formed of shadows, a ‘Śūnyatā’ universe, mysteriously elaborating itself, denying commonsense but allowing some of the propositions of Mahāyāna Buddhism to make very good sense. It becomes an appropriate backdrop for the parapsychological claims of some creative visualisation practitioners.

Curiously, while the fundamentally inconceivable nature of things entirely surrounds them, most scientists as they engage themselves with their work, do not raise their heads to see. Turning a blind eye, many continue to think and act as if the tenets of positivism were still inviolate. They press on with Hawking-like confidence as if through a process of measuring and reasoning alone, the final answer to their questions were about to be found just around the corner. Roger Jones writing in ‘Physics as Metaphor’ describes the blinkered vision he has observed in the scientific community:

When pressed on these matters, most scientists will concede that all physical theories are tentative and approximate and that there is no clear conception of physical reality in modern quantum theory. But such disclaimers are made in the interests of fair play, so to speak. They do not characterise the way scientists behave and think in their everyday activities of research and reaching nor in their conversations with each other. 68

An essential part of the ontological position of traditional science is realism. This is the proposition that observable things have an independent existence from an observer. Based on this we have the rule that in a scientific investigation the observer must always stand dispassionately, apart from what is being observed, just as Mark and I might have done in an experiment with people visualising sixes in a Mah-jong game. This objectivist principle is workable if we stay in Newton’s world of visible lumps but elsewhere it is now much undermined. Quantum mechanics shows us that the status of independent observer as actually an impossible condition and can only be pretended. In actuality the observer and the observed are found to be part of an interactive totality. To quote Jones on this point: ‘... the observer and observed form an integrated unit that cannot be

broken down into independent components."69 "Realism is no longer a tenable philosophical view. It's been disproved in the laboratory." comments the Australian physicist, Brian McCusker.70 Trends in quantum physics thus seem to be restating the traditional Mahāyāna Buddhist position expressed in the Lankavatara Sutra:

To those who see the world clearly and properly, the separation between that which perceives and that which is perceived ceases; there is no such external world as is discriminated by the ignorant.71

Not only is an observer not able to stand apart from a process, as a separate reality but, just as in the case of a person studying his or her own meditation experiences, any observer is so much integrated with the process that he or she is actually essential to it taking place at all. Brian McCusker comments:

... quantum mechanics says the observer is essential. Now it is obvious to me that if the observer is essential to the universe then, to study the universe, it must be essential to study the observer... and that has never been a very popular pastime ... most physicists have opted out of that one and preferred to use quantum physics like a cookbook and go home and believe in realism. 72

If realism has been revealed as a false idol then objectivity cannot be maintained as a sacred cow. If scientific method shows that observer and observed are really one unity, then subjectivity should be allowed for in scientific inquiry, particularly that which deals with human experience, "... to join with people and share what they say they are experiencing..." as Robert put it during our discussion with Mark. In the social sciences, however, following the lead of classical physics, researchers have traditionally attempted to make the process of data collection and processing as objective as possible. This affected impersonalisation has resulted in a denial of the humanness of human beings and, as sociologist and feminist Susan Krieger points out, not only is the observer made impersonal but so also are the people being observed. She says:

69Ibid. p.6.
The social sciences tend not only to view the self of a researcher as a contaminant, but they also view the selves of people studied as invisible. ... In experimental psychology, the self is something we typically know only in terms of measurable external behaviours, or we know it in terms of cognitive processes that do not comprehend the whole self. 73

So it is that with attempts at objective study nothing like the total human is ever seen. Putting these objections aside, there are other difficulties with scientists' claims to cool objectivity. Many researchers have a strong subjective bias in favour of the importance of their chosen specialities. Indeed some are driven by great passion. In the social sciences it is possible that political or religious ideologies, or even the mundane practicalities of funding may strongly colour the conceptual framework of the research. In any case, a neutral and impersonal objectivity is scarcely possible when the object of research begins to affect the researcher. Neither the observer or what is observed, as part of an interactive whole, can avoid affecting each other. To quote Guba and Lincoln:

It is commonly recognised that objects of inquiry, when they are human, may react to inquirers or to their inquiry methods. Less appreciated is the fact that the inquirer is also subject to interaction. Just as the inquirer may shape the respondent's behaviour, so may the respondent shape the inquirer's behaviour. Anyone who has done research involving humans is well aware that one cannot abandon one's own humanness in the interest of "objective" inquiry; it is both impossible and ethically undesirable to do so. 74

In spite of all this, resistance to admitting non-neutrality remains strong among many researchers who choose to avoid knowing that such issues exist. "Scientists firmly believe that as long as they are not conscious of any bias or political agenda, they are neutral and objective, when in fact they are only unconscious." says feminist writer Namenwirth. 75

Objectivity provides the basis for quantification, an essential feature of positivistic study and traditional science contends that nothing can be properly understood if it cannot be

measured. Unfortunately for this contention, measurement can never be applied simultaneously to every measurable aspect of a system. At the quantum physics level this limitation has been demonstrated in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle which says that it is impossible to measure both the speed and position of a sub-atomic particle, knowledge of the one excluding knowledge of the other.76 Using Heisenberg's principle as a metaphor for human studies we can claim that attempts to simultaneously quantify every aspect of human behaviour are out of the question. A further difficulty arises when, as in studies of weather, we find that the more complex and non-linear the system is found to be, the more incomplete is any measured picture of it.77 In the complexity of most aspects of human behaviour, quantification gives such partial and therefore misleading impressions that we really do render "the selves of people studied as invisible."

The study of 'Zen brain waves' by Kasamatsu and Hirai is a case in point. Here is a situation where measurement helps us acquire some valuable information but not a complete understanding. The observations actually make possible the trivialisation of the meditation experience, perhaps even allowing Zen enlightenment to be quantifiable in terms of watts, amps and volts! "Not everything of a spiritual nature can be measured ... some scientists still insist on measuring this activity which is not measurable." says Zen master Enomiya-Lassalle.78 Even if such brain wave data were augmented by other measurements such as breathing rate, blood pressure or heart rate, we would still be very far from understanding what the monk knows about his Zen, a totally subjective form of knowing. When Shunryu Suzuki speaks of the mind waves which appear in his meditations, he does not seem to be talking about something that could be understood by the use of an electroencephalograph.

Even though waves arise, the essence of your mind is pure; it is just like clear water with a few waves. ... Waves are the practice of the water. To speak of waves apart from water or water apart from waves is a delusion. Water and waves are one. Big mind and small mind are one. ... A mind with waves in it is not a disturbed mind but actually an amplified one. Whatever you experience is an expression of big mind.79

78 Enomiya-Lassale, Hugo M. Roland Ropers and Bogden Snela eds., *The Practice of Zen Meditation*.
What does he mean? Something important has occurred for Suzuki but in speaking of pure mind, big mind, and making his metaphoric reference to mind and water, he is talking about experiences which defy adequate verbal expression let alone quantification. They would be very much distorted by positivist inquiry which would attempt to scale and measure them. To understand something of what Suzuki means by 'big mind' in that inner world of meditation, a researcher must be willing to somehow enter it herself.

Quantified studies can only give us incomplete information about human experiences but this is not their only unsatisfactory feature. Such studies need to be based on principles which invite objections of an ethical nature. In realist investigations of human activity it is usually considered necessary to establish control groups, the members of which are either not given full information about the experiment or who are deliberately misinformed about it. In Guba and Lincoln's words, "A realist ontology provides an unusual warrant for unethical behaviour. In the interest of discovering "the real truth" or "serving some higher social good," it may be necessary to deceive the subjects about the true purpose of the inquiry." 80 The deception, whether or not seen as minor by the control groups, may be justified by claiming it to be "in the cause of science." Criticism may be thereby silenced, but ethics are warped.

Another ethical consideration is the mechanistic and therefore demeaning interpretation of human activity which arises when people are seen as research subjects. The criteria of positivist science transforms living people into mere things, clockwork figures moving in a clockwork universe. To quote Guba and Lincoln:

So long as human science is viewed in reductionist, deterministic ways, human beings will be seen as regulated by a system of natural laws, pushed and pulled by them, while making their own (relatively insignificant) contribution to action. They are literally cogs in a machine (the pervasiveness of that metaphor is astonishing!). Knowledge of the laws of human behaviour makes it possible to manipulate, indeed to exploit humans.81

Positivist science is therefore prone to some special abuses. Admittedly the acceptance of its paradigm of reason has rescued us from the cruelties and the superstitious fears of warped mysticism. It has dispelled beliefs which allowed the burning of harmless old

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80 Lincoln, Yvonne S., & Guba, Egon G., 'Can there be a Human Science?' In Person-Centred Review
81 Ibid. p.151.
ladies as witches but in researching the mechanics of living organisms it has produced its own special cruelties. By allowing us the means to destroy the ecology of a whole planet it has created its own special fears and with all its cleverness it has not been able to tell us anything about who or what we are. As Roger Jones says:

... for all its brilliant traits, fabulous techniques, and shining achievements, science has not brought us one jot closer to fathoming the human condition and the mystery of existence ... if it is our souls and the meaning of life we seek, then the light of the lamppost has illuminated nothing.\textsuperscript{82}

"All right then, if you are not going to quantify your research what will you do?" Mark had said at one point in our conversation. With the benefit of further reflection, and more time to phrase my reply I would have said that, as well as producing information of interest to me, I wanted the research to have an ethical basis by informing and empowering the people who came into its orbit. I would have pointed out how the conventional scientific approach of sorting them into control groups, measuring their hair and so forth would have been unlikely to achieve that.

Obviously, the mechanistic principles of positivist science have an important place in expanding certain kinds of knowledge, but do we need to accept those principles as the only arbiter of truth? As the German theoretical chemist, Hans Primas says, "There is little to be gained by rejecting science but we should know about the myth that scientists are living. We can accept science without accepting that science is the only way of understanding the world ..." \textsuperscript{83}

There are paradigms other than positivism from within which the world can and has been explored. To quote Capra: "In trying to understand the mystery of life, man has followed many different approaches. Among them there are the ways of the scientist and mystic but there are many more: the ways of poets, children, clowns, shamans to name but a few." Each of these approaches has its own special validity for, as Capra goes on to say, "These ways have resulted in different descriptions of the world, both verbal and nonverbal, which emphasise different aspects. All are valid and useful in the context in which they arose." \textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82}Jones, Roger S., op. cit. p.339.
In our discussion Robert had mentioned being in love as something that could not be quantified, yet could be inquired into and learned about. A positivist investigation of people in love making use of such things as questionnaires, control groups, blood pressure tests and electroencephalographs would be grotesque. The more love is clinically analysed the less it lives. Yet though it is not measurable in standard deviations, we can deepen our understanding of love and communicate that understanding through such metaphoric devices as poetry, music and dance, languages of the non-rational faculties.

In spite of its limitations I did not want to discard rationality altogether in my inquiry for, as Bookchin says, "... insofar as order does exist in reality ... and is not simply imposed upon it by mind, we can say that reality has a rational dimension." 85 I simply did not want to be confined to this dimension and be prevented by it from exploring ways of knowing about life which do not insist that people and their experiences be reduced to measurable bits to be understood. The poet, the artist and certainly the mystic do not see the world as made of bits. They tend instead to see it in terms of its interrelatedness or they see it holistically as a unity with manifold expressions. The wonder for them is not the mechanistic one of seeing that everything fits so well together. To them it could not be otherwise for the perceived bits are not bits at all but are really aspects of one great whole which includes themselves. The wonder is in the astonishing diversity generated from the unity and in the inscrutable nature of the unity itself. Can this way of understanding things go hand in hand with reasoning? Surely it can. In whole-person learning we should feel free to make use of every faculty we can become aware of in a process Moustakas describes as:

... being open to significant dimensions of experience in which comprehension and compassion mingle; in which intellect, emotion and spirit are integrated; in which intuition, spontaneity, and self-exploration are seen as components of unified experience; in which both discovery and creation are reflections of creative research into human ventures, human processes, and human experiences. 86


**Participatory Knowing.**

In a more flexible research methodology, with the restrictions of an artificially contrived, cool objectivity gone, we can apply the Buddhist principle of appropriate or skillful
means making use of methods which, as Pye tells us, are "not intended to have any particular meaning beyond the attainment of the solution." 87 To further our understanding we can enter a flexible process of diving into and emerging from our study of the inner world of meditation. As an expediency, a form of objectivity can be integrated with our subjectivity. We can insist that, in one sense, to understand our area of inquiry we need to be at one with it. In Krieger' words, "We must teach ourselves that the individual view need not be apologised for and that we have a right to be part of what we know." 88 Or as Reason says, "... we can only know our world as we participate in it; and we cannot know our world by standing apart from it." 89 As an expedient tool to facilitate our learning we can make use of a contradictory paradigm and 'fracture' ourselves from it, taking the view of Plotinus who says: "In knowing, soul or mind abandons its unity; it cannot remain a simplex: knowing is taking account of things; that accounting is multiple; the mind thus plunging into number and multiplicity departs from unity." 90 As various people seem to have managed well with both approaches, an alternation of a sense of unity with and separation from what is being studied may usefully contribute to our understanding.

Such flexibility can allow for sensitivy and personal expression of feeling. It becomes possible for the researcher to explore within her or himself and to expose and integrate what is found there into the research. In my inquiry this means that everyone, including me, studies their own and everyone else's experiences in an egalitarian and co-operative process. Ideally it can become a democracy in which everyone has an equal voice in all matters pertaining to the research. All those involved in my investigation may simultaneously play the parts of subjects and inquirers and co-operate with each other in a scenario in which, as Guba and Lincoln put it: "it would be hard to tell who is the inquirer and who are the respondents, since they would all be doing much the same thing." 91 In practice different degrees of interest and ability might make it difficult to achieve, but we could evolve the collaborative aspect of the inquiry toward a situation like that described by Reason:

In the fullest version of co-operative inquiry the distinction between researcher and subject is completely done away with.

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and all those involved in the inquiry enterprise contribute both as co-researcher -- contributing to decisions about the focus of research, the methods to be employed, reflecting on and making sense of experience, the communication of discoveries; and also contribute as co-subjects participating in the research action being studied. 92

As an appropriate means, not having "any particular meaning beyond the attainment of the solution", a flexible collaborative research can change its methods as it progresses and what is being researched can also become changed by the process of researching it. Practices might be changed or new ones appear in response to the questions, inventions, experiments and discoveries of the co-researchers. Altichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerritt describe the process as one in which:

... people reflect and improve (or develop) their own work and their own situations - by tightly interlinking their reflection and action - and also making their experience public not only to other participants but also to other persons interested in and concerned about the work and the situation. ... Learning progressively (and publicly) by doing and by making mistakes in a 'self reflective spiral' of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning, etc. 93

Such a researching process would not only change what is being researched but, because they are part and parcel of it all, it would also change the researchers. When Mark asked me about the purpose of the inquiry I had replied that it was to improve the human condition. By this I meant that an improved technology would hopefully appear but also that the experience of self-searching and collaboration would bring about wholesome and nurturing change for us all. As co-researchers we would find something to marvel at in our discovered similarities and differences. There would be an evolving new awareness of ourselves as related and responsible human beings, evoking something of the vision expressed by Reason when he says: "... human inquiry and the development of a collaborative consciousness is one way towards a sane human existence." 94

The Hermeneutic Process of Inquiry

Mark's suggestion that I should put forward a hypothesis, subject it to testing and thereby prove or disprove it, accorded with traditional scientific practice; however, while I had some theories about creative meditation, there were none so precious to me that I wanted to petrify and dogmatise them by that process. Our discussion at this point had brought out the differences of attitude towards theoretical structures in rationalistic and naturalistic inquiry, of which Guba & Lincoln say:

Rationalists prefer a priori theory; indeed they are likely to insist that inquiry without a priori theory is impossible. Theories always exist, they say, even if only at the implicit level. It is better to make them explicit than to be uncertain about what is guiding one's inquiry. Naturalists suggest that it is not theory but the inquiry problem that guides and bounds an inquiry. A priori theory, they are likely to assert, constrains the inquiry and introduces biases (believing is seeing). 95

In an exploration of subjective experiences such as meditation, questions are plentiful. As I saw the methodology, the theory that would arise from these questions would be speculative and provisional. It would be material for development in a hermeneutic process. Any theory would be what Guba describes as: "...a tentative construction that, if you take the constructivist's moral imperative seriously, must be continuously challenged and continuously reconstructed."96

A hermeneutic process of ongoing inquiry can be guided by questions which are not artificially imposed but which are expressions of a natural 'desire to know'. It becomes a flow, seeking an evolving understanding of meaning in a cyclic re-evaluation of its own conclusions, a case where going around in circles can carry us forward in much the same way as a wheel on a travelling vehicle. Because of its fluidity the hermeneutic process, compared with the traditional scientific method, is often not tidy. It is sometimes contradictory. It can even be chaotic, but it is more richly true to life. As Heidegger describes it:

What looks like disunity and an unsure, 'haphazard' way of 'trying things out' is an elemental restlessness, the one goal of which is to understand 'life' philosophically and to secure for this understanding a hermeneutical foundation in terms of 'life itself'.

In an interpretation of creative meditation experience a hermeneutic process automatically begins for each person before the actual meditation begins, at the very moment a theme or symbol is first proposed. There is an immediate understanding of such a symbol through other previous learnings. "Every interpretation has its fore-having, its fore-sight, and its fore-conception," as Heidegger says. For example a visualised symbol of a throne is immediately recognised by some as a romantic fairy tale image. For others it is immediately understood as a symbol of dominance and oppression. The interpretation by each person of a set visualisation theme thus commences in a similar fashion to that described by Gadamer in relation to textual interpretation. We can replace the word text with 'visualisation symbol' in this oft quoted statement:

A person who is trying to understand a text is always performing an act of projecting. He projects before himself a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the latter emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to certain meaning.

As I saw the process the research would follow, the initial interpretation of the themes and symbols, when they are first described, would be followed by further interpretations within the meditation experience itself. Still later, the interpretations would continue to develop in discussions or in journal writing where the symbols or themes could be reinterpreted in relation to all the other experiences in the meditation. The whole experience could be pulled apart examined and reinterpreted with new meaning arising as a consequence. There would be a process of development from the interpretation which is necessarily imposed on the visualisation before it is engaged with, to interpretations which arise from further involvement with it. As Rowan and Reason put it:

98 Ibid. p.275.
... as a researcher approaches a phenomenon for study, he or she will have some provisional conceptions of its meaning as a whole; as the parts are examined, the meaning of these will become partially clear, and this clarity can be enhanced by relating them to each other and to the whole, which in turn can lead to a new understanding of the components. So there is a perpetual oscillation of interpretations; we have, as it were, to leap into the circle of understanding before we can start.\textsuperscript{100}

The hermeneutic process is therefore one which happens in any case for an inquirer and, though capable of being described in complex terms, it is really nothing more than the exercise of a part of everyone’s learning method. Even though they may never have heard of hermeneutics, anyone who has ever learned anything about anything has already applied it. To quote Rowan and Reason:

\begin{quote}
The standpoint of modern hermeneutics is that interpretive method is not a special process, totally different from everyday human understanding; it is just one example of an everyday process through which persons make sense of their world. All understanding is hermeneutical, taking place, and to a very large extent determined by, our finite existence in time, history and culture.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

The original function of hermeneutics was to investigate the meaning of scriptural texts. In an inquiry such as mine, there would be texts but they would be created by the co-researchers as the research develops. The texts would emerge at first as a collection of stories as, inevitably, the meditation experiences are described in story form. Time would elapse between the original telling and recording of the stories and their later reviewing when an opportunity is given to see them in a fresh light. Considerations which did not appear at the time of the original telling would probably begin to appear. The new understandings would be shared, recorded, transcribed and, as the text develops, the process of interpretation would continue, to quote Madeleine Grummet:

\begin{quote}
Hermeneutics enters as we and others read what we have written. A critical reading suggests another way, another logic
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{101}Loc.cit.
for the tale, for the character, for the plot, for the denouement. Other logics are discovered for the psychology, the sociology, the anthropology, the philosophy, the politics that shape the narrative.¹⁰²

A sharing in the wonder of each one’s meditation experience would be an accepted part of the process and would somehow be expressed in the text. There would be room for mystery. (I use this word not in the sense of things being dark and hidden but rather in the sense of things being beyond description and wonderful.) Mind would be allowed its special quality of indescribability. "To conceive of mind as a mystery is less mysterious and less mystifying than to fathom that the mind is a mere brain working according to physical, mechanical laws alone; for it is to admit that mystery is part of the natural order of things," says Skolimowski.¹⁰³ We would thus be spared from the possible trivialisation of subtle psychic experiences and we would avoid the perplexity which can result from attempting to give everything that transpires in the inner world of the mind an explanation prone to mechanistic interpretations. Rather than attempting to reduce the inexpressible into a neat formulation, the hermeneutic process can embrace it and allow it to live as an essential aspect of each member’s reality.

With its thread of 'the wonderful and indescribable' weaving its elements together, the emerging text would be enabled to grow from a collection of stories to a collection made up of the stories plus their interpretations and their further interpretations. It could be revisited and reinterpreted over and again in a process of hermeneutic circling which, if expectations are fulfilled, would bring about an extension of knowledge, a deepening of understanding, a celebration, perhaps something like Maslow’s ideal vision of scientific inquiry, of which he says:

Science can be a way of marrying with that which you love, with that which fascinates you and whose mystery you would love to spend your life ... Not only does science begin in wonder, it also ends in wonder. ¹⁰⁴

The text which eventually emerges from all of this is hopefully a record of an interactive process of whole person learning which, in Lincoln’s words, would be: "... the presentation of multiple, holistic, competing, and often conflictual realities of multiple

stakeholders and research participants (including the inquirer's). Ideally the text would form a bridge between the research participants' world and the world of the reader, becoming not only a reference to help with the reader's own research but also a way for the reader to get empathically into the shoes of the researchers. "This vicarious experience, in addition to providing certain technical help to other researchers (e.g. in the presentation of thick description, which enables judgments regarding transferability to be made), should aid the reader in understanding the nuances and subtleties of conflict and agreement in this place and at this time." says Lincoln: 105 It would be an attempt to realise Dilthey's ambitious ideal in which, "The final goal of the hermeneutic procedure is to understand the author better than he understood himself."106 Whether this is possible or not, to move in this direction or towards Gadamer's goal of a "fusion of horizons",107 the text would need to expose the subjective nature of the inquiry with all of its personal and emotional investment as fully and honestly as possible. As Lincoln puts it: "... the written report should demonstrate the passion, the commitment, and the involvement of the inquirer."108

To be as self-revealing as possible, to give voice to the diversity and complexity of the process, the emerging research report might need to make use of a variety of formats. Sometimes a transcript of a discussion could perform the function well. There may be times when a poem or a narrative might do it better. Sometimes 'thick description' or a fantasy tale or an unrestrained 'stream of consciousness' would be best to reveal the soul of the inquiry. "... we have no models for scientific knowledge that account for non-hierarchic learning, and we may have to borrow from the poet, the artist, the madman, the mystic," says Lincoln.109

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109 Ibid. p.85.
Mandala Dancing

Hermeneutic Movements in Seven Scenes

... we have a profound, crucial relationship here; that I am, and that I am defined in a certain way, is completely dependent on the other individuals who comprise the dance, but this dance itself has no existence apart from the dancer

Francis Cook

Featuring

Robert
Carol
Julie
Joe
Malcolm

With guest appearances by

Koichi, Andrew, Linda, Diana, Christopher, and George

And solo performances by

Frances and Alison

Mandala Dancing

The Origin, Structure and Manner of Procedure of the Co-Inquiry Group

The Group

The members of the group which undertook this inquiry were all associated with the Karuna Foundation, a Sydney based Buddhist organisation descended from the former Buddhist Society of N.S.W. which I originally joined in the late nineteen fifties. Within this organisation I have gradually evolved programs based on visualisation meditation following my own introduction to the practice late in 1978. Up until the early nineties I presented these programs at rare intervals but from 1990 onwards they were offered in the form of weekend retreats on a monthly basis. Often these were entitled, 'The Mandala Meditation Retreat.' At each of these retreats the participants would be guided through meditations which would include imagining themselves formed of brilliant light and interacting in a nurturing way with another imagined person who would also be a source of shining radiance.

A collaborative inquiry developed out of this as I encouraged participants in the retreat programs to talk or write to me about their responses to the meditations. Some allowed me to read notes made after meditation sessions. Others sent me letters. Around one hundred and twenty people volunteered data in this way. A co-researching group was gradually evolved out of the interactions that took place between a few of these people. They gravitated into relationship orbits, spontaneously drawn together by a common interest in the activity and a willingness to talk about their visualisations. The sharing of experiences which ensued gradually turned into a focussed search for their meaning.

The co-inquiry group was established as a core structure with loose edges. There was an orbiting periphery of people who came in and out of the inquiry, according to their various needs and expressions of interest. Some appeared at meetings of the core group as 'guests'. Others took part in larger group discussions or interacted with me privately in one to one interviews. The core group itself consisted of five people including myself. They were people who, I thought, displayed a high degree of trust in each other, who had interactive skills which made group discussions about sensitive personal issues viable and who wished to investigate these issues over a sustained period of time.

111 See Appendix A
The ideal of collaborative research was accepted within the group but with certain limits. As I was the person who had taught the others the meditations they would be discussing, it was assumed that my participation would be different in degree and in kind from that of the others. In general it was thought that I, as the person who had initiated the investigation, should also be the one who maintained it, proposing, for example, when meetings should occur and how many of them there would be. The other participants were busy people and were quite willing that I would produce any necessary documentation including transcriptions. This was considered appropriate as I was the only one who intended writing a thesis about the inquiry.

Despite all this, during our discussions I made a point of attempting to be just one of the group, drawing back as much as possible from behaving like a leader and restraining myself whenever an opportunity to play 'teacher' appeared. The group discussions functioned without any apparent need for anyone to fill these roles. The participants threw up questions and pursued their findings interactively without particular reference to me.

In their discussions the participants were supportive of each other but also they were not reluctant to confront each other, especially over generalisations that they did not agree with. There was no formal allocation of a devil's advocate role as described by Heron in his inquiry into altered states of consciousness. The devil's advocate was often present, however, manifesting spontaneously from time to time in members of the group and especially in some of our 'guests'.

At one stage in the research I suggested to the group that a list of questions created by all of us might provide us with a clearer sense of direction. This proposition was agreed to and at the second meeting each participant submitted a written question. These were discussed at the end of the third meeting. These contrived questions, however, held everyone's interest only briefly and played a very minor part in the developing research. The proceedings of the group became increasingly free flowing and spontaneous with an organic feeling to the way themes emerged during each meeting.

Transcriptions

Proceedings of the meetings were taped and the transcripts of what had been recorded were given back to the group members as soon as I had them complete. Usually this would be

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112 See Heron, John, 'Impressions of the Other Reality' pp. 182-198. in Reason, Peter, op. cit., 1990. See also Heron, John, 'Validity in Co-operative Inquiry' pp.40-59. in Ibid.
several weeks or sometimes months after each meeting. Twice the transcripts were given out at the start of a meeting. At other times they were given out when ready in between meetings.

The transcripts in this work are of six meetings of the core group conducted between April 1991 and August 1992. They are excerpts only. If I had attempted to report everything said in these discussions, the resulting body of writing would have been extremely unwieldy. As much as eight thousand words were originally transcribed from one meeting alone.

It was agreed on by the group that my criteria for selection of material would be that it was mainly concerned with the description and interpretation of visualisation experiences. However, the boundaries to this were often difficult to draw. I gave preference to material which, I thought, illustrated a progression of interpretation over a period of time. Discourses by the regular core group members were consequently given precedence over those from the occasional 'guests'. Sometimes the participants disagreed with me on my selections, requesting that sections of dialogue I had not included be reinserted into the text. I made a point of offering to delete any material that the participants were not happy about seeing in print but no deletions were requested.

In our discussions there were great variations of mood. Within a short space of time there would be the softness of intimate disclosure, the lively intensity of debate, the quietness of wordless reflection and then, soon after, there would be flashes of humour with outbreaks of laughter. I have attempted to show these changing expressions of the inquiry by the inclusion of interjections, asides and other indications of group response. I have done this in the hope that, as Douglas and Moustakas say, "...the "data" that emerge are autobiographical, original, and accurately descriptive of the textures and structures of lived experience." 113

Commentaries

After a lapse of time often extending to months, I engaged myself with a post-meeting hermeneutic process of writing 'thought and feeling' commentaries to each meeting. These are not comprehensive. They are responses to aspects of the discussions which struck me at the time as being particularly significant. They were my further reflections on material that emerged during meetings, in part comments I would have liked to have made myself.

during the discussions had I been able to find the words to do so. I made meaning from the transcripts mainly by reflecting on them from the point of view of my own experiences in visualisation meditation and also from the standpoint of my interpretation of Buddhism. As part of several of these commentaries I felt it important to express my understanding in fantasy myth form. These were attempts by me to fill out and enlarge upon the imagined experiences described by the participants. They were therefore intended as "explanations" of fantasy expressed as much as possible in its own terms of mythic imagery.

One to One Interviews and Non Core-Group Participation

In addition to the group sessions transcribed there were a number of one-to-one interviews with members of the core-group and with other people at its periphery. These interchanges were loosely guided by questioning from me. They provided opportunities for individuals to explore a number of issues in depth without the distraction of having to give space to other group members to exercise their own agendas. Portions of two of these interviews are given in Scene Seven. Later, a meeting of some of the non core-group participants was held and some sections of the dialogue of this gathering were transcribed. Extracts from this material appear in the summation.

The Summation.

As with the transcripts and commentaries it was assumed by the group that I would be the scribe of the summation. The eventual form of this section grew out of many rewritings which expanded, contracted and expanded again as various drafts were circulated among the members. The comments, suggestions and criticisms which this provoked led to frequent revisions of what I had written.
Mandala Dancing

Scene One

April 1991 at North Sydney.

Robert, Joe, Carol, Julie, Malcolm, Koichi.

To initiate the sharing process, and provide an example of the manner of participation I hoped for, I told my story of 'Jason the burglar'.\(^{114}\) I described how Jason had once visualised himself as a person worthy of respect and then subsequently had undergone a religious experience in which he had resisted an opportunity to steal a large sum of money. This experience had taken place coincidentally on the same evening that I had, for the first time ever, visualised him as a deity in my sanctuary.\(^{115}\) I told also how Jason had then played out a series of incidents which coincidentally paralleled a Buddhist legend I had shared with a group of children on the day of his transformative experience.

Julie then followed.

Julie: ... This was one probably I did, oh, probably six months, a year, over a year ago, with the elephant ride meditation.\(^{116}\) There had been one particular relationship in my life with somebody who had been a very good friend and then five or six years ago we'd fallen out and it became a very, very bitter relationship and I'd never ... never felt able to release that person. I'd taken him into my sanctuary, I'd done all these other things and they had never quite seemed to work. But the very first time that I did this elephant ride visualisation .... It was the first time I'd looked at this relationship to actually acknowledge that I had hurt him, rather than in terms of how he had hurt me.

So after this meditation it was suddenly very much like I'd been able to release this energy and I thought, "I wouldn't be surprised if I saw him again soon." And as it happened .... you know.... A month or so passed and then .... No, we didn't actually see each other but it was as if the whole relationship had become much easier in terms...

\(^{114}\) For a more detailed account see Appendix B.
\(^{115}\) For a description of the 'sanctuary' meditation and its origin see Appendix A.
\(^{116}\) For a description of the 'elephant ride' meditation and its origin see Appendix A.
of ... you know .... People in between us seemed not to feel constrained about talking about this person in front of me or vice versa.

As it turned out he played quite an important part in our wedding. It was actually quite a pivotal role but that was the first time that I’d seen him in the intervening five years, .... I just remember sort of walking in and this was the very first person I saw and I couldn’t have imagined a few months before that I could have allowed him even to be there let alone play a pivotal role. But it was fantastic! We just sort of smiled at each other. It was lovely, a very healed, very accepting sort of smile.

.... Like I said, I thought this relationship would never be healed .... you know. Like .... carry this bitterness this anger and frustration .... I couldn’t see any way that this would heal except that in time I might forget about it.

So it was fantastic being able to move that energy and to reduce the pressure on the other people around us .... It was wonderful! And as I said .... It was only after that, in fact in the past month or so, when I was actually thinking, "Isn’t it nice that I can actually talk to this person now," when it suddenly clicked in my brain, "Oh yes! it was that visualisation a year or so ago," .... that I was able to look back and see this very clear path running back very clearly and very definitely to that visualisation. It was wonderful.

(Applause from others then Joe telling of a visualisation in which he became the many armed Avalokitesvara distributing unlimited gifts)

... And I found in the visualisation that it was very difficult to give just a little bit to just to one person. As we did the visualisation we grew taller above the earth, very tall, and we kept giving to whoever came. And I found it easier and easier to give .... to the point that it was such a joy to give .... Couldn’t give enough. And it wasn’t .... giving .... it was .... GREAT! You know?

And, what I saw in that was, that I would give but I wasn’t actually losing anything. I was actually gaining so much more by giving. And the feeling was like tenfold or a hundredfold that I was receiving just for the one thing. And then the more I kept giving, because it became such a joy, so much more was coming back. It was just .... it made me laugh in the visualisation. I was laughing with the joy of trying to get rid of it as quick as I possibly could. And it just kept coming and coming. It was just wonderful. I felt like a tiny little kid jumping around and having fun.
..... So, from doing the visualisation, I was able to take that into my life and understand the value of giving and .... it's only been a few months since the workshop and so I'm in the process of experiencing that in my life. It's still very much early days for me but I know the value of it as a one hundred per cent truth. I really experienced it fully.

(Joe then went on to tell of more experiences in which his visualisations seemed to develop a life of their own. He told how he had developed a way of receiving advice from people in his visions. He said that the idea for doing this had come from a conversation with a visiting Japanese Buddhist who had told him that whenever he needed guidance he visualises a person he has respected in the past and asks them for advice.)

Joe: The next night I was here and we were doing a visualisation and Carol and I were to get married within a few weeks. I wanted to do something for Carol, and I wanted to know what that would be. Like, I wanted some guidance to do something special and I couldn't really think of anyone in the past who I had a deep respect for so I thought of whoever will come to mind. And Nara came to mind, Nara from here. And she was actually just in front of me, about a couple of feet away really. But I asked her in the visualisation "What can I do for Carol?"

And she said to me quite clearly and quite gently, "Take care to love her. Be kind and gentle but most of all be her friend." And her advice was so centred and so precise and gently delivered I took it straight into my heart. It was really beautiful advice. And then for our wedding we used those words as part of the service because it was just so special to me, you know? And I couldn't think of any better words or advice from anyone. It was wonderful.

Then just before the wedding, leading up to the wedding, a couple of days before .... it was getting tense because we were all working so hard. We got married in our back yard and so we were doing quite a bit of work to arrange the place so that it was comfortable. I was having quite a bit of difficulty with Carol's parents because they were organising it and I was organising ....Carol was organising it. We had different methods and we were very much trying to get on with each other but we haven't got on very well in the past. And so it was a trying time and it came to the day before the wedding and there were a lot of things that were going unsaid and a lot of tension and I was feeling at boiling point. I was finding to explode, you know, to say .... but it would have been uncalled for and I didn't want to do that and they all felt the same.
So I was carrying some drinks downstairs. I got halfway down the steps and I just stopped and I .... Click! .... just shut my eyes and did a very quick meditation on the steps, very much the same as the one before, but this time Malcolm was there. And I asked Malcolm, "What can I do here because I need some guidance here?" And Malcolm just looked at me and just laughed (Interruptation of laughter from the group) .... and I was quite tense and I was feeling quite short and thinking, "OK you’re laughing. OK fine. I’ll just wait for you to stop and maybe you’ll tell me." Then he looked at me again and he laughed again and I kept waiting and he just kept looking at me and laughing and I was thinking- "It’s not funny, you know?" (Outburst of laughter from others) And then finally and, just by waiting and me having to wait and wait and wait and be patient, it changed my level of stress or tension. And Malcolm finally said, "Listen. Listen. Listen to them and .... embrace." And that was it. That was all I needed. That was fantastic. And all I had to do when I got down was listen to them rather than have my attitude versus theirs.

And it worked. The night went through .... It was OK. We didn’t get to exploding point, where it was heading. The next morning they got up and I’ve never seen so much life and so much joy for the fact that they were involved with the wedding. It was like they were .... you know? It was like they couldn’t do enough. It was just an amazing change.

Something I’ve felt was that, when you do a visualisation, that it’s not only the other person that you’re seeing, but you’re also seeing a reflection of yourself. And what I’ve come to believe now .... after a while. I believe .... That’s what it was .... It was actually a reflection of yourself that you were seeing and it had an effect as well. Now I’m actually coming to believe that what I am seeing in the visualisation is actually real. It is actually real.

(tells of visualising offering a gift to Nara when he had heard she was upset.)

I gave her a gift, which I often do, And I open my hands to see what is there and sometimes it might be a flower or something like that and it might have a special quality. This time it was a stone, a polished stone. It had an oval shape and Nara took it and put it on her head and a golden light came down over her and I thought, "Oh that’s really beautiful." And then she took the stone and in a very sort of, I don’t know how to describe it, but in a very, almost military style, took the stone and put it into her heart and I saw her experience a whole lot of pain.
To me that was very unusual because I've never expected to see Nara in any sort of pain and I didn't want that to happen and so I kept persisting with the visualisation to change it, to change it, you know? To do some more so that that wouldn't happen. And as it happened the Buddha poured a bucket of water on Nara but it actually wasn't water. It was like water but it didn't wet her .... sort of flowed over the top of her. But it didn't change, you know? Her pain didn't change. And when I spoke to Nara later she said she had like a stone in her heart. She told me that the next day. So that's why from that experience I believe that what I'm seeing is not just a reflection of myself but is actually reality.

Sorry for taking four in a row but I actually needed to say that.

(Applause)

Carol: (Out of range of the microphone so that portions of what she said are too indistinct to be transcribed) .... The same as Joe, I've got a lot of experiences and it's pretty wonderful .... I was on a search .... When I came I was physically sick and I had been for some time .... It was getting so the pain had doubled me over but I still came here .... I decided that, because of my past, that I hadn't released a lot of pain within myself that was emotional .... I couldn't lift my body .... Nara had given me meditations to work on releasing this. I meditated on the idea that this was mine and that in fact I was OK and that I had created this on top as a distortion of myself And then I'd got to that stage where I'd understood that through visualisation ....

One day I came for visualisation .... We did chanting first and we meditated, then Nara gave me Reiki.117 And it was suddenly as if I was suspended .... but not suspended .... but held. There was a nothingness but everything at the same time. In that, without words, there was a message and that was, "You are completely safe. You are absolutely safe." And I knew it was true .... that I was really safe. And so I could let go. And there was .... in this suspension, there were light shafts which came suddenly and without any..... And I knew it was gone. I knew it. ...... It was peaceful ..... and I never had any pain. I used to get a lot of pain ..... So for me that was very profound.

(Further conversation centred on Carol)

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Carol: Joe and I were living in a basement flat and it was dark and it was very small, and it had cockroaches, and it had high rise flats all around. (Indistinct - telling of Joe's needs to live in the city and her's to live in the country and how, following a meditation workshop in which both had drawn mandalas of their ideal house they had found a harbourside cottage at no greater rent surrounded by bushland and a short distance from the city.) So we did a Maññala workshop and in it I drew the little flat near Randwick and at the end of the Maññala workshop I drew the house in the country, you know, there was a beach there. And now we live in the country, just like my picture. We don't make any more money. We live in a house. We have a couple of cockroaches.

(Laughter from group)

Koichi: As pets.

Carol: (Laughs) But that was like - we don't make any more money. We haven't done anything .... where we live is .... you have to have money to live there. (Interrupted by laughter) But we don't. So that's a little miracle too.

(Applause)

Robert: I guess .... I've got a lot of experiences but the one that comes to mind .... really my favourite visualisation in the Maññala Workshop is the elephant ride, related to the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue. And umm .... my first experience of that was really crazy. It was actually before the visualisation was first presented here. I was chanting the Meditation Sutra at home once and then suddenly the whole thing started to really become alive for me and every sentence was like it was all really happening. I was really riding the elephant. But it was a very chaotic experience. It was just like a giant elephant came running through the room and I was left saying, "What happened?" So that was all that happened. It all happened and I was going, "What happened? What was that?" (Interrupted by laughter and exclamations from others)

Carol: (Laughing) Like crazy!

Robert: (Laughing) That's right. So I said to Malcolm in a very naive way, "Is that something you could make a visualisation out of?" I really just said a little about what happened and about the elephant ride and, "How would you make it?" Really just an abstract question. And anyway, within a week, Malcolm had come back and had
designed this amazing visualisation about that section of the sūtra .... and then he ran it here for the first time and it was just extraordinary. It was really .... so extraordinary and so exotic, the way that he'd put the visualisation together. I was astonished when he said that he'd done it. It was amazing when I did it. 118

But what that led on to was that it became part of the Maṇḍala workshop. And .... what that helped me with was a childhood thing. And I think that every time I've done that visualisation it's always been as a child. I can't think of one single time that I haven't done that one from a childlike point of view. But what it really helped me with was a really old hurt where I .... My mother was a deserted one and, as her only son .... she depended on me. And also, because both of my sisters were emotional in different ways, so I guess she saw me as stable and secure even at a young age.

And one day her birthday came around and she was .... Everyone forgot her birthday including me and .... Even though I was only eight years old, because she thought that in the whole universe I would be the one person who would remember her birthday, I actually copped her upsetness about that. So when she realised that I hadn't done anything she really let go and cried, which is not like my mother at all actually.

And I felt really terrible. I felt really bad. And that's something I just buried. I don't think I actually told anybody how bad I felt about that. I just put it away. So that visualisation helped me with this experience because I did the visualisation from a child's point of view. So I did it as being an eight year old. And that was wonderful. And what was really weird was that my mum was actually dead in the visualisation. My mother was on a catacomb? catafalque? Like a statue lying down horizontally. She had already passed away. So it was like her funeral and I was telling her how terrible I felt about how much I'd upset her about that. And then in the visualisation she came to life and then of course the whole visualisation came to life. so ....

What was really fantastic about that wasn't that there was some miraculous shift in the universe but that there was a miraculous shift in my feelings. So that was really fantastic about that particular one. So that was my elephant ride.

(Applause then a long pause then a period of quiet, reflective conversations.)

118 For a description of my experience of this occurrence see Appendix A.
Koichi: As far as I can catch, listening to your stories, I find that this training of visualisation is something to do with controlling your subconscious mind. I mean you are trying to control your sub-conscious mind, by yourself, by your conscious, awakened conscious. Because I think, and also several scholars say, that our life, our daily life, our behaviour, or our conduct, may be dominated by the subconscious mind, not our conscious or rational mind.

Human beings are not rational beings because our conduct is not usually the result of thinking. That’s why the importance of religious practice is mainly to control with our conscious this sub-conscious mind which is ... (Indistinct) ... my life, or my conduct. So we have to purify this sub-conscious mind in some way. So this training which is called visualisation for us, I mean for human beings, is very tactful training for controlling or dominating my own sub-conscious mind by this conscious way.

Joe: I disagree with that. Maybe it’s just a question of terminology but I don’t see it as a way of actually controlling my sub-conscious mind. I think that would be actually ... It wouldn’t be healthy or ... spiritually healthy. I see it more or less as a way of tapping into your sub-conscious mind and seeing what’s available and, like we discussed last night, seeing that this is my nature ... fully ... and experiencing that.

But not necessarily controlling. I tend to feel that controlling it would be like to .... Actually I wouldn’t even be tapping into it because ... It’s so vast. If I tried to control it I would corner it off anyway. That’s my feeling on controlling. I don’t think it would work for me, in that sense.

Carol: I think I understand the principle in that .... The way I used to be was, "I want it." (Clenches teeth) "I’m going to get it." and "Out of my way world." That’s how I used to be .... My whole consciousness was in control, although I didn’t know that. This was control. That was all about control. But to do the visualisations and to have faith in something beyond and bigger is to release that control and in effect to put more control in my life. But not in the sense of control .... it’s different. .... Now I flow more easily than I used to .... and this sort of ....

Malcolm: Is it like coming to a real choice?

Carol: Yeah .... Yes.
Robert: That's what I think too, because I think.... I think it's a really important issue.... It's fascinating. But.... for me with my own sub-conscious mind it's more like there's a whole spectrum of potentials there. They're all there and normally I listen to the unhealthy ones, or extremely unhealthy ones, and I'm not even aware that they're running things. (To Koichi) Just as you said and.... as much finer minds than mine have discerned.... But this kind of technology of Malcolm's and the Lotus Sutra, the Kegon Sutra is more like being able to listen to the wholesome things in the unconscious. It's making a choice to listen to something different. But it's also seen as a totality.

(The discussion developed into an appraisal of issues of control and freedom in the Karuna Foundation)

Commentary on Scene One

The hermeneutic aspect consists in depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible, while the dialectic aspect consists of comparing and contrasting these existing individual (including the inquirer’s) constructions so that each respondent must confront the constructions of others and come to terms with them. 119

Egon Guba

In this first meeting I felt the beginning of a circling, a search back into what we had experienced to find meaning in it. Each of us has our own way of doing this and between us we explored a range of interpretations. It felt to me that in our inquiry group, a hermeneutic parading of the elephant riders had begun as we tell our stories of experiences in the inner worlds of visualisation and reflect on their significance. The process of the sharings and the musings felt like -

Elephant Riders

Through the mist, we return.
Each rider musing on some mystic journey
Beyond the former boundaries to our imaginations.

Travellers through time returning from a healing rendezvous,
We come now to this dancing ground
Mahouts mounted high on moving shadow beasts,
Pacing mastodons, swaying mammoths,
Samantabhadra’s elephant yojanas high.

Come again to our circle,
We softly dance our mirrored pachyderms and sing
And hear above the tread of cushioned feet,
Above the silver sound of tinkled bells
Each other’s songs of past-time twilight lands
And reaching out our minds and drawing back again we form
A fondly held - illusion? - of shared discovery.

Our discussion on past-time experiences had opened with a sharing of ‘miracle’ tales. I had begun by telling about my experience with Jason. I had become fascinated by the implications of my experience and having shared this story, I thought the discussion might go heavily into questions of unlikely coincidences between visualisation practice and events which followed. Jung’s term for this phenomena, synchronicity, is one which he says, "... simply formulates the occurrence of meaningful coincidences which, in themselves are chance happenings, but are so improbable that we must assume them to be based on some kind of principle, or on some property of the empirical world." 120

I felt the theme of coincidental links was continued in Julie's story, a link between a repentance visualisation and a healed set of relationships. Interestingly it was not a link she had expected. Her motivation for taking part in the meditation had been to free herself of bitter feelings and the realisation of the coincidental connection, when it appeared, had been a sudden leap, "...it suddenly clicked in my brain," she had said.

I had hoped to explore more of this but then we were led away from the synchronicity theme toward parapsychological speculations by Joe’s stories about how visualisation had produced answers to his questions and how he thought that some of his visions could be representations of actual situations not yet known about by him. Carol’s experiences then led us towards suggested connections between visualisation and physical healing and then she brought us back to thoughts of synchronicity with her story of the coincidence of visualising an ideal place to live and then later finding it. Was this synchronicity or was this an experience of that related phenomenon known as serendipity? Perhaps more precisely it was an example of what Royston Roberts calls pseudoserendipity "accidental discoveries of ways to achieve an end sought for..."121.

Julie’s story of revisiting the past in her visualisation seemed to open the way for Robert to talk about his own experience of exploring the past with an imaginary elephant ride. Robert had nothing parapsychological or synchronistic to tell about but nevertheless his experience was deeply significant to him. A "miraculous shift" had taken place in his feelings which had come about through revisiting childhood memories of an almost forgotten incident. "I just put it away," he said. Here is another interpretation of what seems miraculous, one for each of us to explore. How much have we all 'put away' of our past? How much is there in all of us, half forgotten, but sitting at the edges of our minds ready to be integrated with our present knowing and bringing about miraculous shifts in the way we understand ourselves and each other?

I felt openness and warm acceptance within the group as our stories were shared. Each contribution was applauded. It seemed there was a sense of being safe to reveal our inner selves without fear of being subjected to judgement or belittled in some other way. Perhaps out of respect for the trust that each displayed in telling the others of their experiences, the further implications of what we were saying were not taken up by the group for a deeper probing. Only the entry of our guest, Koichi, into the conversation broke this ambience, bringing about an abrupt change in the mood. Though a Buddhist he had not attempted visualisation meditation and so his comments were necessarily based on opinion rather than experience. As he spoke I noticed a stiffening of demeanour among the other participants. It felt to me that sharing had given way to being lectured at as Koichi informed us that in visualisation we were seeking to dominate the sub-conscious mind.

Koichi’s proposition provoked the group members into clarifying their positions on this point and Joe showed that his position was very different. I ask myself where I stand in this question, "Are we trying to exert control over our sub-conscious mind or are we attempting to become friends with it?" I prefer the latter image. I feel very much that in these processes harmony and realisations of unity prevail. In the creative meditation exercises that we had been discussing, I see the bringing together of disparate parts of ourselves into a synergistic unity as more desirable than the suppression implied by the control of one part by another. What emerges for me is a vision of participants in a dance where each dancer intuitively and intelligently responds to the music and to the other dancers and in which an attempt by one dancer to dominate the others would inhibit the performance.

Debate has its own uses as does sharing and intimate disclosure. Can a group have sufficient flexibility to accommodate both modes of interaction? I think that under certain circumstances it might. It would depend on the way the members saw the purpose of the group activity and the function of their interactions within it. The argument opened by Koichi could perhaps evolve into a dialogue in which the opposed sides might relax sufficiently to attempt an appreciation of the other’s point of view. "True dialogue is the opposite of argument." say Snodgrass and Coyne, "Both sides are immersed in the discussion. They are both concerned to enlarge their understanding of a subject." In Gadamer’s words: "... it is characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration..." 122 and to quote from Robert’s writings: "It is this act of opening myself to new learning processes that expands the limits of my vision of the matter that is under consideration. The point here is that it is not a simple addition of the other’s ... viewpoint, the change takes place in both." 123

At the close of this session I find that my initial fascination with questions of synchronicity has been added to by an interest in questioning other facets of the visualisation experience. I feel a need to describe these processes more clearly to myself as much as to others.

122Gadamer, Hans-Georg.op.cit., p. 347
Maṇḍala Dancing

Scene Two

August 1991 at North Sydney.

Robert, Julie, Joe, Carol, Malcolm, Linda.

Carol: (after reading through the transcript of the previous meeting) Yeah .... Really interesting! (Long pause) This work with visualisation for me .... I mean I do my private visualisations but the ones with the biggest effect .... of change, in me, have come from the Maṇḍala weekends, a whole weekend of visualisation.

I'm doing a counselling course at the moment and a guy was telling us about counselling skills and how the process works and where it takes you over a period of months and then years. And, we got to a part in the second stage where you start to help the client to clarify the problem areas in their life. And he started to use the words, "As if they were making a picture of certain items in their life ...." Like, their problems, they can actually see them. Their problems become clearer.

I guess what it came to is that this whole Maṇḍala process was like .... A weekend workshop can lead to a result, or the equivalent to a result of a year of therapy! You know? With the counselling, people get to see that it's possible to change and then you can do it. It's the same process but it just happens over a year. But in the Maṇḍala Workshop it happens in a weekend. To me it's powerful!

Malcolm: Thank you. (Long pause.) Was anything else interesting?

Joe: Yeah. I guess so. I was reading Robert's recount of the elephant ride and it reminded me of the first time I went on it. I'd forgotten about it you know? And how powerful it was. Yeah .... it was really, really powerful. Uhh, just that in itself.

Robert: Was that where your elephant took off? Was it that time?
Joe: No, that was Bill’s elephant. Yeah, my elephant just stayed on the ground. (Chorus of laughter) No, what was really interesting was the way we saw the person we'd done some sort of injustice to .... a long time ago. I saw my brother. It was seemingly a very trivial thing that I'd done, I can't even remember what the details of that were now. But to look at him as a statue and to call his name and get no reply, because he was a statue, was a very sad feeling.

It brought up all the things for me that I'd ever done wrong to him, all the things that I needed to say to him .... I wanted to say to him. And that was a wonderful experience .... because it showed me how important it was to do that. Whereas I'd gone through years of just not saying much at all except, "How are you going? How's your life?" and all that sort of thing and not saying all those real things, not needing to be honest. It showed me the importance of being honest in our relationship.

Julie: I think that's a very important point. It struck me with reading about Robert's visualisation, because since the last time we were talking .... I've also done a visualisation like that and it was actually with my mother as if she were dead .... She actually is alive so .... but to be able to imagine it as if it were the case that she was dead and how I would feel, if she were dead, but without having to, sort of, go through that, and then to be able to summon up all those feelings ....

It can really help to shape the way that you relate to someone in life. It gives you an incredibly powerful tool. Whereas, if I just sat here and thought, "What would it be like if my mother was dead?" .... and I was just thinking about it, I wouldn't be able to, sort of, summon all of that up. I wouldn't have the real .... You know .... You can really link into that deeper part. So it's an incredibly, sort of, powerful .... (Pause, looks at the tape recorder and chuckles) Now I'm very conscious of saying, "sort of" (Chorus of laughter)

Carol: Just on that, I'm really interested in this shift of consciousness. It's an appreciation of someone or something that you didn't have before, or you weren't aware of before. Um, I don't know if this is .... It's a question on this shift in perception. Does it shift you in energy? I guess I'm relating it to a shift of an attitude to gratitude and love, wonderment that they're alive and well. A shift in say .... Take regret for example, to joy, guilt to joy. Now, for me I guess this shift is emotional. Emotion must be energy. Does this .... I mean, without the shift is there disease physically? Somewhere along the line I'd like to hear someone say "Yes" and then tell me why.
Malcolm: Are you meaning that, when you shift your feelings that profoundly, is there also a shift in the general well-being of the body? Is it like a feeling and body interaction? Is that what you're meaning?

Carol: I am .... uh .... and the sub-conscious mind as well. Is feeling and the sub-conscious mind connected? Because in these notes, people talk about controlling feelings very much as if controlling feelings and the sub-conscious mind are all the same thing. I mean, maybe they are. I don't know, but I know they're all powerful and I know that ....

Robert: So it's .... sorry .... it sounds like you're saying that we're using one set of terminology to talk about things that might be different things. It sounded like what you were getting at was, what is actually happening there?

Carol: Yes, what is really happening? (Several voices join in, all talking at once)

Robert: What really is going on and how are things connected? Is that what you're saying?

Carol: I am. Thanks Robert. I mean they all seem to be connected and they're all real.

Malcolm: So what's going on? What is it?

Carol: It's huge. I mean I believe that. It's huge. I believe in it and I believe in its inherent goodness when we do it. But I mean ....

(Long pause, everyone in quiet reflection)

Joe: Malcolm, that experience you had with Jason the burglar. Do you believe that he had an experience because of your visualisation or in conjunction with your visualisation?

Malcolm: I think that the idea of 'because' starts to fall apart when you try to look at all the things that can be seen as causes. See, Jason did visualisations and he prayed as well. So you could say everything happened because he did that. Or you could play with fantasy and say that a group of children in a classroom were a sort of magical
cause because there were coincidences going on with the Angulimala story they acted out that day and with what Jason did that night.

Joe: But in that case, I don't want to take anything away from your visualisation by saying this, but if you hadn't done the visualisation that night what do you see as the possibilities in your belief system that he would have done what he did that night? What I'm trying to say is, was your visualisation a part of that do you think?

Malcolm: Well, I'm sure my visualisation was part of it but maybe not as the cause. I see the whole event as a totality where everything was a part of it, including children colouring in this maze and going through emotional experiences which echo what Jason later said he had that night. I see Angulimala going through his adventure two thousand years ago and being part of it all. But you can invent anything if you allow non-local causes. I can be seen as an effect, a puppet in the whole thing, jiggled.

Joe: Yeah. I'm only asking you this because of my own thing I'm sort of going through at the moment, with visualisations. I've done quite a few and they've had such significant effects on me and I've learned so much, but at the same time I'm looking at whether .... By me doing a visualisation now and then experiencing a reality of that tomorrow, is it because I've tapped into something that's actually happening anyway, or is my visualisation responsible for what happens tomorrow? You know? Wonderful things happen each day and sometimes it might be something that I'd like to happen and sometimes I may not have done a visualisation and that happened anyway.

Linda: Can I tell you of a story I wrote for Malcolm when I went to stay with a friend on a farm? Because that was so strange... (Tells of how she had visualised taking her sad friend into her sanctuary and offering her a jewel of happiness) .... and I opened my eyes and I was really crying. But I felt a great feeling of joy in giving her this jewel of happiness.

And I went back to the farm and she was up and we had breakfast and she said "Would you like to go for a walk?" and I said "Yes" and .... I didn't mention anything about my meditation to her .... and as we were walking she said, "You know, I woke up feeling so happy for the first time in a long time." And .... It was a wonderful feeling for me. And I've been back to the farm with her since and she's always said to me, "You know, I'm so happy when I'm with you." You know? I'm quite sure .... I really believe absolutely that the meditation that I had, actually worked with her in some way.'
Joe: I'm not doubting that at all. I mean, during the week... uh... my sister and brother-in-law broke up in their marriage and... uh... it was very traumatic and in the past eight years, my brother-in-law hadn't expressed himself in any way and anyway they broke up. Carol did a visualisation and gave him the cloak of sight. Now within two days he rang me up and said, "I want to speak to you. I haven't spoken to you and I want to talk to you. And I just want to tell you how happy I am."

And he went through this complete unfolding of all the things that he'd discovered about himself... and about this dream where he climbed out of the blackness and found a bird, and the bird came to life and smiled at him and... It was incredible, like it was a complete spiritual awakening that he'd been through. And he was saying, "I never realised after all these years that I've hated myself and I've been blaming other people and other things but it's all (Indistinct) and it's been since my childhood." And he could see it all and he kept saying, "I can see it all so clearly now. I can see it." And he just kept saying, "I can see it clearly."

Malcolm: And what was the cloak that Carol gave him?

Chorus: The cloak of sight.

Joe: And so it was such a parallel that I don't see any coincidence at all in that. But the question I'm asking is... Carol's visualisation... Was she the product of what was happening with him or was he the product of what she did? You know? Like would what happened with him have happened anyway?

Robert: I think it's both. I don't think... I can't see how you can separate the two...

(Chorus of comments)

Malcolm: So you might say: Would it matter if we didn't do any visualisations any more because these wonderful things will happen anyway?

Robert: Yes but... 

(Chorus of comments)
Joe: Yeah. Oh but I'm not trying to destroy the whole process *(Chorus of laughter)* but I'm asking the question because it's been coming to my mind ....

*(Chorus of comments)*

Robert: To me there's a whole lot of assumptions about the way the universe is that's coming up here, that are creating problems that maybe aren't really problems. They're just questions that we're making difficult because of the way we're thinking about who we are and our relationship to the universe.

Malcolm: Are you saying that Joe's question is a non-question. Is that what you're saying?

Robert: No I'm saying that. It's a question that's loaded with a whole set of assumptions. The way that Joe's talking is the way that a lot of physicists look at things. And then physicists end up with this incredible Gordian knot about chickens and eggs, kind of thing, because .... I mean I think it's an incredibly important question. Don't get me wrong. I mean it's one that keeps me awake at night.

*(Carol suggested that the difficulty of who causes what and to whom in a visualisation could be circumvented by drawing a parallel between the visualisation process and a form of non-directive counselling technique she had been learning. In this method there is no attempt to influence the client and the client is free, in a nurturing environment to develop their own healing and growing process.)*

Carol: ... You are just there with them unconditionally .... all I'm doing is supporting. It's a very caring, loving way of being with someone. In a visualisation you are unconditionally there for whoever you are doing it for.

Joe: It's that full support and not interfering at all. Just allowing it to happen.

Carol: The parallel is that you are doing it with trust and an open heart.

Joe: And with respect that the person could do it themselves.

*(The discussion returned to the theme of cause and effect after I had suggested that rational approaches were inadequate for our area of inquiry. It developed into an intense interchange between Robert and me in which he voiced his objections to maintaining*
prejudice between the world views of holistic interconnected mysticism and rational, analytic science. A change of direction was initiated by Linda.

Linda: I think I would like to go back to what was a bit contentious last time which was whether we are actually controlling the sub-conscious. I do believe we are actually controlling the sub-conscious and our rational mind is doing it. We are doing it quite deliberately. Our rational minds can say, "OK look I don't want to feel bitter about this person," but we cannot stop these sub-conscious feelings impeding and surfacing when we don't know it. And by doing a meditation, by doing a creative visualisation, we are controlling the sub-conscious, being able to train our entire body to actually understand what our rational mind is telling us.

Joe: I disagree. I disagree. I say you are releasing your sub-conscious. That's the way I look at it.

Linda: Releasing! Semantics!

Joe: No, to me it's not. There's a big difference. I say that for me it's opening up. Opening up to new possibilities.

Linda: Sure, in addition. But I think we do recognise that something .... our conscious minds cannot often handle a problem. And we know that we have a way of dealing with the problem. It's like giving up smoking. People know that hypnotherapy is a good way to give up smoking because the sub-conscious mind is tapped into. So in the same way we rational people are using the sub-conscious mind to control our actions.

Carol: But I am really unhappy because I am controlled by my sub-conscious mind.

Linda: So now we are telling the sub-conscious where to get off!

Carol: No. No. That's not it at all. It's like .... somehow believing that there's something greater than myself and letting go. There is a flow that's happened and suddenly I'm just jarred all over the world like I used to be. It's got nothing to do with controlling it though.

(There was further debate between Robert and myself on issues concerning control and the conflict between rationalism and mysticism. This was eventually replaced by an interchange}
**through the group of humorous comments and laughter. In turn this made way for further sharing.**

**Linda**: One of my biggest problems was the fact that I was so worried because my two daughters weren’t getting on well. That was causing me more grief than anything in the world. They had always been so very close as children and that had always given me so much pleasure. I always used to think, ‘Oh well if nothing else happens they’ve always got each other and they’re close.’ Well, I don’t know how things changed but things did change as they grew older. Their lifestyles were very different for one and they actually got to the stage where they almost hated each other. So I’d have to spend Saturdays with one daughter and Sundays with the other. The whole time I was with one of them they would complain to me about the other one or they would think that I loved one more than the other.

So, after hearing about the wonderful things that happened in Buddhist meditation and after myself experiencing some wonderful synchronistic creative visualisations, I started imagining that if I visualised my girls being together, that would have some magical effect on them and would bring them together again and therefore would cause ... ease a lot of tension between them, all three of us. So I started meditating on the two being together and I remember once being up in a plane and imagining the two of them holding hands and walking across the pink clouds. The sun was setting. And I concentrated on that image so hard that it became very much part of my regular meditation. I imagined them holding each other, kissing each other, being close and feeling incredibly happy about that.

After about six months nothing seemed to happen. Things were getting actually worse and I saw Malcolm one day and I mentioned it to him. And he pointed out to me very delicately and very sensitively that it was really not the intention of meditation to organise other people’s relationships with each other. It would be better to concentrate on my relationship with one of them or my relation with the other one ..., rather than focussing on playing God virtually, bringing two people together.

So I felt very despondent at that and almost angry. I was very angry with myself and angry that I had misunderstood the intention of meditation so much. So I rejected it really quite strongly for a while. I didn’t meditate for a while and I certainly decided that, very strongly, that I would no longer wish for the children to be close together and it was their lives. And if they complained to me about the other one I would say,
"Oh I'm not interested and I don't care if the two of you never become friends for the rest of your lives!" So I turned completely the other way.

And what happened a few months down the track is that Anne became pregnant and her sister, who had two children, was wonderful to her. And now the two of them are just like they were - once. And I see them together holding each other's hands or putting their arms around each other. And Lana, my older daughter is going to help Anne at the birth. She's going to be her support person. And I feel overjoyed that I can now be in the company of the two of them, just as I had visualised. And we can feel back in the same kind of cocoon of happiness that we always had when they were growing up.

Now, how this happened I don't know. It could easily have been all going to be inevitable anyway .... that as soon as Anne became a mother, she would have got Lana's support. It could have been just the fact that I stopped, psychologically I suppose, in some way putting pressure on them and perhaps, without even knowing it, subconsciously putting pressure on them to conform to my desires that .... um, I should release them to make their own decisions .... and it could well be ....

But I just still think that the image that I had of them walking over those big clouds holding hands was something that happened somewhere in the universe and eventually reflected back to help them come together and my happiness in that was a very small part of it. So really to see them together .... to see them finding each other again was something wonderful and whether it was meditation or not I don't know but I certainly would never meditate again to make people .... to bring people together. I'd rather meditate on them simply .... as I did later. I think that was a good way of them being released, being freed by me, just by loving them separately, to then be able to turn towards each other and find each other.

**Commentary on Scene Two**

To try to eliminate one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd ... In our analysis of the hermeneutical process we saw that to acquire a horizon of interpretations requires a fusion of horizons.124

Hans-Georg Gadamer

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The discussion about whether or not we should try to control our sub-conscious mind is raised again. Linda wants to. Joe doesn't want to. They appear to stand in different worlds on the matter, seeming to feel so strongly about it that I am sure there are deeper issues running underneath the question for both of them. How alien to each other are the different horizons of their perceptions of life? Can they appreciate each others point of view? Can some sort of "fusion of horizons" emerge from this?

I ask myself again, are we trying to control our sub-conscious mind? I think the question is related to how we describe these hidden parts of us to ourselves. Maybe like Freud we have learned to see the sub-conscious as filled with dark urges that push us from behind and if so, it might seem to us as a force to be subdued. On the other hand, like Jung, we may have come to think of the sub-conscious as being full of intriguing mysteries, like a curious old building inviting friendly explorations and only seeming to threaten because it isn't understood. I see an imaginary Dr Freud and Dr Jung demonstrating the difference of feeling and interpretation something like this -

\textit{Two Visitors to the Sub-conscious Mind}

Sigmund Freud walks briskly through the town.
And pacing close beside
His friends, the anxious ladies, tell of memories and dreams
And fears and dreads that hold them fast like horrid spells.
So Doctor Freud with brandished cane goes onward through the town
To seek the guilty necromancer's lair.
On through the town, down crooked ancient streets
Where, in the darkening night, a shadowed tower stands
Looming large! And deeply carved above the door the words,
'Source of Haunted Dreams, Beware!'
Notebook held in hand he watches through the night
Observing spectral forms which come and go
And, peering through a window, he sees menace coiled within.
And then -

The great tower stands at dawn soft touched by early light
And Carl Jung comes to seek and solve its mysteries.

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With nervous ladies clutching aspidistras close behind
The famous Jung with eyes agleam comes through the town
And stands before the soaring rose lit spire.
With searching fingers touches sculptured walls
Feels mystic signs and enigmatic runes,
Enrushing serpents, swastikas and smiling forms of saints
Symbolic intertwined complexity.
"These icons all have meaning!" he exclaims.
"Meaning," softly speaks the morning breeze.
"Meaning," sings a voice within the tower.
He gazes at the massive door,
Deciphers words engraved upon its awesome frame.
And sees that in the morning light they read,
'Source of Myth and Magic. Have no Fear.' 126

I think that when Carol asks, "What is really happening?" it is everyone's question but it has a different focus of interest for each of us. My focus is on the improbability of what we are telling each other. The implications of our various stories seem to be that connections are in operation between aspects of life in ways that are not generally believed. What is happening is surely not a matter of direct cause and effect relationships, yet our thinking is conditioned to explain all events in this way. Some of Joe's questions about Jason and about Carol's imaginary cloak of sight therefore have the feel of Zen koans, questions with built-in logical paradoxes. Seeking answers to Joe's questions feels like attempting a reply when asked, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" 127

My own habits of cause-effect thinking often lead me to speak in self-contradictory terms about my experiences. It is so easy to fall back on mechanistic descriptions. In this I think that Linda's story is significant. When she speaks of images walking on clouds, reflected back by the universe, maybe she has given us a means of drawing pictures of reality different from the mechanical views we often have of life. I see a picture emerging from Linda's story which might help us with that other question of whether or not to control. Also I think it brings in Carol's suggested parallel between supportive non-directive counselling and nurturing visualisations. Weaving these thoughts together I look again at Linda's story:

127 See fn. 176. in Summation
Cloud Sisters

Linda gazes out of the window at a billowing sea of pink clouds - in her mind and within the mist she sees visions of walking sisters. Within her mind and around the visions, feelings flow and patterns of reflection ready themselves for change. But in that lovely vision is control and expectation. The patterns lock! The expected changes run in reverse. The sisters fight and hate each other more and Linda's former confidence dissolves, evaporates. She turns her face away.

And so she lets them go. She lets the sisters go, allows them to be free without control, to be themselves. With expectations gone, the patterns shift again. Reflections move beyond the visions in the mind, the pictures in the clouds, the feelings in the heart and spirit, running deep and spreading wide in a shimmering interconnective web of illumination and love reaching far beyond anything she or I could measure with thoughts or with words - and the sisters find themselves free to do what they always wanted to do. In the new found light they link arms - they embrace.

The story of the cloud sisters is like a parable illustrating the message of the Flower Ornament Sutra. Everything is connected with every other thing within a whole and everything within that whole responds reflectively to its connection with everything else. Further, these interconnected things are not things at all but dynamic processes. Part of their ecology is that within their interconnectedness they resist control and another part is their natural tendency to unfold to nurturing light when nurturing light is offered.
Mandala Dancing

Scene Three

September 1991 at North Sydney.

Joe, Carol, Malcolm, Linda, Diana.

Diana: (Tells of her experiences with drawing predictive mandalas and gives a detailed account of how, over a period of time, the events and situations she had drawn had actually occurred, including one of finding an ideal house in the Blue Mountains. )

Linda: (After responding to Diana ) Two little things that have happened in mandalas that perhaps I should tell that I haven’t mentioned; One happened in the Mandala workshop in about November that I came to. I drew, we had to draw the things we wanted and I drew the house that we moved into and ....

Carol: Yah? Another one! Oh, there’s three in this place! (Chorus of laughter then everyone speaking at once )

Joe: We’ll have to start a real estate agency.

Diana: And I visualised the house ....

Carol: Amazing!

(Sustained chorus of laughter )

Linda: And I also wrote on it ‘love and harmony’ and really it has ...

Carol: I’m quite amazed by this. There must be something in this.

Joe: There’s three visualisations there, all for houses.

Diana: It worked, I moved into a house that looked almost exactly the same as .... I didn’t even know I was moving to the Blue Mountains at this stage .... with big Leura
pine trees in the back and I got a little house with a verandah. It had been fibroed in of course (Laughs) but it had a great big pine tree in the back garden and great big tall trees around it.

Carol: So did mine (Laughter)

Malcolm: Well you know there’s a pattern emerging ....

Carol: There is!

Malcolm: .... in all of this because .... I find that it seems to happen a lot with predictive visualisations, that there are many stories about relationships that changed but also it’s finding places to live. That seems to happen a lot too.

Diana: I think the quality of things always .... It’s been very important to me because I always see that place where I live as being warm and full of laughter and hospitable and generous.

Malcolm: Actually it’s about relationship with a place isn’t it.

Diana: Oh, it is isn’t it.

Malcolm: So it’s another kind of relationship.

Diana: And also the quality of the relationships of people who come into it too.

Carol: A nest!

(Chorus of "Mmmmm.")

Carol: It’s interesting that we’re talking like this. I feel almost embarrassed to talk about this but, you know, I relate to a lot of what you were saying to wanting peace and harmony and to wanting money to wanting the car fixed, to wanting .... you know, I relate to all of it really. Um, but something’s been happening for me recently which is like .... In two years there has been phenomenal change in me as a person, my life, where I live, who I am, my attitudes, my abilities, my energies and they’re all positive.
However, what started to happen is, uhh. It's like there are some things that I want and I can get and I've always believed that I should be able to, yet I haven't. I've also looked in my past to see where I've had thoughts and beliefs that are full of assumptions that are not necessarily correct. They're very limited, narrow, things about me. One of the things I know about me is that I tend to put myself down a lot. And there's a safety in that, like if I'm not capable then I won't do and then I won't get it wrong. Then I can't fail, so that's fine.

So I think I limit myself that way. It's to do with low self-esteem. I don't know how to explain this ... It's like I'm functioning in the world, I'm doing fine, but there's another energy in me that I am shocked and stunned by and it's full of hate and anger and it's strange because, if I could draw it, it's squiggles. If I had a big piece of paper that's how I'd draw it. Just black and probably red .... squiggles .... but underneath it's like an egg of space that I'm terrified of .... And when I'm in touch with that I've got this new visualisation that I'm afraid of.

I feel myself moving into a space of mood, of an emotion, whereby I can see myself with a sledge-hammer going berserk. I'm murderous. My mood is absolutely murderous. In my visualisations no longer there are people. Like I'm smashing houses or .... I'd smash the shrine you know like .... when I'm in this, if I imagine myself in this room and please, I hope this isn't blasphemy, but that Buddha there would go straight out the window because that's a load of shit. You know that sort of attitude?

Malcolm: Are you talking about spontaneous visions or are you .... ? You're not talking about something you sit down and decide to do.

Carol: Sit down, no, no. This builds and it takes over and I find it's like, this vision will come and I'll be like .... that's what I want to do. I want to be somewhere with the sledge-hammer and I want to let go of this madness and I want to hurt the wall and it's because the Buddha is garbage.

Malcolm: Yes.

Carol: And it's all .... (Tenses her body) .... Uuurgh! Like that.

Malcolm: Right.
Carol: They are spontaneous but they’re short, like it’s sharp and totally .... I can block it by .... I’m choosing not to because I feel I’m in a process. And I’m hoping that .... but I can (Breathes out heavily) and go to work and throw it behind my shoulder and perform, sort of thing. But, it’s easy for me in this just to talk. I’m sitting on the edge of feeling the energy in what I’m talking about.

Diana: Yeah, could I ask you a question Carol? Oh sorry, do you want to go on?

Carol: No? I .... It’s got a lot to do with visualisation and I’m not sure about it. It scares me, scares me. I do have a hope that it is OK. I know that I’ve been unhealthy in many, many ways. Ummm .... and I know that this doesn’t sound healthy.

Malcolm: While you were talking I was seeing you going right through. You smash the shrine. Smash a hole through the wall...

Carol: .... I’ve got a sledge-hammer.

Malcolm: Yeah. You’ve got a sledge-hammer. You do the lot. You complete all of that and then you arise, tall and powerful and much bigger than you were before. It’s just like that smashing through an eggshell image. And you came out. You hatched. And then you were free.

Carol: I love that. I love that. I love it. It fits with my drawing and the picture like when I try to see the whole I get that squiggle and then there’s .... It turns into an oval and it’s got .... I look at that and I see nothing. And I’m really scared of that and I feel like this is .... See, I really love what you just said but .... I get a vision of, if it happened, you know, if I went bazooko and destroyed it, like, I’d be crying and screaming and yelling and all that but then I’d be left in the corner, crying because I am so scared of that emptiness that .... It means if that thing is nothing then I am nothing. It’s like .... What I’m looking at is, um .... It means that if that’s nothing my house is nothing.... Who cares about the visualisation? Because that is it. That’s it. The egg! It has to be something and it could be nothing. And I keep seeing nothing in it like ....

Malcolm: It’s a frightening nothing.

Carol: It’s (emphatically) nothing nothing. It’s .... why, what for and who cares? and, if that’s the case, smash everything it doesn’t mean anything.
Linda: I was just wondering if there's a tussle going on in you between the old and the new and that you're very afraid that if you let go of the old the new will not be sufficient to replace it. It's like Diana and me having to let go of our children because there's the fear that there will be nothing to replace what's made us what we are.

Diana: Yes, yes.

Linda: And so what this rage is, I would say, is a symbol of what you are holding on to from your past ... that you're frightened of losing. You're frightened of letting it go because, will this be sufficient to set you on the path to a new life?

Carol: Like, there have been monumental changes in my life and me and who I am and ....

Linda: That's very frightening.

Carol: Yeah.

Diana: Could I just tell you how I felt when you were saying that because .... I mean, I know, you told me that you've had a problem with drugs and I've certainly been through it with my son and I've had my share of self-destructiveness, but it felt to me as though perhaps self-destructiveness was sort of becoming other-destructiveness so that it was sort of coming out and going.

Carol: Ooooooh! Thank you. That's a good one.

(Chorus of laughter and comments)

Diana: .... rather than being directed to yourself that it was sort of being directed out and, though it's a frightening thing, I mean I've often had fantasies of kicking people who are holding me up in queues.

(Chorus of laughter)

Diana: I mean it's not nice but it's just something that comes and goes and we think, "Oh where did that come from?" But it's coming from somewhere.
(Further discussion on change being associated with a sense of loss)

Malcolm: (to Carol) Could it be like that? There is a lot of loss in change of any kind.

Diana: Even a good change is traumatic I think.

Carol: That's right, I agree with you. God I....

Diana: I mean a good change can be awfully traumatic if it's not what you're used to.

Carol: Getting straight sober could not be described as anything but a good change, right? But it was the most traumatic.... it was awful.

(Interruption to recording as the tape is changed over)

Linda: .... when I was in a shopping mall I've had an incredibly strong desire to punch people as they walked past me, to hit them, you know? And I couldn't believe that I could feel like that. So I think it must be quite common.

Malcolm: I think it's common. I've had destructive fantasies like driving in my car with a machine-gun mounted on the front spraying all the other traffic that was getting in my way.

(Chorus of laughter)

Diana: It's better out than in isn't it.

Malcolm: Better out than in.

Diana: When I meditate this happens. I've always found that when I've had long periods of meditation that there will come a time when I think, "Oh, what is coming up?" you know, and I'm sure it's all been down here and repressed and probably making me ill and all those sorts of things. And I suppose the thing about it is to somehow process it and then just let it go. It was the feeling that I had when you were talking that it was, sort of, rather than being turned in on yourself that it was, sort of .... The next process is perhaps turn it outward in your imagination and then it will go when it's ready to. That's how it felt to me but that's....
Malcolm: I like that - "Better out than in."

Diana: It's got to be dealt with hasn't it?

Malcolm: Maybe you should consciously have some visualisations now where you throw hundreds of Buddhas out of windows. (Chorus of laughter and comments) .... and then, you know, harking back to the flash that I had before, having got it off your chest, then you go on to consciously visualise something that is very creative, healing and nurturing but only when you've had that real good fun of ....

Diana: Get right into it.

Malcolm: Get into the anger and then let that work right through. It's staying with these things that helps. Staying with these fantasies and taking them through and .... you do all that negative stuff and you really work it all through and get it all done and only then do something creative and healing so that it becomes complete. Can you hang in there maybe and go right through that fear?

Carol: I don't know. I can stay with it with hope. And I can smash up rooms. Give me a sledge-hammer. I'll go for it. I do believe that you are right and I feel very hopeful about at least it's not going in any more and it's coming out.

Diana: Yes, I think that's fantastic. I mean, when there's energy there's always a hope of, sort of, transmutation. I think it's important that the energy's there, I mean .... It sounds awful to experience it but it also sounds incredibly vital too and there's a lot of energy there. And, you know, when the time comes and it's ready to go into something or .... At least it's there and its not ... I mean it might feel horrible. I'm sure it does but you're not being self-destructive with it and at least it is sort of ....

Carol: Yes, I can see, It's not just in here going Urghhhhh! any more with me not being conscious about it. Now it's coming out and it's florid. (Laughs)

Diana: Yeah and terrif .... and, I thought, that's probably terrifying.

Carol: And .... terrifying, yes. It's terrifying in the fear. It's not terrifying in the hate. It's powerful! You see like smashing walls! And the worst is I hate me for being so hateful. But to smash a wall is great. You know, it's great. But what I was trying to say was, it is still something going out into the universe. It's very powerfully visual. It's got
all the qualities of a good visualisation except for it’s negative. So that makes me afraid too.

Diana: But I think it’s better for the universe that you’re not destroying yourself.

Carol: I hear that.

Diana: Yeah, and I feel that because I’ve sort of experienced it with other people, you know, like my son has been, you know, very self-destructive and I just think it’s so important for the world that, at least you’re out there. I think that’s .... I think, anything that might be going out, is forgivable at the moment while you work through it. I think that’s important.

Carol: Maybe, I’m not sure, but when I was being healed with Reiki\textsuperscript{128} and meditation and owning my sickness, my physical sickness, owning that I created it, I was stuck with the question, "Now what will I do with it?" But then in that visualisation there was light and there was energy in my pain. In the physical sickness there was energy and it went into the universe and I felt it could be transformed in any way. It is still in existence but it doesn’t have to be a disease now. So, maybe this is just the same, hopefully.

Diana: (softly) Is there anything that we could do to help you? I mean on our own instead of .... (indistinct) Can you see that there might be something we could ....?

Carol: No, you’ve helped me now already. At least I’m having permission to talk about it so thank you.

Malcolm: Supposing that we all got around you and gave you a supportive visualisation to, sort of, get you on with this ....

Carol: I wouldn’t know how to be in it.

Malcolm: No, what would we do? Could you script it for us? What would we do?

Carol: (Long pause) It’s very hard to tell, you know, I think that my immediate thing was to see you all as huge people so that I was somewhere very small on your big toe. You are smiling at the process of me bashing everything up. So you’re all round

\textsuperscript{128} See fn. 117
toe. You are smiling at the process of me bashing everything up. So you're all round me but you're so big I can't even see you. And, um, you're sending me love and care. And the Buddha feeding me information, the knowledge of what is this egg shell, I mean it's turned into an egg today but .... It's not void. It's not emptiness, but it's underneath all this squiggle. It's something else underneath it and it could be nothing.

*Diana*: It could be Buddha-nature couldn't it? It could be the .... It could be couldn't it?

*Malcolm*: So what happens now in the visualisation? We're standing around and you've got that thing down there ....

*Carol*: *(Long pause then softly)* ooooooooh oooh. I don't know, I can't see it. All I see is blackness.

*Diana*: Um .... You know that lovely exercise that we do at the Mandala workshop, I've been doing it a lot myself. You know, where you offer a jewel which represents a gift. I'm just wondering. Could you think of a gift that could be useful in terms of, um, those qualities which ....?

*Carol*: Do you know what came through? .... A torch!

*Diana*: A torch! The light.

*Joe*: Ahhh!

*Diana*: A light to peep through the .... shit. To peep through the black.

*(Further discussion then departure of Linda to keep another appointment followed by further telling by Carol of her experiences with anger and how one night walking under a beautiful starlit sky and looking up at the moon and the stars and, instead of feeling at one with the beauty of nature as she often does, she felt angry at the spectacle)*

*Carol*: You know what I'm saying? I wasn't looking at the beauty I was looking at my smallness and that's what I was angry about. You see? *(Laughter)* I don't want to be small all right?

*Malcolm*: Well, why not try being a big goddess?
Carol: I think I will.

Malcolm: Be a giant. You remember when I suggested you invent for us a vision for you, you made us all big and you were so tiny.

Diana: You could be normal or forty yojanas high.\(^{129}\)

Carol: So I'm big. Oh Jeez! I could do awful things to you though. Actually I'm afraid of that.

Malcolm: That's why you keep yourself small. We'll trust you.

Diana: Yes. We can trust you.

Carol: Hey, all right. I'm going to do that. I'll do that meditation. I'll be big and you'll be small and I'll trust.

Diana: We'll trust. See? You be yourself and we will trust. See? We'll trust.

Joe: Trust that we have the ability to look after ourselves.

Diana: And not be hurt or ....

Malcolm: And if you throw us out the window I'll just transmute and come back.

Carol: (Laughter) And I'll be so pissed off. I'll work out another way to get you.
(Chorus of laughter) OK Malcolm, thank you. I think that one sounds really, really, really much more dynamic.

Joe: Yeah. OK, thank you.

Carol: OK, thank you. Thank you very, very much.

(The discussion turns to a list of questions collected at the previous meeting)

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\(^{129}\)A unit of distance referred to in Buddhist texts equivalent to 64,120, or 160 kilometers. See Glossary in Kató, Bunnö, Tamura, Yoshirō, and Miyasaka, Kōjirō, trans. op. cit., p.383
Joe: The two questions I'd like to include are, 'How can you integrate reason and feeling in visualisation without dominance of one over the other, achieving synergy and partnership?' and the other one is, 'Is there anything we can do as a group that we can't do by ourselves?'

Diana: I like, 'If losing control is important how can we do that without going mad?' and I think what goes directly with that is, 'What role does faith have in this practice?' Because I think a lot of this has to do with faith.

Carol: And I like, 'Is there something we can do as a group that we can't do by ourselves?' (Pause) and, 'Are we selling ourselves short?'

Diana: There's one that I don't really like the feel of, Malcolm, that's, 'How do we improve the visualisations to make them bigger and better?'

Malcolm: I don't know who made that one up so I don't know who to blame. (Chorus of laughter)

Joe: Well, whoever is not here is usually appropriate. (Chorus of laughter with calling of names of people not present) Actually I like that question.

Diana: Do you?

Joe: Yes, because it's asking the same question as all the other questions anyway. That's how I see it, you change the visualisations to suit the need.

Malcolm: About the one that you chose Joe, I don't quite know what the question about integrating reason and feeling means.

Joe: I guess what I see in that is, uh, integrating the pictures in a visualisation, understanding them intellectually and having the feeling working together with that rather than as separate entities. To have both working on an equal basis. I often do a visualisation without feeling a connection of the two.

Malcolm: Yes, I see. I like the one that says, 'Can we save the world?' I'd like to look at that one.
Commentary on Scene Three

Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self motivated, and open to spontaneous shift. It defies the shackles of convention and tradition. With distinctive energy and rhythm, it pushes beyond the known, the expected or the merely possible.  

Bruce Douglas, Clark Moustakas

There is no such thing as a problem without a gift for you in its hands. You seek problems because you need their gifts.  

Richard Bach

In this scene we explore out into new territory. After a dalliance with a theme of magical house hunting, we move into a world of darkened moods and for the first time we enter an exploration of visualisation as mind therapy. Carol’s disclosure of her destructive visions encourages some of us to confess our own. We sledge-hammer walls. Kick people in queues. Punch them in supermarkets and machine-gun them in heavy traffic! What can be done with rushes of feeling like these that come to us forming their own imagery? What should we do with the anger and the fear? I am certain that it should not be denied. In imagination it should be allowed to clearly name itself and come out into the light. As we suggested to Carol, the unbidden feeling can be allowed to dance its destructive dance with full vigour until, exhausted, it sinks to the ground. Only then it can be cradled, nurtured and transmuted into something more fulfilling.  

And I feel strongly about the importance of it being transmuted. I don’t believe that in the long run it is psychologically or psychically healthy for us to simply fling our negativity about like irresponsible day-trippers littering the landscape with trash. In the speaking and dancing of the fear and the anger, as Carol said, “it is still something going out into the universe.” I think that, if everything in the universe really is

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mysteriously connected and mutually responsive, then the belief that anything we do to our universe is forgivable is to depend on a wishful sentiment that will be contradicted by 'real life'. As Linda once demonstrated with her daughters in the clouds, our universe is like our mirror. It reflects back to us metaphors of the actions of our minds. More than this the universe is our womb. We are part of a cosmic ecology and we bear the consequences of what what we send into it. So it follows, I believe, that after that first wild dancing with the clenched fist, a different dancing should follow, a slow and gentle dance that honours, that repents, that embraces, a dance that loves and uplifts.

In my mind all this is linked with the question mentioned by me at the conclusion of this scene, 'Can we save the world?' That question is important to me because sometimes, though not always, I understand in my heart that I am a part of this world. I know that I am both in this world and that this world is in me. There is no real separation. At these times I understand that if I ignore that 'whole world' part of me then nothing of me can be saved at all. 133

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Mandala Dancing

Scene Four

October 1991 in Tokyo during a two week pilgrimage to Buddhist sanctuaries in Japan.

Robert (Absent for part of the meeting) Joe, Carol, Julie, Diana, Malcolm, Christopher.

Malcolm: One nice experience I've had was connected with going to see the Sanjusangendo Temple with the one thousand gold statues of the many armed Cry Regarder. And it was also connected with Elizabeth telling me about something she does called a street retreat in which she stands in the street and watches the crowd go by and she develops that as a meditation, looking into the passing faces and seeing Christ. And then it was connected too with Graeme grumbling about being in crowded stations and getting a very oppressed feeling and wanting to lash out at the crowd. I talked to Graeme about Elizabeth's street retreat meditation, thinking that something like it might help him. And then one afternoon I tried it myself.

We were coming back from our trip to Kyoto and we were all standing in Tokyo Station near some very wide steps that came down from one of the platforms. And a huge wave of people began flowing down the steps towards us. I was looking at them and it sort of happened spontaneously. I superimposed on that sea of faces an image of all of those thousand bodhisattvas in the Sanjusangendo temple. And the crowd became a sea of golden bodhisattvas advancing down the steps in rows and rows. And for a moment it was beautiful. It wasn't a horrible rush hour crowd that was overwhelming and you have to fight it off, you know?

Christopher: Yes that's nice .... because, I know, going to work every day in the subway, I usually see everybody as sheep. You know, and you get this tense, uncomfortable feeling. Looking at it that way would be much more positive.

134 'The Temple of the Thirty Three Bays' in Kyoto dedicated to Kannon (the Japanese name for Avalokiteśvara, 'Regarder of the Cries of the World').
Carol: In the subway too especially when you see a load of people who've just come off the train together. There's a power, a movement. (*Several begin talking at once about being in subway crowds.*)

Joe: It reminds me of a conveyor belt with all the cans moving along.

Malcolm: So, we could all do street retreats. (*Murmurs of "Umm, yeah, great wonderful")

(Pause)

Julie: Well I've got two. I guess they're a bit unfocussed but while I've been here these particularly stand out and somehow I think they're connected. The first one was not a fully fledged visualisation as such. It was at Hase Kannon Temple. I don't know if you've been there Chris, it's in Kamakura. It's a temple for children, for abortions, for children who died at an early age. And there is this incredibly moving scene there. All the people who have lost children or had abortions put a small statue of Jizo and there's this sea of them. I felt so overwhelmed by this and there were other people in the group who were overwhelmed by it as well. I honestly can't remember the details of the visualisation. It will come back to me but I can't really remember the details at the moment.

I was just standing in front of the big shrine that's inside, crying my eyes out in front of the Bodhisattra Cry Regarder and there was this thing of just needing to release and just needing to let go. And something inside of me going, "Oh I can't let go because ... I can't!" But it was coming out of me anyway. I was crying floods of tears. And then I was sitting outside afterwards and it sort of came, I guess, the idea came to me just really suddenly. I've always been a person who's found it very difficult to make mistakes and keep going. And this seemed to me, to be a really positive way of being able to commemorate these lives and to be able to do that in a really healthy way and to acknowledge these things that we can't acknowledge, or refuse to acknowledge. I find that very much in my own case where I refuse to admit that I made a mistake because if I've made a mistake then I find it difficult to move on from that.

These statues embodied being allowed to still remember but not hold on. It was a really beautiful representation. It was as though you're allowed to grieve the mistakes that have been made but then also to move on. I guess that was what my visualisation was connected to, the idea of being able to cleanse and to say, "O.K. mistakes can be made. You can move on." One of the themes that's been coming up over the last week particularly is the idea of the impossible being possible. And somehow this theme keeps reverberating in me.
I'm a person who can't let go of things, but I can! So it's like the impossible becoming possible.

And then in the Sanjusangendo, there were these thousands and thousands of Cry Regarders. And once again I had a beautifully cleansing visualisation but as I was walking out .... Actually I find it difficult to walk and visualise at the same time, you know, I have to be sitting and thinking and consciously doing it. But this time I was walking down this corridor, walking past the thousands and thousands and it was suddenly like they were on both sides of me. And then they became like rows and rows of ancestors (Chorus of soft "Aahh")

And so I did this spontaneous visualisation about releasing. It was like going back infinitely because you can't really see to the back of, well, couldn't really see to the back of them in my visualisation. They were going on infinitely. And once again it was just like this spontaneous letting go of the mistakes and of the hurts and honouring, very much honouring. Because, I guess, our family history has been very turbulent. At times there hasn't been a lot of honouring. And I thought, "That's really nice. That's one thing I can actually do in this. I can honour these people who are part of me. Its because of them I'm here." (Soft chorus of "Aahh" and "Mmmm")

And Joe was actually talking about this incredible idea of .... I don't want to go into your idea because it's really .... I don't want to steal it. (Outburst of laughter around group) No, but the idea of what we do in the present affecting the past. And I could really very strongly, very clearly see what Joe was talking about because it was like .... It was having these incredible sort of reverberations back and .... It was really like this .... shaking of the room on both sides. I could really feel that .... going back.

Carol: So in your visualisation you felt as though ....

Julie: As though I was walking down a corridor, which in fact I was, but as if I was surrounded on both sides by these .... It wasn't even like they had faces of ancestors or anything. It really was like they were the actual Cry Regarders but I knew that they were ancestors going back infinitely. You know, one of the things I was saying to Nara was that I was really worried about my father because, before I left, he was suddenly looking very old and tired and a bit defeated by life and it really scared me to be going away and leaving him like that. And the last time I saw him I wanted to shake life into him and say, "Don't give up. You're not so old." So this helped me to see that in a different way because .... It was partly what Nara had said about appreciation. You can't make somebody want to
enjoy life if they don't. All you can do is appreciate the effort that they've made. I can appreciate him for what he's done rather than being angry at him for looking old.

So it was wonderful. I think those two things were very important and fundamental realisations for me about .... There are things that I've been carrying around for years and I don't know whether they're resolved but there's certainly a huge shift in them. Because I've often seen the way I am as being very shaped by my family and I guess that not being able to admit mistakes and move on, is something that all of my family does. I thought, "Well maybe in doing this. Maybe I'm also doing something for the rest of my family because if I can just accept and move on, then maybe that's allowing a loosening up in the rest of them.

*Carol*: Thank you. (*Chorus of "Mmmm." "Thanks Julie.")

(*Long pause then suddenly several speak at once.*)

*Joe*: When I came on this trip to Japan, I was really hoping that something would happen for me spiritually but I was also really scared .... of any commitment even to Buddhism because I'm scared not so much of my own feelings about that but of what someone else may see in that, you know, because there's so many different sorts of Buddhists. And if someone says, "Oh you're one of them. You're one of those people who smoke incense." Or something, whatever it is that other Buddhists do. I didn't want to be locked in like that, I've had a real fear of that.

*Malcolm*: You didn't want to be classified.

*Joe*: Yes, and even classifying myself. So I've had a real fear of that and even going up and giving reverence in front of, like, this huge Buddha statue that we saw down at Kamakura. I just couldn't do it. You know, I really wanted to do it because I wanted to, sort of, let go but I just couldn't, even if I did the motion, the feeling wasn't there you know? And I wanted to get through it because I knew I was really locked in. And I spoke to Malcolm about it and he suggested that I just .... do it. Just giving it a little bit of effort and it will come.

And so I did try. I tried it down at the Sanjusangendo in Kyoto. I found it very difficult to do. And .... but I was really determined to do it before I left, you know? Because it was such a beautiful place I didn't want to walk in and walk out. And so I did do it and .... It wasn't really good .... in fact I was very angry that day. Because we were going along to so many temples and I was just getting sick of it, you know? I was just .... running through
temples. (*Chorus of chuckles*) I was really getting sick of it. I didn't want to run through this one and say "I've been there." You know? Um - and then I did a visualisation. And I was angry, like most of the group, for different little reasons. And so I thought, "I'll do a visualisation for all the group before I go." And I just did what came naturally, just what came. And what happened was, everyone grew as flowers. Every person was like a flower out of Sesame Street. (*Chorus of laughter*) with a face inside you know? and every person was there in it and all ... (*indistinct*) (*Chorus of laughter*)

*Carol*: Isn't that gorgeous?

*Joe*: And that was really wonderful. And then I walked out of the place and that was it. I didn't care if I never went to another temple again. I was fulfilled you know? I think it's been said to me a million times .... You know, "Try this, try this, try that" but it just didn't go in for one reason or another. But from that day I learned how to give reverence with so much ease. And, because so often I'd give reverence and I'd be bowing and sort of thinking, "I respect you." or "I think you're a wonderful person." This is what I've been trying to go through my head and I've been sort of going, "Oh (*indistinct*) .... get stuck .... (*indistinct*) (*Chorus of laughter*)

*Malcolm*: Get what?

*Joe*: I'd be getting stuck as I did it, you know, just going ....

*Malcolm*: Oh I thought you said, "Get stuffed." I'm sorry, I .... (*Chorus of laughter*)

*Joe*: I'd go up to the person and think, "Oh you're a wonderful person." you know? It felt like it was all up in the head and there was no heart-felt thing or anything. Even though I wanted it to be, you know? And what I learnt from that day on was to visualise as I did it. Just a very simple one and whatever happened, happened. And very often I would see a person, maybe as a flower, or Malcolm, when you were giving a talk, I was wondering if you were nervous and I just did a quick visualisation and you were a tree. (*Chorus of "Aabbb.") And when you bowed you were like, your branches bent towards the people, you know? (*Chorus of "Mmmm") So it was so easy to give reverence to a person, you know? And it was a wonderful thing for me and I enjoy it now, whereas before it was such a dilemma.
Anyway from that I was able to, when we were chanting, to really follow through, and to really follow through when I gave reverence in front of the Gohonzon. Yeah, and what spontaneously happened the other day .... once again I was quite angry before it, and this was the flip side. We were chanting "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." and as I was chanting I saw through the image of the Gohonzon to Nichiren and, I can’t even remember how I got there or what got me there but as I was doing it I had a realisation that I could do this with Nichiren. So I was doing it with him and the feeling was wonderful, you know? As I was doing it with him I was beside him and, I saw him, he was bent over in despair and I had my face up against his face. He was there and I was there and I was doing it with him and encouraging him in his time of despair.

And at the same time I realised that when I’m in a moment of despair sometimes, when I put in just a little bit of effort, or from nowhere, inspiration comes. Sometimes I might have prayed or I might have asked the universe or Buddha, or whatever was there, for something and then it comes, and I thought, "Wow! What if it comes from someone in the future who’s doing something for me in the past!" Because in the concept of Buddhism, there’s timelessness. Present and future and past are all one. And so I was thinking, "Well, if I’m doing this for Nichiren now, he’s experiencing it then, as the present and that could be support coming to him.

And I was thinking how wonderful that was, that where I get my support is maybe from someone in the future or in the past somewhere. And I was thinking, that everytime someone chants, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" it could register with Nichiren in his own time and reinforce his ability to move on and to keep believing in his vision. That’s what kept him going all that time.

So that was a realisation I had. I just started to think that, when something happened in the past, where I haven’t supported someone, and they’ve pulled inspiration out of the air to keep themselves going, then maybe, if I was the person who pulled them down at that time, I can now do a visualisation for that person and they’ll experience it. So I am this person who pulled them down and then maybe picked them up again. (Chorus of "Yeah.") and I thought "Wow! What did I ...."

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135 Japanese for 'Object of Veneration' in this case Joe is referring to the gilded wooden statue of Buddha in the Great Sacred Hall of Risshō Kōsei-kai.
136 Japanese mantra conceived by Nichiren meaning Reverence to the Teaching of the Mystic Law of the Lotus Flower. The mantra refers to the Lotus Sutra.
Christopher: (Accompanied by soft exclamations of "Yeah.") That's very good, sort of, the sense of cause that you've made in the past you can make up for in the present.

Joe: Yeah. And then I thought about it and I went, "Oohhh. This is .... (indistinct) .... wonderful!" (Chorus of exclamations) and then I thought about it for a day and I realised that's exactly what Malcolm's been teaching us in the visualisations all the time. Take a friend with you as if .... but we're only talking about "as if" because we don't believe that it actually happens. There's a possibility of that you know.

Malcolm: And it doesn't matter whether you believe it or not anyway. You just do it.

Joe: Yes, I mean feeling has weight and if that timelessness is true then there's got to be some reality in that.

Further conversation including a story by Christopher about performing a funeral service for his grandfather

Malcolm: You know, in the Mandala Retreat, in the elephant ride. You have all your friends appear in fancy dress and run along beside you and then later, in the prophesy visualisation, in the movie, all of your friends come in and they all give you a standing ovation. And I felt like both of those visions had a physical manifestation in the Oeshiki Festival.138 You know, there were all these people giving everybody a standing ovation (Accompanied by exclamations of "Oooh of course!" "Oh yes!" and laughter.) And I thought "Well, that part wasn't supposed to be a prophecy. That was just to add fun to it all." (Exclamations and laughter)

Julie: Yes it is a prophecy! .... and the pagodas that go along the side were always how I've envisaged my scenes at the end of the visualisation. They're always like as if they're encased in light, and then, they're encased in something and they light up from within. That's how I've always seen .... but all around the side with this huge theatre, full of friends.

Malcolm: And that's what you've seen in your visions.

Diana: Yes, the audience clapping that day, smiling and, that was just like that meditation.

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Malcolm: Yes, I've never had a standing ovation before. (Pause) Chris you said you've had some experiences since that seminar we did in San Francisco.

Christopher: Yes, (Describes several experiences with friends in New York.) .... In my head I intellectualise the teachings pretty well but I want to feel them in my heart. One day, chanting very hard, how, you know .... How can I feel this in my heart? .... and afterward bending down like this, a young child came up to me, opened her hand with a pearl and ....

Malcolm: This is imagination?

Christopher: Yeah. .... and said, "As easy as taking a pearl from my hand."

Carol: (Sharp intake of breath) (Murmurs from others)

Christopher: And then, going back to the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sūtra, I read that story, you know, where the Dragon King's daughter offers the pearl and that's how fast you attain Buddhahood. And that was one that I hadn't even created. That just came up. Umm .... That was a nice one. (Murmurs of "Wonderful." "That's a beautiful one." "Lovely." "Mmmm.")

Malcolm: And that was while you were chanting.

Christopher: Yeah, after finishing, bending down like this. And then, Boom, right then, you know? (Soft murmurs) I still haven't learned how to use that one yet but it was a nice one and I still visualise it now when I get frustrated. Because a child is so innocent and yet so ....

It's like, my wife's a nurse and she works in a cancer hospital for children and I go there periodically and these children are so .... They're innocent and yet so wise. It's almost like a pure state of being. They're going to die and they feel it but they're not uncomfortable with it. And there's one child kept telling a story to his mother about how they're waiting for him. He envisioned people in a pumpkin patch waiting for him. That was a favourite thing of his, pumpkins. And he asked if he could go to them and she would say, "No, no, no, don't." You know, frightened by it all. And he was getting much sicker and sicker and he kind of woke up out of a daze and said, "They're waiting for me. They want me to come. They say it's all right. Can I go?" and she said "Yes." and he died. And so seeing these kids with this innocence and this wisdom .... and this child offering the pearl, the
same look. I think, you know, that's the need, is that innocence, you know, and the 

wisdom with it.

_Diana:_ It's the simplicity and the profoundness as well isn't it.

_Christopher:_ Yeah.

_Joe:_ Chris, when you had that one, you were just giving reverence and that spontaneously 
came to you is that it?

_Christopher:_ Yeah.

_Joe:_ That's fantastic!

_Christopher:_ Yes I was specifically asking "How?" because in my head .... like I said I was 

like yourself (to Joe) in my heart it's very hard for me to feel it. I want to do it. You know, 

I want to really feel it in my heart and I want to feel the universal force that we're all 
supposed to emanate from and know that I'm part of it. And sometimes, there's been a 
couple of times in my life when I've felt, like my entire body's exploded and I've been a 
part of something but only (Clicks fingers) quick and then back to normal. And so, you 

know, kind of asking for that. How do I get there? And it's not in the intellect. I know 

that, you know? So - going from there .... (Very long pause)

_Malcolm:_ Well.

_Christopher:_ (Laughs softly, then another pause) I still do some of the ones that you were 
suggesting. If I'm sitting in a position such as this, I'll picture Buddha sitting the same way 
in front of me and a light emanating from him and coming into me. And I always picture a 
smile on Buddha's face because that's how I picture Buddha. That's a nice meditation. I 
like that .... and for some reason the light is always green, I don't know why.

_Malcolm:_ You said that before that you always see .... What did you say? You said auras 
were green didn't you?

_Christopher:_ Yeah. Auras are green. Yeah. Because I .... When I see people I see auras 
around them sometimes. Like I do with you right now.

_Malcolm:_ It's green.
Christopher: Its whitish green. Yeah. (Laughter from others)

Carol: Well, since I've been here I've had quite a lot of meditations but I guess they've all been on a theme. Actually there's been a couple of themes. And there's been a lot happen so I feel fairly confused but I can try and share some of it.

Before we came here, I was speaking with Malcolm and the group about feeling really angry and having spontaneous visualisations that were quite disturbing because I would have this sledgehammer and I would want to bash the walls. And uhhh knock the Buddha off his altar. There was a lot of that stuff and I was pretty perturbed about that and Diana and Malcolm and everybody were reassuring in saying that there was a lot of anger, sure, but it was coming out rather than being sat on. So that was reassuring and good.

But when we came to Japan, Malcolm took us through a meditation where the Buddha gives you a gift, whatever you need as a quality. And it was quite beautiful but .... and I was going with it up to a point .... until I had to accept this gift from the Buddha and .... what happened was quite startling and very saddening to me because I couldn't accept the gift. I felt very guilty because I'd feel I'd been given a lot and I felt I couldn't accept because I'd been given so much and yet I was needing more. I felt guilty and ashamed of myself .... Ummm .... which was quite sad but .... It made me think about how, for some time, I'd been working on my levels of non-acceptance of myself and I knew that I had self-hate and self-loathing for years.

It was one of the first times I've just looked at it like that. I didn't know what to do with it. But I knew it was important but .... (Pause) Some time before that .... I don't know how to connect all these up but .... ummm. I also had a wonderful experience. A lot of stuff has happened with Malcolm during Mandala Workshops and we did a flying exercise visualisation one time. And what happened was I opened my eyes from this visualisation of flying and there was a butterfly wing on the floor. And I picked it up and kept it and then there were a lot of changes and it was sort of symbolic. And when we went to the Hase Kannon temple with all the Jizo, all the saints, I had a very profound experience which was indescribable, very much like Julie was talking about, but when I came out of the temple there was a wing on the floor.

Christopher: (Softly) Is that right?

Carol: And I picked it up and kept it .... umm .... which meant a lot to me. (Pause) In the Oeshiki Festival, when we were banging the drums, Malcolm had suggested before we went on the stage that we imagine we take a friend with us. And uhh, what happened was,
while I was banging the drum, I visualised that all my ancestors were behind me. And they were all there. Just everybody was there and it was just really joyous. I've had some really, really good experiences whereby I came to understand that my ancestors were with me always. It connects with Joe's story in that there is no time in that. They're not dead because (with emphasis) THEY ARE. And they're always there with me supporting me like I am supporting them.

And when I was up there doing this drumming my ancestors were all there and they seemed to curl up across the stage and curl down and they became all the people in the audience.

Malcolm: This is while you were actually on the stage.

Carol: Yes. But what happened was, these ancestors turned into relatives. And so for the first time in my life there was a whole bunch of people who were mostly all Asian and I understood how I was related to them.

Malcolm: Living relatives.

Carol: Yes they literally turned from ancestors into living relatives in the audience and it was really wonderful, really, really wonderful. .... but today was really special. (Carol had taken part in a procession offering flowers to the statue of Buddha.) I think because I felt it was a great privilege and I was also very scared. I was very concerned about giving flowers for lots and lots of different reasons. But what I ended up deciding to do was to offer .... And Joe had actually suggested that I offer up to anyone who comes to mind. It doesn't have to be the Buddha. It can be anyone. So I had really tried to think on that and I liked that idea .... but nobody came. (Soft laughter from others.)

So what happened .... As I was walking down in the procession the Buddha turned into the Cry Regader, Avalokiteśvara, In this meditation I went to offer whatever I could and Avalokiteśvara, was suddenly there, rather than the Buddha statue that was actually there. And I was going to offer this thing and it had a big grin on its face. And it had twenty million gifts, if I wanted, and I was taking these flowers. The message came to me that in the flowers there were twenty million gifts and in me there were twenty million gifts. And the message was somehow that it was O.K. to give this gift because I was (emphatically) I AM and it was YOU ARE!

And so I COULD take a gift from Avalokiteśvara and the Buddha, because I AM and within me there's infinite changes and infinite wonders and movement and .... just like
there is in the universe. And so that tied up with a whole heap of stuff for me and it was really, really moving until as I was seeing it .... I don't know, it was just really moving. And I felt I was controlling, in a way, because if I had just done what I normally do in a meditation or visualisation I would have been crying my eyes out. But I had to control because it was a procession.

And then afterwards, when everybody was chanting in Japanese, and I couldn't join in, everybody was on the lotus lake and it was just .... Everybody was on lotuses and there was this whole chorus of joy. And it was lovely. But there's more. There's more tied up .... That's just some of it. It was magnificent. (Pause) Thank you. I really needed .... I really needed to touch these areas. (Pause) I've searched for a long time. Thank you.

(There was no further reference to visualisation experiences but the discussion remained animated, continuing until late in the night. Robert, who had been called outside the room to meet visitors, returned and described how impressed he had been by an address given by the leader of a ceremony held as a typhoon approached Tokyo. I commented favourably on the concept of the typhoon being interpreted as a reflection of our own attitudes and actions. Diana expressed uncertainty about this idea. This led to an intense debate between Diana and myself on what degree of responsibility it was appropriate for us to feel about the effects of natural disasters such as typhoons. )

Commentary on Scene Four

The dragon's daughter then said to the Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulation and the honoured Sariputra: "I have offered my pearl and the World-Honoured One has accepted it - was this action speedy?"

They answered: "Most speedy."
The daughter said: "By your supernatural powers behold me become a Buddha even more rapidly than that!" 139

Threefold Lotus Sutra

The theme running through the early part of this session seems to be that the impossible can become possible. What we thought we could not do, we learn to do. The visualisations described by everyone are cosmic. We seem to reach out through time, into the past, into the future, out into the universe, "...to feel the universal force that we're all

supposed to emanate from and know that I’m part of it." says Christopher. Joe’s vision seems to have aroused in him a mystical perception of time similar to that taught in the Tendai Buddhist doctrine of three thousand realms in a moment of life. "The entire universe is contained in each life at every moment of its existence. Conversely, each life moment permeates the entire universe." says high priest Nichikan Shonin. Thus Joe’s act of chanting in the present can be a support for Nichiren in the distant past.

I think that Christopher’s vision of the Dragon King’s Daughter can be an encouragement for those of us who wish for insight and wisdom but who cannot find it because we have lost our innocence - or think we have.

A Fantasy Interpretation of Christopher’s Vision

- A child’s merry laughter suddenly rang out. Startled, Christopher lifted his eyes from the page he had been reading and saw, seated on a nearby chair, a little barefoot girl, her dark hair all braided up and decorated with a tiara of sea shells. "The Daughter of the Dragon King," she announced as she looked at Christopher with a charming and eager smile, "From Chapter Twelve." She laughed again then, tilting her head a little, she said, "Tell what you know of me."

"You are an eight year old girl who attains immediate full enlightenment," Christopher answered thoughtfully. "As a symbol you represent the power of the innocent mind." He indicated the book he had been reading from. "You are a special element of this Lotus alchemy. When, in the sūtra, you transform into a Buddha more quickly than a finger snap, you demonstrate the power of a childlike sense of wonder, the power of childlike trust, of the child’s sense of play." He paused as he savoured the meaning of the words he had spoken and he felt pleasure as he visualised the qualities he had described coming into existence within him. He imagined them deeply in his heart and felt something shift inside of him as what he was imagining became real. "In our meditations it is these qualities that help to bring about the richest transmutation miracles," he added happily.

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On hearing him say this, the little girl slid quickly off the chair, turned to face him, snapped her fingers and instantly disappeared from his view. A loud clap of thunder echoed in the air outside. The earth shuddered and in the sky beyond the window there suddenly blazed a great and dazzling light which brilliantly illuminated the entire landscape. Every detail of the countryside was vividly revealed. The far off hills, each distant building, and nearer by each leaf on every tree, each blade of grass and every tiny pebble on the ground flashed and shone as if it were suddenly formed of burnished silver or gold. As the beautiful radiance projected in through the window he felt it pass right through him as if he were transparent.

Christopher stood bathed in that golden light and opened himself to its cleansing power. As its brilliance flowed in he abandoned his whole being to a feeling of absolute trust, allowing the light to penetrate to the very core of his soul. He was filled with the light. He became the light - and something of himself was extended out through the whole of the cosmos. The cosmos welcomed him and he knew in the depths of his heart that it lived and that he was at one with it.

Outside Christopher’s window, high above the earth, the source of that extraordinary incandescence stood motionless for a while and then, as rumbling echoes continued to boom and roll about in the distant hills, it began moving majestically towards the far horizon. As it drew further away, Christopher could see ripples of rainbow colour running rapidly across the sky from the south. He steadied himself by resting one hand on the table as the ground swayed gently to and fro beneath his feet. 143

As the wonderful manifestation of the transforming Buddha made its departure, the appearance of things inside and outside the room gradually returned to normal becoming as still as it had previously been. Christopher stood motionless, facing the window with the Lotus Sūtra in his hand, allowing himself to quietly absorb the lesson, as far as he could understand it. Everything around him was as it was before, but Christopher knew that nothing in his world would ever be the same again.

143 In Buddhist canonical literature the attainment of Enlightenment by a Buddha is associated with displays of light and earth tremors. e.g. ‘When the Buddha Universal Surpassing Wisdom attained Perfect Enlightenment, the five hundred myriad kotis of buddha-worlds in all directions were each shaken in different ways; even the dark places between those realms, where the august light of the sun and moon could not shine, all became brilliant.’ Kaitō, Bunnō, Tamura, Yoshirō, and Miyasaka, Kōjirō, trans. op. cit., p.149.
Mandala Dancing

Scene Five

January, 1992 at North Sydney - One week after a New Year’s Eve midnight chanting and visualisation meeting

Robert, Julie, Carol, Joe, Malcolm, George.

(I had been unable to find my extension microphone and the tape recorder was not well positioned during this meeting. The voices of Carol and Julie were fairly clear but the men’s voices were muffled. Loud conversation was distorted and traffic noise intruding through open windows obscured soft conversation.)

Julie: (Traffic noise) I was really pleased when Malcolm said he wanted to have a coresearchers’ meeting because the last one we had was in Japan and there’s been a lot of processes that have been going on for me since then that have been very important.... that I feel I’m still in the middle of. In the last meeting we were talking about a meditation we did in the Sanjusangendo, the temple with one thousand and one statues of Avalokiteśvara and I had a very vivid visualisation of being surrounded by ancestors going back as far as the eye could see and beyond. I described it at that time but I didn’t really understand what it meant.

There was a very strong sense of being supported and encouraged by all these people known and unknown. When I came back to Australia I was thinking about that some more. It struck me that in my family there was never a great sense of tradition. And I was talking to my father recently and he was saying "Your mother and I lost our parents at a very young age." (Traffic noise) and that was devastating to both of them. I suppose that in my parent’s families it was something that was shut off. (Traffic noise) So I never really had a sense of my grandparents. I was thinking about that and thinking about this thing of ancestors. I realised, looking back at that visualisation, that it was the first time I’d ever had this sense of heritage and tradition going back. It didn’t even matter if these people were
my family. I think I even mentioned it at the time that they were supporting me into the future.

It was important to me because I had that sense of being very disembodied and not really as if I belonged anywhere or as if I had any real roots. It was kind of like I was floating through life and one thing that comes strongly from that visualisation is the sense that, whilst I'm here and I'm me, I also belong to something that goes back and is much bigger than me but also includes me. So it's like not being this little isolated person. Having the sense of past helps me to look back. It's my own past.

_Malcolm_: Like the courage to turn around and ....

_Julie_: Yes, exactly, courage. It's the support to be able to do it. Something that happened earlier in the trip brought to mind a very, very painful experience in my life. It was something that I had always thought, "If I ever look at this I'm just going to be overwhelmed. I would be consumed by it." After this experience I got enough courage to look back at that. So at the last Mandala seminar I did the elephant ride with this Being and it was like for the first time I could really feel the pain, I could really experience it but I wasn't going to be overwhelmed by it. For the first time in five or six years I was able to .... I'd spent so much time being ashamed and frightened. And that affected the way I felt about myself. And oddly enough I think it's also released other energies for me. Because, as I've never really felt grounded, I was never able to make plans or look ahead. And for the first time I've had a sense of having some real dreams. You know I can actually look at myself and see not only my weaknesses but also my strengths.

_Carol_: (Traffic noise) Julie, what you were talking about has led me to think .... It's got something to do with healing and support, this sense of belonging and purpose .... This last year has been a really, really big year. There's been a lot of things happen but towards the end of it I just, I don't know .... You know, the last time we got together I was talking about a sledgehammer, you know about a fantasy, I was so angry and wanting to smash things, smash the wall, smash this, smash that, just go for it. (Traffic noise)

That's what I wanted to look at in the meditation on New Year's Eve. I'd actually been through a fairly difficult time where I seemed to have dropped into a terrible sadness, a terrible grief. It had been with me for some time, a sense of loss. It's just been there. It hasn't been necessarily grounded in anything. So with this sadness I was lost again feeling (Traffic noise) I was bad, I was a drifter, I couldn't stop drifting in this sadness and sense of loss and waste.
But when I looked back at it through the New Year visualisation, one of the things that struck me was that there was a whole host of beautiful things that had happened and when I got back to the door of the New Year to look back again I realised that I was part of it, that I had created that. I felt a sense of colour in that I created my last year. (Traffic noise) And that was, for me a great... uhh... uplifting feeling because I felt powerful and in a sort of way also responsible. And so I felt again as if I had been almost like swooping back. For me that was quite moving. I thought I'd lost something and I found it. That I am creative. I can create. I do create. And I think that's really very beautiful.

(george then told of his experience of meeting with a Chinese healer in Portugal who had helped with his health problems. I asked if he thought that this help could be linked with his previous participation in a Mandala retreat during which he had focused on his need for healing. This, he said, was probably no more than an interesting coincidence. Robert and Joe then talked about the importance of seeing links of meaning in apparently disconnected experiences. As an illustration, Joe said that seeing a twig fall off a tree could be understood as having meaning in relation to other things in a person's life.)

George: I find it difficult to extrapolate meaning from a twig falling off a tree. (Everyone speaks at once.)

Joe: I don't necessarily mean that I'm walking down a path and a twig falls off a tree and that means that the universe is jumping up and down saying, "Look! I'm trying to tell you something!" What I'm saying is, the twig falls off the tree and that gives me a chance to look at something in a new light.

(to illustrate how meaning could be drawn from coincidence, I told about my recent return visit to Japan. I had been inconvenienced and annoyed by a pair of heavy brass candelabras which my wife had asked me to take with me as a gift for the people who had given our Karuna visitors very warm hospitality a few months earlier. As I tried to carry the heavy objects along a busy Tokyo street with gift wrapping paper on the verge of falling off. I was thinking how inappropriate my annoyance was for the occasion. However, I was able to dissipate my irritation when I had conjured up a vision of a village girl I had seen during a stop-over in Bali two days previously. She had been walking down a street toward a temple, patiently carrying a tall arrangement of fruit on her head as an offering. To find the temple, I had followed her through the village, very impressed by what she was doing. In Japan I imagined the girl walking ahead of me along the street, modelling the attitude I could have in presenting my gift.)
Malcolm: ... and I thought, "I can't do it with that kind of attitude, I'm different." But as soon as I admitted that to myself, I found myself able to do it. At least, I was able to imagine myself copying her attitude. Then, as I did that, walking along that street in Tokyo, what I was copying became a real feeling for me. So it then felt as if the incident of me seeing that Balinese girl was specially arranged for me to learn that lesson. It was like the incident was put there to help me find another function of visualisation. That explanation is too mechanical, and I don't actually believe it, but even so, it looks and feels like that.... (Noise) ... the timing was just right. The incident was just right for something I needed to learn. Maybe that's what Joe is saying about seeing a branch fall from a tree. It happens at just the right time so that it fits in with something you are wanting or needing to learn. It isn't just chance.

George: Yes but on the other hand (Everyone talking at once and traffic noise) I'm sure it can be proved why it can't ... (Lively, loud and distorted conversation)

Julie: ... and you can use those incidents to take yourself to another level of consciousness.

George: Yes, but you can take inspiration from anything. You can just make it up.

Julie: I'm sure it's more than that. I think it's partly that but .... (Noise) A leaf can fall off a tree any time and you don't notice it. It's like the moment you do notice it seems significant.

(Noise, distorted voice)

George: (Noise) ... That's my perception of things, you know, I find it impossible to make a connection to a variety of ... (Noise)

(Lively discussion between Robert, Joe and George obscured by distortion and noise)

Malcolm: ... Believing in mechanical causation, that this event causes that event but it's not connected with this other event, is a valid way of considering things, especially if you're an engineer. But with life as a whole, a less obvious interconnectedness of things has to be allowed for, I feel. For example, there's a lady who attended a series of Mañal retreats ... (Noise) The main issue for her was losing weight. She did retreat after retreat but her weight didn't change. She eventually decided it wasn't working for her and went looking for ... (Noise) and found one that worked. And her weight is reduced now quite a lot. But her point of view now is that she tried visualisation, it didn't work and then she found something that did work. Now someone else might say that there's an enormous
connection, (Murmurs of assent) that she did all these visualisations and they were connected with finding the healer. It just depends on how mechanically you want to look at things.

(Noise, distorted voices)

Robert: (Obscured by noise) ... Julie and I had been doing elephant ride meditations ... for various reasons ... (Noise) This friend came back from overseas and the present that he gave me was - an elephant! (Laughter from all) ... cleaning up the past. And not only that, when he gave us the elephant he invited two other friends from way back, one who I used to think was an arse-hole (Noise, laughter) ... and he was saying all these beautiful things about environmental science that really related to my thesis ... (Noise) He was really helping me.

(George then questioned Robert about his thesis and then initiated a discussion about the superiority of Chinese medicine over Western medicine.)

Commentary on Scene Five

The hermeneutical circle applies to one's whole life, which is an ongoing process of interpreting experiences. Our interpretation of experiences modifies our perception of the past and our anticipations of the future; and our understanding of the past and the future forms the context in which we interpret experiences.144

Adrian Snodgrass and Richard Coyne

I was initially disappointed with this session. Apart from my clumsiness in the way I had set up recording facilities, I felt that I had made an error in suggesting that George be invited as a guest. Although he had spoken warmly about the benefits of his visualisation experiences in one-to-one conversations with me, it seemed to me that he had reacted to the warm and open sharing at the start of the meeting by withdrawing into a defensive posture, perhaps feeling threatened by our enthusiasm. In immediate retrospect, it seemed

to me that the session had been devalued by George's attempts to change the subject or to rationalise away his own experiences and those of others in the group.

It was not until much later when I was transcribing what could be heard of the dialogue on the tape that I was able to take my attention away from the frustration of the discussion with George and begin to appreciate the contributions from Carol and Julie who, at the start of the meeting, had shared what I came to see as beautiful illustrations of hermeneutic circling processes in terms of re-examining a heartfelt experience. What I was able to salvage from the recording of this meeting gave me an impression of Julie and Carol finding and courageously sharing fresh interpretations of their past by looking back at and through their visualisations. For both of them the process was supportive of an expanded vision of the present and future.

Julie had returned to her experience in the Sanjusangendo temple saying that though she had described it at our gathering in Tokyo she hadn't really understood what it had meant. Since then she had returned in reflective thought to the experience. Her visualisation images developed meaning after the event as they were reviewed and reconsidered, a process of forming connections which she said is still continuing. Perhaps such a process could go on indefinitely. "Meaning is not fixed and firm ... it changes with time and as the situation changes." say Snodgrass and Coyne: "Understanding is in perpetual flux. Meaning is not an immutable object that stands over against us but is an ever changing part of an ever changing situation."145

It seemed to me that Carol, unlike Julie, had felt herself arriving at a firm conclusion. I get the impression from recalling past meetings that she rather likes the security of firm conclusions. I think she becomes disturbed when these are disturbed and feels lost when they are lost. Maybe in this she is a mirror to me because I often find myself reducing life's issues to neat formulae and sometimes, when these do not fit the circumstances, I wonder where my sails and rudder have gone. The 'perpetual flux' is not necessarily a comfortable process and I think it is natural for us to attempt to keep ourselves comfortable by trying to make meaning immutable.

As Julie had done, Carol had looked back along the road she had travelled but through the time span of just the preceding year. She had reviewed her experiences by way of a visualisation in which she realised that a year that she had thought of as being full of distress could be seen as having "a whole host of beautiful things" and especially that she had been part of its creation. The visualisation itself had produced a reinterpretation while

she was actually within it. The meaning seemed to come to her in a flash of sudden
discovery, not simply a matter of acquiring further knowledge but an insight that gave
release. "Insight is more than knowledge of this or that." says Gadamer, "It always
involves an escape from something that held us captive." 146

I see both Carol and Julie perceiving pattern in the wholeness of their experience and at the
same time seeing significance in particular parts that they had hitherto not noticed or
thought were missing. As a consequence to recognising these missing parts, something
changed in their perception of the patterning of the whole. Their circling through the
remembered experience appears to me as a process of understanding not restricted to
logical thinking, in fact operating at a different level altogether from logic. This, I think,
is consistent with the principles described for hermeneutic learning. As Snodgrass and
Coyne say:

.... logic is inadequate to the task of understanding the
working of understanding. Yet understanding occurs, so
there must be some leap that enables us to understand the
whole and the parts at the same time, however contrary to
the rules of logic this may seem. 147

I believe that from the way they speak, both Carol and Julie have, as part of this process, a
shift in the heart, something connected with, but certainly not merely a part of, thinking.
Over and again they use the word 'felt' and 'feel' to describe their discoveries of meaning.
I say 'discoveries' but is this the right word? Are such meanings discovered or created? For
both Carol and Julie, the meanings that have appeared for them have come from a deep
searching within the soul. Maybe what is happening is both discovery and creation or even
perhaps something else again. "....the paradoxical notion that our meaning is
simultaneously created by us and manifested through us." as Reason and Hawkins have
it: 148

My reconsideration of this meeting seems something like the process followed by Carol.
Parts were missing from my immediate recollection of an experience but, on returning to
it, I recognise those missing parts and see their significance. The whole is then perceived by
me quite differently. A meeting that I had first felt to have been inconsequential becomes
instead an inspiration. 149

149 After reading this Julie 'said, "I think that's right. In fact that's what happened." Carol said, "That
Manḍala Dancing

Scene Six

At Katoomba. March, 1992. Late in the afternoon immediately after the close of a Manḍala Retreat.

Joe, Julie, Robert, Malcolm, Andrew.

( *Hum of conversation. Everyone unfolding and sorting notes made during the workshop* )

Malcolm: Shall I go first or what? .... I haven't got any notes! (*Laughs*)

Robert: (*Offers notes*) I'll lend you mine then. (*General laughter*)

Julie: (*Indistinct*) Well I'll start. .... As I said earlier, I'd got up and suddenly I had this incredible pain and it just got worse and worse and worse. And I was just, sort of, sitting there thinking, "I think I'm going to faint."

Malcolm: That was when you woke up this morning.

Julie: Yes, while I was sitting having coffee. You know, I thought, "I can't even stand." And it came on so suddenly. It was really surprising and then Rob insisted that I go and lie down, which was really good, and then he came and did Reiki which was really fantastic. The pain was still there but it was like I was removed from it, whereas before I just felt totally, you know .... I thought there was no point in me even trying to do any meditation because I was just too caught up in this pain. I couldn't think about anything else. And then when Rob did the Reiki it was like the pain was still there but it receded into the background a bit.

I was quite relaxed even though I was conscious that I was feeling pain but that was O.K. In fact I could hear your voice coming through the door. I could hear Joe first explaining what we would draw, which was great because it got me thinking a lot about the manḍala and about the visualisation but I wasn't even conscious that I was going to actually do it at
this stage. It was just from listening to the voices coming through the door and then at some point it struck me that I could actually still do it because I could still hear you. As I said earlier, I had planned to do this with somebody who I still needed to do.

Malcolm: You mean as your guest in the meditation.

Julie: Yes, but it wasn't a powerful decision. Normally, when I go to do this, it is a very powerful "YES this is the right person!" Then, as I was feeling this pain, I started to think "When have I felt this kind of pain before?" I was just thinking, "This is so sudden. It's all so unlikely that in the middle of a retreat I suddenly have this incredible pain. I mean, why is this all happening?"

And then it took me back to a time in my life where I felt like I had become split into two. Not in the sense that I was split into two personalities but where I felt there was an essential me that was still going on, but there was this .... It's kind of like my body and my mind, or spirit or whatever, got separated and one went off on a tangent. There was a very traumatic experience that had brought that on and .... (Pause, then softly) Now I'm going to cry. (Pauses then laughs softly) So then I thought well, maybe I could do myself as the person to be healed. You know, I'm actually in pain but then I thought, "Oh no, I don't want to go through anything self-indulgent." And then I remembered you actually saying, the last time we had the question and answer night, that you thought it was O.K. to do that kind of thing. So I thought, "Well I'll try it."

Though I never actually saw myself as such in the visualisation, I had the sense of being a child but also this kind of disembodied spirit encompassing a lot of different things. It wasn't like it was fixed in time. It spanned a lot of things. It was like the part, which I felt had split off and got lost, that I hadn't been able to protect, so it hurt and continued to get hurt. So I really felt able, as my self now, to apologise and to really regret that pain that happened. I think though, one of the other really interesting things for me was that this actually took place in what I would describe as a sanctuary.

Malcolm: It wasn't in the bare landscape of the past.

Julie: No it was actually .... Well, what it did have was a giant golden Buddha in the background. So it was like this very protective presence saying, "This is O.K. to do." Because it was really, really painful. A lot of this had been stuff that I was conscious of and I guess I've done work on it in bits and pieces but I'd never really brought it up in that sense of saying, "Part of myself allowed this to happen." So I was able to go through all
that and when we got onto the elephant that was really quite fantastic because there was that sense of embracing and supporting and protecting myself. It wasn’t like suddenly we merged into one but it felt that the split had definitely been healed.

And then we went on with the friends and everything and some of the faces were of people who I wouldn’t have thought I’d feel comfortable having in the visualisation. But suddenly they were there and they were very supportive and warm. It was kind of like there was this very supportive energy through it. Somehow we ended up at the golden Buddha again (Laughs) but that was really nice and once again there was a very strong protective feeling about it. So that was really great for me. It was incredibly strong. It was appropriate to come back to the golden Buddha because that was like coming full circle. And then afterwards, (to Malcolm) you’ve often spoke about how in the meditation our friend that we take with us might feel a bit groggy and new-born, and I actually did feel like that. I felt very like my nerve ends were really tingling and I felt very sort of... born again, (Laughs) for want of a better word, but also very spacy, very groggy. Yeah, it was great.

Malcolm: And you being held, is that like the you now, or the you then, or is it ....

Julie: I think it’s both. Yeah, because, I guess that, when I thought about it, it was like there was an absolute split and then I sort of started reclaiming some of that loss, but not totally. I guess the roots of it are still there so they are still able to be hurt. It was really nice because I didn’t feel rotten, I guess. Often, when I’ve tried to look at this stuff, I just felt too guilty or too overwhelmed by it and I put it away. This was like acknowledging that there are different parts of me and different facets. I was able to look at them straight on, not sort of shy away.

Malcolm: So that was significant.

Julie: Yeah, it was incredibly significant. (Long pause) Thank you.

Malcolm: Thank you.

(Long pause)

Malcolm: Can I talk about something I experienced? (Murmurs of assent) Well, when I’m guiding people through the visualisations, like I’ve done this weekend, I sometimes find I’ve lost the identity of the guest I chose to have in my own. I think it’s because I’m conscious of what’s going on in the group, looking around at the people in the room to see
how they’re going. In every meditation this weekend I lost my guest and they were replaced most times by somebody from within the room.

It happened a bit like that yesterday in the sanctuary, which was very strong for me. I started off by choosing as my guest, an old friend, an old lady that I knew a long time ago, and when I invited her into the sanctuary she certainly came to the door. But while she was waiting outside, just for a brief flash, she wasn’t the little old lady any more. It was suddenly like she was dressed as Darth Vader. It was completely unexpected. She was a little Darth Vader, a little short one. (Group laughter) It was just a brief flash of that and then someone came in and I’m not sure that it was her any more or anyone. It certainly wasn’t Darth Vader.

Anyway, whoever the guest was by that time, I had looked around to see how everyone in the room was going and then lost whoever it was. But I was conscious there was really somebody there. And then for a little while (to Robert) it was you. Just for a little while. And then it wasn’t you and once again there was no identity to the person. But, even though that was the case, I was still feeling very strongly about the whole process and I was engaged with it in a qualitatively different way from most others I have ever done. And as I was guiding the group and doing the visualisation, I found that things came to me to say that I haven’t said previously. I remember one of the things I said was ".... the sense of wonder such as a child would have." Because that’s what I was really feeling.

I hadn’t the faintest clue who it was on the throne but there was a tremendous interaction going on between me and this anonymous person. It was really very, very strong. And I was finding in myself this very lovely sense of the wonder of a child, really a very innocent sense of wonder for this person on the throne who was glowing and radiating and doing all these miraculous things. It felt both significant and also peculiar. It was significant because of the strength of feeling there. I felt I was having a really wonderful experience and yet at the same time the question was there, "Well who is it?" I was really getting into that sense of wonder in a very innocent way. It was the innocence of it that I really relished, the fact that I could feel this wonder in a very innocent wide eyed ....

Robert: Without even knowing who the ....

Malcolm: And without even knowing who it was. Yes.

Robert: Which is really extraordinary.
Malcolm: Yes, a similar thing happened with the elephant ride too, that I ended up not sure who my guest was. It started off by being Mrs Tsukioka. You know, I was going to apologise to her but then, when I came to the statue of her it wasn't her. It was Rodin's Thinker.

Robert: Wow!

Joe: (Laughing) Wow! What did you ever do to him?

Malcolm: (With laughter through the group) I didn't do anything. (Laughter through the group and comments) That was also, however, quite a strong experience but the really strong one was in the sanctuary where I felt that childlike innocence. That was really, really very wonderful and, like in every case, my chosen guest was replaced by somebody else and eventually by somebody anonymous. There was certainly someone there but who it was I have no idea.

Robert: There was a definite sense of presence. Like you didn't have a vacant throne or a vacant ....

Malcolm: Oh no, there was no vacant throne. Whoever it was, was really doing an amazing show up there (Laughter from others) There were beams of light going all over the place.

Joe: Malcolm, when you looked at that would you consider that was a part of you that you were seeing? You'd never seen that part of you? That some part of you was really acknowledging (Indistinct) ....?

Malcolm: You mean that I projected part of me .... that I sat on the throne, you mean.

Joe: Well like, in a visualisation, if the people that we see are actually reflections of part of us in some way ....

Malcolm: Yes.

Joe: So that's a part of you that you haven't quite recognised (Murmurs around group) you recognised that it's magnificent and beautiful.

Malcolm: That's a thought too. (Pause) That doesn't feel wrong. It certainly doesn't feel wrong. Maybe that's right.
Joe: (Softly) Yeah.

Robert: Could it be people that you had some kind of connection with, like they were attracted to be there, but you didn't have a physical form to attach to them, or something. Could it be like someone really did step in but you weren't... They didn't have a clear physical form but they had a clear spiritual form.

Malcolm: You mean somebody that I knew and was aware of but couldn't identify, but they were actually somebody I knew.

Robert: Yeah. Or someone that's come to you anyway. Someone that's been invited somehow by what you're doing....

Andrew: Invoked

Robert: Invoked. Yeah. So that's what I was thinking like you'd invoked some kind of presence.

Malcolm: Yes. That also could.... That doesn't feel wrong either. (Pause) Something else that occurred to me was that it could be a sort of archetypal person representing all people.... and then I didn't feel too happy about that idea because I thought that representing all people means I can miss out on individuals. I can have this sense of wonder for all people but not for individuals. That's possible I think.

Robert: That's true.

Malcolm: Yes, like I could have universal loving compassion for everyone except - you, you, you and you. (Laughter and comments through group)

Joe: (Laughs) People are wonderful but....

Malcolm: Yeah, people are wonderful but not these particular people - (Laughter and comments)

Robert: That's amazing. (Pause)

Malcolm: I'd like time to reflect more on all that. How about somebody else, has anyone got anything fresh?
Joe: (Laughing) Yeah, mine’s all fresh. (Laughter through group) I’ve got a couple of fresh ones. (More laughter) I’ve had an amazing weekend with visualisations and they are all so valuable and interlinked. I’ll try and be brief, mainly talk about one I think. Umm .... The one I did yesterday, the sanctuary meditation, I spoke to you about it yesterday (Sighs) uhhh .... was a really uncomfortable meditation. Everything about it was fine. My guest appeared. My sanctuary appeared. It was my backyard where I’ve been doing some gardening, and when my throne appeared up in a tree, I thought, "Well why not?" you know. Why not? It was a nice view from up there, you know? And .... that was all fine. I was just letting it all happen as it went.

But when you went into the part where I was assumed to have the wonder of a child, I just blocked and I couldn’t go any further. And I was getting really uncomfortable. And .... I had my brother as the guest and I was seeing him and I was seeing the sanctuary but it was just a picture. It was like a one dimensional photo of this scene. It still had movement but it was one dimensional. I kept sort of losing my attention on the sanctuary and being alerted by my body which was really uncomfortable. And then I would go in and out very quickly and sort of go straight back to the meditation. But I couldn’t get beyond that. It was like every time I went back it was really uncomfortable. I couldn’t get past, just the picture and that was it.

And when I spoke to you afterwards and we sort of stumbled together through the steps of it and you mentioned that you had suggested the wonder of a child. I realised what had happened. Because my own childhood was .... I guess difficult is the way to describe it .... in the way that emotional expression wasn’t encouraged in our house. And so, as a child, I learned not to do that. And at the end of the meditation I had a feeling that I daydreamed. or something, or lost my concentration and that everyone else was finished except for me. Although I knew that wasn’t true because I had been listening but I had to open my eyes to check that I wasn’t the only person left still sitting there. I had a fear that it could be it like that. And then I shut my eyes and continued with the meditation.

After it was over I felt humiliated or somewhere between humiliated and ashamed. And I was looking around at everyone just hoping they weren’t looking at me and I was really feeling uncomfortable. I felt that came from being a child and being humiliated through expressing some sort of emotion and then being ashamed of having done that. And so it really clicked. When you actually said that to me yesterday, "Yes, I had mentioned the wonder of a child." The penny kind of dropped. I felt like a good walk. I just wanted to get out. It was very painful.
Then today when I was doing the meditation for healing the past I went back to a time in my teenage years when I was working out on the car and my father came up and tried to help me with the car and I said, "I don't really want any help. I can do this myself." And he kept giving me help and I told him to get lost and "I don't need your help" and "Get out." you know? I was quite aggressive the way I spoke to him. And a friend of mine, who was there, said to me, "Look, that was a bit strong what you said to him." I didn't feel it was. I felt it was justified that he came to help me and I didn't want his help so I told him to get lost.

In retrospect his way of expressing and communicating with me was - the only thing we had in common was that we both had cars and we liked working on cars. (Voice softening) So in retrospect, I felt that was his way of showing some sort of love and care because we didn't ever really have any sort of relationship. So in the healing the past meditation I went back to him to say sorry for that moment. It was ... it was really strange because there was still no connection, still no real connection you know? Umm ... I felt some connection when I touched his face and he was still stone and then when I was actually helping him approach the elephant and I was supporting him, it brought me back to a time when .... It was the only time I remember showing any physical care for him when he came out of the hospital and I was holding him to help him walk.

And I helped him up onto the elephant .... and riding along .... and I felt that warmth and support that you were talking about as we went. But although I was giving what I could, I still couldn’t feel this connection you know? And it’s logical it wasn’t there because we never really had it in the first place. But still .... We were going along then lots of people started to come. It was really nice, you know, it was nice to see .... Carol came along and that was really lovely and then my mother came along and she was like, enraptured to see my father and it was a really, really beautiful moment. That was the most loving and beautiful I’ve seen the two of them together and .... I mean, my father was dying five years ago so it was really nice to see that.

It was just after this moment, some people ran .... and just ran under the elephant’s path and they got crushed by the elephant that I was riding on. And I thought (Voice softens) "Oh shit!" you know? "These people are gone." And so immediately I tried to change the scene and I changed it to a river that we were walking in so the people would not be trodden on. But then the elephant took a few steps and fell over and he fell into the water. It was a really uncomfortable feeling, falling into the water, and the landscape after that, once it had become a river, was immediately desolate and isolated. And I knew that I’d done something that wasn’t natural with the visualisation so I went straight back to where I’d just left off.
And the people were still trodden down. So I asked for support in the visualisation, as it was going, because it was too uncomfortable. And when I did that, immediately I felt like two thousand, three thousand-foot translucent gold Buddhas just went "Phwww" (Lifts hands) around the whole landscape, all around the horizon. It was just like (Lifts hand) "Phwww" you know? (Exclamations of soft "Mmmm" from others) (Indistinct) .... encircled in these Buddhas. And I hadn't even thought about that kind of support, you know? So, I was still uncomfortable with it but I knew that if I was getting this sort of support (Indistinct) and so I just kept going on and continued. And the people were still dead but I thought, "Ohh, I guess that's the way it is."

And as I continued along the path, and it was coming to the end of the visualisation, I still hadn't quite felt a connection so I .... I mean at different times my father was looking really happy and jubilant and uh , .... contented and at different times I felt that too. It was like we sort of really acknowledged each other but it was just like .... moments. And then it was near the end of the meditation and I didn't want it to end because I felt, "This is the closest I've been to my father all my life and I just wanted it to continue. And I just wanted to know - from him if we could start to get to know each other, .... you know .... (Takes a deep breath) .... and finally he said "Yes." .... yeah .... (Long pause)

What we did in the end was .... (Deep breath) .... I touched his face with my face. And I remember the feel of .... actually .... his face and that brought back that feeling for me and .... Ohhh .... I felt connected at that point. I felt, "Yes." I kind of knew, "Yes, we can develop a relationship from here." And the feeling of leaning over and touching his face was the same one I had done in Japan when I was in the Fumon Hall and I was thinking of Nichiren. It was the same sort of leaning across to each other and .... just touching faces and he was leaning this side (Touches cheek with hand) and I was leaning that side. And just touching faces on the side and .... Yeah, it just happened.

So after I finished doing some writing I was feeling very emotional and I went for a walk. And I experienced crying for the first time in sixteen years. (Pause) Like it wasn't a real gut wrenching cry but it was .... (More animated) I was at first watching it and I was thinking "Uhh , I think I might be crying." (Soft laughter from others) And I was thinking, "No no I don't think I am." .... and then I was going "Uhu, uhu" and tears are coming down, just a couple, maybe not, and I could hear myself doing it and .... "Oh, I think I am." (Soft laughter from others) and it kept happening like that. It went on for ten or fifteen minutes in just little bits, you know. And I was just thinking of different things and uh , .... I could hear myself and, a little bit more. It never got to the stage of, like uh ....
Malcolm: Full on crying.

Joe: Full on cry, but it was consistent and ... Yeah. I think I’m at least on my way to some sort of emotional freedom. Yeah. So it was kind of, I was laughing and smiling at that feeling knowing it was great. And then I’d sort of cry again and ... It’s really nice. It’s like .... And I could feel that I was crying because I’d made a connection, you know. (Pause) I’d never done that, you know. Yeah.

It was only recently I’d been thinking, in my relationship with my parents, how it had been. And a couple of weeks ago I was talking with my mother and uhh .... realising what sort of relationship I actually had and was still having. And I thought, "Shit! I actually feel like an orphan in this relationship." That’s how connected it’s actually been. And so today I felt like, "No I’m not." .... you know?

Malcolm: (Softly after a long silence) Strong.

Joe: Yeah. It was strong.

(Long silence)

Joe: After this we did the visualisation of being a plant growing and facing towards the rising sun. When I did it, it was fine. Just being a plant growing with my roots in the ground and just feeling very relaxed about the sun. I made no effort. I just accepted the sun. Just relaxing and trusting that the sunlight is coming in. On Wednesday night I did exactly the same meditation but I couldn’t take it in. It was really uncomfortable. I couldn’t just stand there and just take it in. And I ended up moving around as a plant. I was moving and moving. That was the only way I could take in the sun. And then after this meditation today, I thought, "That’s because a plant with roots needs commitment." The roots are commitment and I couldn’t commit myself to this, you know? And after this it was fine. I had commitment. Yeah. So it’s been an ... eventful meditation weekend. (Laughter from all)

(Following a break)

Andrew: Mine was like a big theme, like three meditations and one dream that all fitted into the same theme that ended with having my head cut off. It started off by not doing a
mandala for the first visualisation. And that was really important for me because it really broke up any preconceptions, so I didn’t have any preconceptions.

Malcolm: Because of coming late, you didn’t know what to do.

Andrew: Yeah, because of coming late so I didn’t really know what to visualise. But what happened was, I got given the metaphor for the whole weekend and ongoing and suddenly there was Vicki and I flying and we were flying up in the air and then we flew down and we went down underneath the ground and we came up in a big circle. And then we came up again and I realised we were tracing a face. And then what happened was that we sort of quickly sketched in the rest of the body and disappeared. And then there was this person with a huge belly. Like, completely buried in the ground up to here. (Touches forehead) Just a little bit of the head above ground.

Robert: Did you.... sorry.... you mean you traced it even underground?

Andrew: Yeah, underground and then this figure, which was then me, started clawing its way out of the ground and making huge earthquakes as it came out of the ground, violent eruptions trying to get out of the ground. As soon as it got out of the ground it immediately slimmed down and became really thin and slender and shot up and became a star. And then, I don’t know about the rest of you, but if it’s working I have amazing physical sensations in the body as well, so it’s really working. And the star, it went on and it seeded lots of things, like there were lots of seeds and then all these humans grew up. But it was like that metaphor, climbing out of the earth into some sort of understanding, consciousness.

But then the really interesting one, I think, was the sanctuary where the experience started as I was drawing the mandala. Suddenly I had this amazing feeling of affection, really affectionate love for Robert who was sitting doing his mandala, a few feet away. So I had this incredible rush of this feeling and then I went up to the other end of the room near the fire and I was just looking at Robert and I had this amazing sensation of.... I could see his back clearly and there were two bands of energy coming in from his shoulders and down to his lower spine.

And first I wanted to put my hands on his shoulders but then I knew I really had to put my hand on the base of his lower spine. And I thought this was rather a really strange
thing to want to do. And I thought, I really want to do it but I can't just walk over there and put my hand on the base of his spine. But in the end I did, and I did it very briefly, but it was quite good that I'd done it, for me. And Robert didn't seem to mind that I'd done it.

So anyway, then I went on to my .... Oh, this is after the snake had gone across the garden outside so in the actual meditation, when I was looking at Robert what came up in my mind was Rupert, Rupert, Rupert, my brother so then I got the idea "That's the one who's just right for the sanctuary, right for this meditation." So I started doing it and I was in the sanctuary and I had this misty door and the first things that came through were huge snakes, really huge. So I was whipping them into pieces with a sword. That was like a little appetizer. And then my brother came through eventually and I was really surprised he was completely in armour, really weary, with a sword he was leaning on to walk. He'd just been in some amazing battle. So he came in really tired and I sat him down on the throne and he took off his helmet but not anything else and I gave him a gift which was a crystal ball and that changed his armour into robes.

The robe I had on was silver and black and it was a robe of power and a robe of integrating the shadow. It was the robe of becoming whole. Oh, what I forgot to say, that's right, before we started the visualisation, the affection I felt for Robert turned into real hatred. I had a lot of hatred and I had this vision of cutting his lower back up with a sword. So, and also, while I was doing that, what swung into my head then was kundalini .... snake .... lower back. As I came out of the meditation, as it was all swirling into me, Robert appeared again to me and uhh .... I can't think what happened. Hang on let me just .... Might be something important (Sorts through notes made during the workshop) Oh yeah, that's right, the gratefulness to my brother was that he'd killed the dragon, that's what came to me. I didn't feel much awe but there was this real gratefulness that he'd killed the dragon.

And then I had that one today, the elephant ride which .... I started with Robert. Robert was the one I wanted to apologise to for ways I'd hurt him earlier. So .... Robert was there in the past and I could see him. He was cold and stone-like and then I could feel some regret coming and that was good. I could feel there actually was some movement and Robert came to life. But, as he came to life, it was like although he was weak .... We were in the wrong relationship somehow. Me supporting him wasn't what was right somehow, although he was weak. In fact it wasn't quite like Robert as a person because he had your head Robert but his body was sort of like very incorporeal, not very much there.

Robert : Like a head kind of ....
Andrew: Yeah, there was something there. I mean the head was really important and when you looked at me I had an incredible feeling of recognition for you. And like, there was something really meaningful in that. So I was still trying to help you onto the elephant and that's where I had this headache and thought, "Something's not right here. What should I do about it? I'll drop Robert." And I didn't drop you. I gave up trying to do something with Robert. And just got on the elephant and started the ride and had nice shivers and things and that was enjoyable but then it turned into another battle where I was doing a lot of fighting and then, yeah, it was heroic, sort of slightly melancholic feeling. And then Robert came up again as the king and I was his warrior and what I felt for Robert was this incredible devotion and loyalty which was what I was apologising for the lack of when we'd started off. And Robert was very much like he is now, a bit Yoda-ish and he didn't really say much. He just sort of looked really a bit beamish and then took out his sword and (Outburst of laughter by all) .... but in a really sort of nice (More laughter) the feeling was very important. There was no malevolence. It was like Robert being a fool actually. It was that sense of divine fool and then he cut off my head. Which felt O.K.

Malcolm: Because your head was immediately replaced wasn't it?

Andrew: Yeah it sort of somersaulted off and popped back on again. But still severed. It didn't join up again. It was still severed but sitting there.

Joe: But connected again?

Andrew: Yeah I was still me again but I felt my head had been severed. So I mean it felt like Manjusri, a bit like Buddha of wisdom, Whack! Cut off the intellect or something. But the feeling was not nice. And also the feeling of Robert as king was very powerful for me. I was very surprised actually. So yeah, hmm. That's it. (Pause) Have a nice normal .... (Interrupted by laughter)

(Reflective pause) That was really a wonderful weekend. I feel like it's been a really deep exploration and all these snakes and things are really sub-conscious things of intense importance to me. I've never gone this deeply before and it's never been so difficult. I mean all these battles. It really has been a battle to do these ones.

Malcolm: That's going to be something you can revisit isn't it. And re-explore.

Andrew: Mmmm yes. I mean it's very much confused and not clear, just the base material, not the understanding.
Malcolm: And then of course (To Andrew and Robert) you were linked weren't you. Some of your meditations were linked.


Malcolm: Do you want to talk about that Robert?

Robert: Well yes I do. There's one other link too with what Julie was saying before about the golden Buddha. When I went to my elephant which turned out to be a triceratops, and I wanted it to be a triceratops, I had this great big golden Buddha and I wanted him to get out of the way. (Laughing) He wasn't supposed to be there (Laughter from others) (Indistinct) It just took me a while to get rid of that and get a triceratops there. (Continued laughter from others) That's the only time I've had Buddha in there and I didn't want him there. I was saying "You don't have any significance in this one. Get out!"
(More laughter)

(Dialogue lost during changing of tape) Yesterday I thought my experience was really cosmic and then when I was hearing what everyone was saying, I started to tape measure my experiences I started to go, "Ohh maybe it's a very small experience." But actually I don't think so because I feel like it's connected to what everyone else was doing and there were literal connections there too. Andrew putting his hands on my back, which he mentioned before, which was out of the blue for me because I was bumbling around doing other things. And suddenly Andrew came and very purposefully put his hands on my lower back. I experienced it like a supportive blessing. And that really made me want to go on.

Because the main problem is the sanctuary I wasn't enjoy the sanctuary any more. I honestly think it's more than a year since I had a really meaningful sanctuary experience. And I actually got to the point where I'm not looking forward to them any more. I can't feel reverence unless the person does something cosmic and there wasn't anything cosmic at all. So Andrew doing that really reassured me to really pursue my doubt, kind of thing. Because it was after that I came and (to Malcolm) questioned you and you gave me really good answers. Basically I was saying "I don't want to put somebody up there because I don't feel a very worthwhile person myself." So I had a sense of being valueless.

And then suddenly I said, "Oh it's connected to my father." You know, while I was talking to you and you made suggestions about that. Well it was a very significant meditation for me because, in my own history way, because I've never, ever done anything with my father
that worked, in any kind of way. I have done things with my dad but it was half-baked, incomplete or unsatisfactory and stuff like that. The sanctuary I didn’t think would ever be the visualisation I would ever connect with him in. I honestly thought it might be the elephant ride or something else. It’s also the visualisation that I thought had nothing to do with my father. So I would have laid money I might one day have an elephant ride but I’ll never have a sanctuary experience, it’s an elephant ride thing.

But anyway what happened was Joe in the morning had mentioned about Gagaku, 150 so I was incorporating all these things, like everything that happened that day was really important. So then I had this setting which was a Gagaku hall. What was really weird was, it wasn’t my sanctuary, that was the first strange thing. It was a hall that I’d been invited to and what happened was Andrew and Keith, a mutual friend, took on the role of being warrior, guardian, king, law, samurai types. My father came in as Darth Vader. ( with emphasis ) .... Darth Vader ( Exchange of smiles in the group ) .... but a big Darth Vader and with his respirator off so he couldn’t breathe very well, looking very smelly and yucky and dirty and horrible and ( Laughs ) and I just thought I didn’t really want to be .... Yeah, that’s very strange because there was no .... I suppose all of this stuff is strange. Having Darth Vader walk into a Gagaku hall was really weird for me.

Malcolm : The Gagaku music was playing was it?

Robert : No I just knew that I was in a place where that kind of dignified thing happened. It was stately. Oh the essence of it was that Andrew and Keith came and sat on each side of me and .... can’t remember my own experience ( Sorts through notes ) Yeah, and then suddenly I was dressed like Luke Skywalker so I was dressed in black. Originally I’d got a robe, a robe of gold and blue which was a robe of respect and I’d got this robe on and then ( to Malcolm ) you said to give our guests a gift and from that point onwards it was as if you were personally guiding me through the visualisation. Because you were making calls like a coach or something like that. There were junctions and you were making calls, "Go this way." when I was wavering. So the guidance for me was very intimate and then .... Oh I was using the spells to bring him there at first and I had a lot of doubt in my mind that it was going to do anything good actually.

I said, "Father," in that kind of .... I felt that. And then you said about giving a gift and I gave him the Lotus Sūtra. It was a really sincere gift. I wasn’t thinking .... there was actually almost a sceptical part of me going, " Yeah, yeah. Give your dad the Lotus Sūtra. What a crawler! What a good boy!" But that’s what sprung into my hands. And then the

150 Gagaku is the traditional music of the Japanese imperial court.
Lotus Sutra turned into this little kitten that lives outside our house. This kitten is a symbol of something vulnerable to me and I was really worried that Darth Vader, my father, was going to crush it because he doesn't care about little things. That's what I felt. He doesn't care about tiny things. So I gave him the Lotus Sutra and the kitten. At that stage Andrew and Keith were looking very intent, like if something went wrong they were going to correct it in some kind of powerful way.

Actually there was a lot of masculinity in my theme and (to Malcolm) you came in at that point and joined in and another friend of mine, Peter, joined in. In that sense I was surrounded by four .... So I had a protective field, kind of thing. And then, Darth Vader, when the Lotus Sutra got to him and the kitten got to him, the kitten became a companion for him. You know the kitten was really appropriate. Then he turned into an Obi Wan Kenobi which looked a little bit like my father but, to be really honest, a little bit like Alec Guinness, which my father does not look like. But Alec Guinness looks like what I think a good dad looks like. So it's probably a kind of romantic image. So I felt my Sanctuary was not a place but these friends that had come and were respecting my pain and just being intensely protective and ....

*Malcolm*: Creating the safe conditions *(indistinct)* so you could deal with *(indistinct)*

*Robert*: Yes, that's right and they were all very strong and dignified and very no-nonsense people so a very great power. And then, when you said about being like a child, I became a child. That was really amazing. *(That)* was really amazing because all the way through I was just teetering. I was thinking "This could be another unsatisfactory experience with my father." *(Pause)* Yeah, what I said to my father was I respect him which is a very strange statement because I actually don't respect my father at all. I really don't. I don't respect him. He is a kind of byword for me for bad ways to be. I can't think of a single thing about my father that I actually could say was a good thing, like he was very charming but he was very deceptive as well.

So I said that I respected him and then *(to Malcolm)* you said to do a ritual. And my father gave me a sword, so there's another sword image coming through there, and it came in the Dharma transmission box that Nikkyo Niwano gave to his son Nichiko. And I thought it was the sword of truth. And one thing that came through strongly was that I'd lost my father's physical form. and I thought that was all right finally. I felt that's all right because I had this longing to see him, you know in some physical kind of way. And yet I felt like "No really your father's not going to ...." I mean, I'm making my own prophecy here but I felt like I won't see my father. You know, that part of him being related to me is gone, even though he's still alive. It's not going to happen that way, I feel.
The main thing that I got out of it was that things were not terrible, that the way that things had happened was really the best way, that by doing what he did he made me what I am today. Like, all the experiences I've had, I've only had because I was so upset and pissed off that my father ran away. (Laughs) That's really the core experience. So I felt that the visualisation made me feel that my hurt was real and it also made me reclaim some of my own life. You know, get back my childhood really. Well look, I really feel that for the first time that I've got some kind of genuine connections with my father. Yeah, so that was a strong experience for me from the workshop. But everything was strong. (Pause) I'm really amazed. (Long pause)

Malcolm: That's extraordinary. You know we've got some very rich .... what? Rich ....

Joe: Rich people! (General laughter)

Malcolm: .... rich experiences richly described. I'm really interested in the way we all seem to be linking up ....

Robert: Yeah. That's what I'm amazed at.

Malcolm: Darth Vader in two meditations, all the swords ....

Julie: Reclaiming childhood, acknowledging pain ....

Robert: (Indicating Julie) She stuck a big Buddha in my meditation too. (Laughs)

(Further conversation and laughter)

Malcolm: More connections? What was that?

Julie: Well, I was just saying to Andrew. It was really bizarre. In my last prophecy meditation, Andrew suddenly, sort of, popped up with a sort of sub-title, 'Andrew White Knight of the Soul'. I thought, "What? What is this?" (Laughs) (Interruptions of laughter and comments from others) .... that sort of masculine imagery and I don't normally have that kind of imagery but suddenly Andrew was there and he was literally on a white horse (Laughter, exclamations and comments from all) .... "Where did that come from?" Obviously I was tapping into your - stuff.

Malcolm: (After a long pause) So do you feel sort of all played out?
Robert: I was going to ask you to say what it all means (indistinct) .... in five minutes.
(Chuckles around group)

Malcolm: Well, I'd like to ask us all what it all means, but not in five minutes.

Commentary on Scene Six

Should we not have a logic which can also cope with the interdependence of people, the interpenetration of people, and the unity of people? And if this involves an altered state of consciousness (where we let go of our ordinary logic) then should we not learn more about the states and levels of consciousness which are involved in this? 151

Peter Reason, John Rowan

It's like everyone is in everyone else's mind.
Do you know what I mean? 152

Jason Mackenzie

In this scene we have just emerged from a weekend of meditation experiences in which all of us have plunged deep into the ocean of our minds and we have surfaced again holding out treasures for the others to see.

Julie has explored another aspect of the process of becoming a whole person through a further development of the elephant ride theme. Previously she has talked about healing damaged relationships with others and now by Scene Six she has come to explore the healing of a damaged self. Like all of us Julie has divisions within herself for, as Larry Dossey says, "...we are each a patchwork, an arabesque of interwoven parts that usually work so harmoniously we never suspect their existence." 153

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152 See Appendix B.
And not always do they work harmoniously. "We must become aware that each of us has within himself various self-models or models of the ego, ... Such models are not only diverse in nature, origin and vividness but they are in constant conflict between themselves," says Assagioli.\textsuperscript{154} Whether working in harmony or not, according to Dossey, many of these internal splits are thought to have been precipitated by past traumatic experiences. In Julie's visualisation she was able to deal with that kind of issue, bringing separated parts of her self into dialogue and effecting a reconciliation.

As we surfaced from the deep with our treasured finds there was a question waiting for us: What is to be done with unexpected visions? On this occasion the group members all reported having objects and incidents appear in their visualisations which, at first sight, seemed incongruous and in some cases appeared contradictory to the theme of the meditation. This was particularly so for Andrew who went deeply into very unexpected experiences which, he said later, had been far from joyful. How do we best respond when images come unbidden as they may sometimes do in all forms of meditation?

Imagery is not welcomed into every form of meditation found in Buddhism. In the meditation practice of the Theravadin tradition, random visions are regarded simply as delusions. They are not recognised as having anything more than a distractive function and it is assumed that, because they are essentially unreal, they will pass away in time if mindfulness of the breathing or some other prescribed object of attention is continued with. A similar attitude prevails among Zen meditators.\textsuperscript{155} Tibetan Buddhist meditation practice generally differs in that random visions are not discarded as mere delusions. They do have meaning The strategy here is to allow them to happen and to observe them with "equilibrium".\textsuperscript{156}

A step further can be taken through the interactive approach to imagery demonstrated in the Lotus and the Flower Ornament Sūtras.\textsuperscript{157} From these models, which form the base of the Karuna visualisations, we see that we can accept the symbolic message of the images and, most important, we can actively engage with the forces they represent. We can integrate them into our process of inner transmutation.

\textsuperscript{156} Interview with Lama Trijam, Karma Kagyu Do Ngak Choling, Sydney, August, 1992.
\textsuperscript{157} See especially the Bauddha's instructions to Ananda in Katō, Bunno, Tamura, Yoshiro, and Miyasaka, Kōjiro, trans. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 347-370.
I once had a very large ogre walk into my sanctuary taking me completely by surprise. He was bulky, black, very tall and he had a long heavy face. I remember that, as he came in, it felt appropriate to me that I should treat him as I would treat one of my invited sanctuary guests. I looked at him and began thinking, and feeling, "That's wonderful. That's wonderful that you can do that, wonderful that you can be like that." I respected his uniqueness and felt an enjoyment in the sincerity with which I could express my sense of wonder. After a while the ogre no longer seemed a disturbing presence. He went to a corner, sat down and settled quietly into meditation.

The ogre of course was a projection of part of myself and my response to him allowed me to begin the process of coming to terms with that. I could have gone further into the meaning of the vision by dialoguing with the ogre, by asking him what he wanted to tell me. I could then have taken the sublimation process further, perhaps by reducing him in size or sitting him on my lap or cradling him in my arms. Maybe I could have imagined him illuminated or elevated. There are many possibilities. More important than what I did would be the heart feeling with which I did it. I had applied this principle during the retreat in my experiences with my vanishing guests and I felt that these meditations had gone in a satisfactory direction. As Julie found, visualisations run deepest and are most fruitful when they incorporate acceptance, dialogue and celebration. These are the ways in which both intended and unintended 'inner world experiences' can help to make us more complete.

Robert's practice of Buddhism centres strongly on the Lotus Sutra so his natural response to his unintended imagery was to progressively integrate it into the transmutational process. When his father appeared in his sanctuary as Darth Vader, while he himself was costumed as Luke Skywalker, Robert recognised the imagery as being symbolic of the way he describes his relationship with his father, Darth Vader being the unfeeling and unreachable father of Luke in the 'Star Wars' films. The imagery was especially appropriate for the process that Robert went through, evocative as it was of the reconciliation of Luke Skywalker with his father. Robert, accepting the 'unscripted' imagery, went ahead, as was intended, with a heartfelt experience of the Buddhist pāramitā practice, offering the father symbol a precious gift and searching within for

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158 Characters from the Twentieth Century-Fox films, Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi.
159 The pāramitās - 'the accomplishments which lead beyond' are: giving, ethical conduct, energy, patience, meditation and wisdom. See Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, *Essays in Zen Buddhism. (Third Series).* York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser. 1971.p.335-338.
deep respect as he did so. Robert, to his surprise, found that this sublimative energy was available to him and an inner healing followed as a consequence.

When Joe experienced the incongruous image of people falling under his elephant, his first response was to change the imagery, to change the 'symbolic message'. However, the imagery, being very likely a representation of something real in his experience of life would not be this easily denied and so it became more disturbing. Joe saw his mistake and he allowed the original scenario to return, changing instead what he did in his heart. He asked for support from somewhere and it came. Unexpectedly giant Buddhas appeared to protect him and he was able to go through with the healing which he had originally intended.

Robert and Joe thus made use of the ability we all have to choose our attitude to what we experience. This makes the difference between an effective transformative visualisation and simply getting lost in a random, though potentially meaningful, fantasy. The Karuna meditations work on the assumption that, if we search in the heart for wonder, compassion, repentance, generosity, gratitude, love, all of which are developments of the paramitas practice, then no matter what form they may take, the images that come will respond in ways that will sustain us. In both cases, having applied these principles, Robert and Joe experienced a cleansing of feeling and a deepening of insight which both found very rewarding.160

It seemed to me that Andrew had taken an approach that was very different from all the others. I came to the conclusion that his unique experiences in his meditations had come about because, unlike the other inquiry group members, he normally trains in one of the Tibetan methods of visualisation. I assumed that his response to the meditations in the Mandala retreat would have been affected by that training and I wondered, for example, if all the aggressive interaction might have been a reaction to the formal structure of his regular practice. I also wondered if, having arrived late on the first day and having missed the opening explanatory talk, he had overlooked the main point of the exercises which was to arrive at new understandings through a sublimation of feelings. I was uneasy about all the imagined violence "going out into the universe," as Carol once put it.161 I became more concerned when I heard him speaking about his visualisations a few days later saying

160 Robert, Joe and Julie read this without comment apart from expressing interest.
161 See my commentary to Scene Three.
that they had been disturbing and that he would not be attending any more Mandala retreats for quite some time. 162

As our post-retreat discussion was drawing to a close there was a growing awareness in the group of the extent to which several of us had shared similar unexpected imagery. Also it became apparent that similar visions had come to some of us either simultaneously or else in a 'logical' story sequence, our icons seeming to travel purposefully through each others' imaginary scenes. Andrew's conflict imagery especially seemed to have echoed in the meditations of us all. It was as if our imaginations had become like mirrors, playfully reflecting his icons back and forth.

From a Buddhist perspective I think that the best 'sense' of this phenomenon is made in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, with its visions of a hologram universe, a cosmic ecology in which all our minds and all phenomena are interreflecting, as Cleary says: "the one and the many interpenetrating." 163 The idea appeals to me that the interreflecting nature of the 'reality realm', the dharma-dhāra, had been opened to us in our meditative reveries.164 Thinking in this manner, what then happens to questions about where the great protective Buddhas came from and whether or not they were all invoked for us by Joe?

The Mystery of the Interreflecting Icons
As we sit with closed eyes, each in our private world, we abandon our resistance to the hologram mind and -

162 Much later I showed these comments to Andrew who said: "I really can't see that Tibetan meditation has a lot to do with my experience. It's got a lot more to do with Jungian archetypes. It's got everything to do with the psychotherapeutic practice and the psychology practice that I have gone along with for quite some time. All the images I regard as important and useful and are telling me something psychologically. It was in fact a very useful and important experience. I disagree that it was aggressive interaction. I think the images were aggressive but that's something to do with processes of transformation. It doesn't matter about whether images come out as negative or positive if the motivation is to experience and learn from them. In fact, sure they were far from joyful, but they weren't unsatisfying because of that. If you go in open, then who knows what's going to come up? I don't think that sublimation of feelings is the main target. I think exploration must come first. Understanding has to come first. The elevation of understanding of course is completely the target. I get the feeling, reading this, that my experiences were taken as negative, as if somehow the process wasn't working properly for me, that it was somehow a disintegrative experience and I think that's not right at all. It seems to me as though you're trying somehow to get rid of this particular experience. Either get rid of it or cast it in some way so that it fits better with your main thesis of the sublimation of feelings." Recorded interview, May, 1993.


A mirroring of black robes appears -
Andrew visualises himself in the black and silver robe of "integrating the shadow".
Minutes later, the black robed Darth Vader, living symbol of the dark side, appears to
Robert in his sanctuary while, in my visualisation, I am visited by a miniature Darth Vader.

Mirrored warriors appear -
In Robert's visualisation Andrew plays the role of a guardian warrior.
In Andrew's meditation he is a warrior for Robert who plays the part of a king.
In Julie's vision, Andrew unexpectedly appears as 'White Knight of the Soul'.

Mirrored elephants find themselves in conflict -
Andrew rides his elephant to do medieval battle, engaging in heroic violence.
In Joe's vision, violent and unwanted imagery appears as people rush to be trampled
beneath the feet of his elephant.

There is an appearance of mirrored swords -
Andrew visualises himself and others in his visions armed with swords.
In Robert's vision he is unexpectedly given a "sword of truth".
In Andrew's vision his head is cut off by Robert's sword "like Buddha of wisdom."

Reflected Buddhas guard the meditators -
Joe, disturbed at the violence, is suddenly protected by towering gold Buddhas.
In Julie's vision a great golden Buddha appears protectively nearby.
In Robert's imaginary world a golden Buddha comes uninvited to sit between him and his
triceratops. 165

In our hearts there are reflections of the 'healing child' -

165 Subsequently to this meeting at Katoomba there have been others where people have discussed their
experiences immediately after a group meditation and found that similar themes had unexpectedly arisen.
For example on the day our co-inquirer, Diana died, members met and visualised her as being free and
happy. In the discussion which followed it was discovered that all of us had experienced whiteness as a
predominant colour of the objects in our visions, white light, white lotuses, a white Buddha, Diana
dancing in a white dress and so forth. On another occasion a group of sixteen people imagined
themselves presenting a friend with an unspecified gift as part of a visualisation. The subsequent
discussion revealed a wide selection of gifts but six of the people said they had presented eggs or various
types of bird. Although I am certain that none of these shared images had been overtly or consciously
offered by me, I cannot be absolutely sure that some subliminal suggestion might not unintentionally
have been made. This could have been done by someone during a conversation within the group before
the meditation session or else by me when I was describing and guiding the visualisations. If this were so
then another kind of sense is made of the phenomena though perhaps not as exciting as that made in
terms of the dharma-dhātu, or the collective unconscious.
Robert establishes a connection with his father and thereby reclaims his childhood. Joe experiences a healing connection with his father that he never felt before. I explore a fresh sense of wonder like that of a child. Julie connects with her divided self and comes to feel she is 'born again'.

166 It is not so remarkable that we would have child themes in common. A suggestion that we should attempt to express the innocence of a child was made by me to the group during the retreat.
Mandala Dancing

Scene Seven

Do we have the imagination and the will to live up to our new capacities? Of course we do. Because evolution of consciousness, freedom and beauty is a fifteen billion year tradition written in our minds and bodies. The intention to overcome limits through innovation and transformation is the most ancient tradition in the cosmos.167

Barbara Marx Hubbard

One to one conversations featuring Alison. Frances. Malcolm.

Conversation with Alison. July, 1992

Malcolm: Perhaps you might like to talk about whether or not visualisation meditation works for you or not. What do you feel about that?

Alison: I guess that my strongest feeling about it is, it depends on what you’re looking for but to me, anyway, it gives me temporary relief but I don’t think, from my own experience, it gives me long-term problem solving. Initially I looked at it as a problem solver and I think perhaps my single biggest problem is my cynicism. So I don’t know whether I’ve held myself back from it working effectively or whether it doesn’t work. So that’s where my ambivalence comes in because I’m not sure whether I am responsible for it not working or whether it is .... Oh I wouldn’t dismiss it all as hogwash, like I wouldn’t do that, but I would say that ....

I mean one specific example .... I did a creative visualisation about my sister, who’s very difficult, and for the first time I experienced feeling forgiveness for her and feeling, instead of just hatred, which I’ve always felt for everything she’s done .... I actually tried putting her on my throne and I was able to do it and at the time I felt tremendous release and then shortly after that I thought it was very positive because my brother reported that her horrific living conditions had changed a lot and he found that the coincidence that

happens when you visualise .... He felt that my visualisation was a direct tie in with my sister's living conditions.

But I've had no improvement in my relations with her. I felt temporary relief and I let go of something initially so I think it was a vehicle for me to explore that feeling but I don't know, now that its several years later, I don't know if it changed everythiing and I think I've always seen that creative meditation would change everything. Like I've always seen it as, you experience the other's side of feelings, you experience being thankful for something or humbling yourself before someone you hate and putting them on your throne. But it didn't, sort of, provide a long-term solving of that problem. It just allowed me to explore that feeling and yet I haven't been able to carry that through. So that also introduces my cynicism because then I think, "Well it was the long arm of coincidence rather than me creating an energy in the universe." So, does that make sense?

Malcolm : It's wonderful!

Alison : Yeah. (Laughter from both of us) And what does it do? Well, I think what it does is it allows you to, what I basically said, explore a different aspect but I think that, human nature being what it is, it stops it working. Because I think that, for example, I'm a fairly hardened cynic so maybe I set myself back by not being able to explore, I think it's a very high ideal expecting human beings, someone such as myself for example .... I think it's a very lofty ideal and very esoteric and a very wonderful ideal but it's very hard for me to truly experience, to truly allow myself to be forgiving or to truly put someone on my throne and humble myself before them. I mean I can get into the sanctuary very easily because the concept of a safe place is wonderful for me. But for me to let go of all my daily armour, and my daily cynicism, because that's an armour, sort of, my weapon against people that hurt me .... to truly put that aside is asking me to do something that I really can't do.

And so I play with the idea of it and I might briefly experience it, when I have them on the throne. I might briefly experience truly humbling myself and worshipping and making that sort of wonderful .... but there's too much baggage I bring into the sanctuary with me to make that really happen. So I'm asking too much of myself to really put that aside. So that's why I think it doesn't work because of the element of human nature. And I don't know that everyone .... I think a lot of very practical people .... I'm very practical, .... I think a lot of very practical people would experience that to some extent because we're not all noble, like I don't think .... (Laughter) I think you have to ....
And maybe we’re not all childlike. I mean that’s my other experience of creative meditation, visualisation, is you must allow the child, that childlike simplicity to come through. And I think.... I’m not saying I’m too old, years wise. I’ve lived enough now to have seen bad things and to have developed ways of coping with things and it’s asking me to revert back to the child I was, that was hurt. So I can’t necessarily go back to that simplicity. Does that make sense? Because what you have to find is that place where you can be pure. And I can’t find that place.

So one of my disillusionments with it is, it’s asking me to undo all my protective layers that I’ve spent twenty nine years doing up, you see, and it’s asking me to try and heal hurts within myself that I can’t heal, that I can’t come to terms with. Like, I had a brief respite with my sister in experiencing .... just very brief .... in experiencing forgiveness for what she’s done to .... the rift and the pain that she’s caused in my family but it was just a chink in my armour and as soon as I came out of that meditative state, it clicked back in. You know? Like, instantly, I had to protect myself. So I think it’s not practical. Um, yeah. You know, I’d like it to be more practical.

I mean, maybe it’s a discipline problem, maybe I’m not disciplined enough. Maybe I haven’t trusted it enough to keep doing it and to keep .... um. It seems like you have to do it for too long before you see a return. You know, like it just seems like it’s years before there’s an immediate result. And I guess I also hate it because I hear stories about other people who visualised a grand piano and a rent free house and they get it and I think, "Bastards!" like, "Why didn’t I get that? I did it just as nicely as you did it and I picked a hard person and ....". You know? So I think there’s also a natural element of, "Well it’s not fair. It didn’t work that well for me." Does that make sense?

Malcolm: Yes it does.

Interview with Frances, August 1992

Malcolm: Well my question is, "Does it do anything significant for?" You know, you've done this workshop a few times and you seem to have had some remarkable experiences?

Frances: Well the most remarkable experience I had was after the weekend that I did in 1984. I think it was .... Ohh, March, April, something like that. I was at a point in my life .... at a sort of crossroads I guess. I’d been a single parent for seven years and that was starting to tell on me. I’d just returned from New Zealand after doing a teacher training course - sort of an alternative teacher training course. And I was just shifting from one person’s house to another because I couldn’t find myself accommodation. So I really had
nowhere to live except to go back to my parents which at that age of my life, I was thirty three, was not really what one should do.

I didn't have a job. I had just finished a full term of speech and drama training. And I just didn't know if I should continue because that was going to be another two terms and three years living on supporting benefit and not being able to make ends meet, sending a child to a private school and thinking of paying out rent, which I wasn't doing at that stage. So it just seemed an impossibility to continue down that path.

So I did that weekend course with you, with the help of friends who looked after my child while I did it. And, after that, I noticed that things started moving, almost immediately. Just towards the end of the school holidays I was offered a job in teaching which meant I could think of getting a place to live, because I knew where I was going to be working, and I knew I'd have an income. So then I found a flat. I just stumbled across a really nice flat in Lane Cove and it was quite handy to my job. It was half way between my son's school and my job. So that worked out very well. And then I met somebody, who actually helped me move into the flat. This all happened in the same week by the way. I think I found out about the job immediately after the weekend course and then in the following few days I met a new person in my life and then two days later he helped me move into the flat. He didn't move in with me but he helped me move and somehow that seemed to be a symbolic thing (Laughter). So within the space of a week I guess I could say that I'd achieved - these three major areas of my life had changed.

Malcolm: He became ....

Frances: Well I married the man who helped me move into the flat! (Laughter)

Malcolm: Pretending that I don't know anything about this, and don't understand what's going on, why do you relate all that to having done the visualisations? What relationship is there to that?

Frances: Well, I feel that I was very clear about what I wanted to achieve in the visualisation course before I did it. So I think that, knowing from the beginning where my problem areas were, I was determined to find a new way of looking at those problems and changing them. I was determined to change things. That was the operating factor - determined to make a change. And - I'd sat on things for long enough, especially the one of being a single parent. That was the one that I knew needed to be changed radically.
So I really concentrated a lot on that because I'd had a really negative pattern in my relationships. They always seemed to end. I never met the right person. I always got caught up with the wrong, inverted commas, the wrong person. And if I did get involved with a person that liked me then I wouldn't necessarily be able to return that feeling and so it just went nowhere. So I had a pretty negative pattern there and a big bomb blast was needed to change that - to enable me to feel that I was able to meet somebody that would be right for me.

Malcolm: And then you did another retreat later on, didn't you.

Frances: Yes that's right. That was .... I was married then four years, I think, and I was expecting my third child and .... I really came along to help my brother sort out some of his problems but at the same time I really needed to help myself face what I was told was going to be a difficult birth. And .... um .... the difficult birth did happen but my attitude toward it was so different from the previous one that I was able to recover in a quarter of the time that it took me to recover from the previous birth. So that helped greatly I think and .... just more pleasure in looking after a small child whereas the previous one .... having a difficult birth and then the physical tiredness .... It really rocked me.

So it was really a pleasant experience to have this little one. I felt very joyful about this child. I wanted a natural birth but then I realised that imposing my ideas was not the way to go. It was to accept what came my way with a better attitude and then, whatever came my way I could accept it. It actually healed my physical body. It healed more quickly and I was able to get back to doing exercises. I was even told that I was better at the exercises than the ladies who were younger than me and who had just had a natural child birth. Almost immediately .... not immediately but one or two days afterwards .... I was able to take part in the exercise class and do very well at it. So that, I think, speaks for itself.

Malcolm: There's something about all this that is a little difficult to explain in ordinary terms. Do you feel that?

Frances: Well, because I've been involved with this for so long I certainly .... well I don't take it for granted, but I certainly know that if one works in this way and uses the mind and taps these inner resources that we have, that you can change your life every day, really radically. The unfortunate part is that it is very, very easy, I've found, for the old patterns and habits to creep back in and it's a constant vigilance to stop that process. So that's my story, It's .... I know the power of it and I believe that it does work, without a doubt.
I’ve done a lot of meditation over the years and experienced different kinds of meditation and, well, visualisation is obviously the most powerful because you’re changing the way you think and feel about your everyday habits and reactions to things. That is the hardest thing to change. And you cannot do it just from the conscious mind, I have found. It’s all very well to say, “Well, I’ll do it differently next time.” But if you don’t enter into another mind state and see what pattern is operating there, then the change will not come. The same pattern will recur - no matter how much you try to tell yourself it won’t. I feel that one has to take time out and get into a deeper state, to change the thinking pattern. So that you have time to reflect and make new images and new pictures .... and then, without having to think consciously at all, it will work by itself.

And it changes the outside. That’s the remarkable part. This is the part that I’ve found very fascinating I guess. If you change something within yourself, through the various techniques that I’ve been shown, especially the one of remorse, regret, forgiveness .... that is an incredibly powerful way to change your way of behaving and, almost automatically, the follow up pattern is that things around you will change. As soon as I changed my feelings about my situation and got to see it in a new light and got to see new possibilities, then, when I went back to the real world it had changed .... while I’d been away from it. (Laughter) If you use the energy generated by the feelings of regret or forgiveness, which is quite powerful, then the outside world seems to change without you having to do any more.

Malcolm: Do you think it just seems to change or does it really change?

Frances: Well yes, true, true. No, I’ve experienced it really changing. People seem to respond in a different way as though they sense something different about you and so they almost come up to match your change. They lift their game as well. They feel released as well. So you’re affecting other people as well as yourself.

Malcolm: Some time ago there was a discussion in which somebody brought up the question of whether we thought there was anything supernatural involved in this. I wonder what you think about that.

Frances: Umm, I baulk at the term ‘supernatural’ It doesn’t really mean much to me. Because, what is natural? You know?

Malcolm: What about other people saying some of it was supernatural?
Frances: Well, I don’t really know what they’d mean by it. Maybe they’d mean that it’s something that can’t be explained or something beyond the ordinary person’s understanding or something a little bit mystical or unfathomable.

Malcolm: You think there’s any element of that?

Frances: Well it’s all of that. It’s just that being labelled ‘supernatural’ is limiting because it immediately seems to put up a block and you think you can’t understand it and therefore you can never really do it. It’s quite logical all of this. It really does work and there’s a reason why it’s working. Labelling it ‘supernatural’ is an excuse for not really wanting to understand.

Malcolm: And what about this retreat that’s just finished. What do you feel about the energies there and the direction .... ?

Frances: Well .... yes! Umm, I can see an incredible difference between my first mandala. drawing and my last one. And yet when I came I couldn’t have possibly done what I did in my last one straight away you know. I couldn’t have done that last drawing first. I definitely came here with a fixed situation and I knew it was fixed. I drew things in boxes. I drew circles that cut things off from one another. And .... I did have some positive things there, I had some stars .... but they were sort of up the top and the other ones were down the bottom, and the down the bottom stuff was dragging me down.

And now, in my last drawing, everyone was connected. There was a flowing feeling between all and there was a recognition that each person that was in my problem areas needed their own particular attention. So I drew it that way so that they were connected to me but no one else was cut off from anyone else. You see? So I got rid of all the boxes and there were lots of lovely flowing lines and colour and me and my magic robe in a special colour. It just felt so much better. And interestingly enough the problems that arose with work, mainly work and what it was doing to me at the moment .... that sort of wasn’t important because it was the relationships underlying all these other things that I did that was important. Do you understand what I mean by that? So I didn’t have to draw work or anything. I just drew people. The people that, I felt, were at the bottom of my problem.

And I knew that if I could be different in my relationships with these people then the other problems which seem to be problems can easily be rearranged to suit this family and make this work better. So .... is that clear? ( Laughter ) So all the boxes and cut off circles disappeared and there’s just lots of lovely flowing lines. I mean I don’t want it to sound as
if it were just all over the top. It was real feelings that I felt were at the base. If energy is there to generate real feelings of warmth and love .... to get their turn .... obviously I'm talking about my own family .... then all these other things that crop up .... just trying to organise times and schedules and work and things .... they have to fit the family rather than the family having to fit around it. That's what's happened for me in this last workshop, trying to make the family situation work better.

**Malcolm**: And that happened quite well in the movie visualisation?

**Frances**: *(In agreement)* Mmmm, Just at one stage though, I caught myself in the movie saying "Ohh, This can't really be you. You can't really be this joyous." and then I remembered what you'd said and I thought, "Uh .... Uh .... I'm not listening to you. Go away!" You know, this rational sort of conscious mind slipping out of the visualisation saying, "Oh well, it'll be Monday tomorrow and riding on elephants and dancing over hillsides and everyone flower children and what-not will all just dissolve away and we'll be all caught up in the drama of it all again and you just can't be this joyous." .... and I thought " Oh look. Go away! I don't want to hear that. *(Laughs)* Let me be joyous." So that was interesting because it really is so true that we have to work so hard to create these pictures and just let them be without having this commentary all the time .... restricting.

**Malcolm**: How important do you think this all is, or could be, this business of visualisation? Is it a side issue in life or .... What do you think?

**Frances**: *(Laughing)* I really think, when I do these courses, I think this is the only thing in life. If we could all spend this amount of time, at least some amount of time each week, re-evaluating and assessing what had gone that week, then we'd all be a lot happier and the world would be a better place. And, after talking to one of the ladies in the group, who works with aboriginal adults who've had dreadfully painful experiences .... I think .... if only people like that could have an opportunity .... and there must be thousands of them, you know, thousands .... and I mean everybody really, you can't leave anyone out.

Everybody, as you said, is holding in a lot of hurt, a lot of pain, a lot of anger, all those negative things. We're kind of carrying them in a sack around with us all the time and we won't let go of them. We think we have to have them and if only we could be taught how to let them go and allow some more positive, energetic, stimulating pictures and positive solutions to come, from deep within, then people would be a lot happier. The world would be a more joyous place. It's such a powerful tool. I think people totally underestimate the power of it. It's almost something that should be made compulsory in school education curriculums. *(Laughs)*
Commentary on Scene Seven

Out of all the individual interviews I conducted outside the core group I chose these two because they seemed to be standing at such opposite poles of interpretation. Both women had been involved in the meditation program for several years so both have had time to think their interpretations through.

Alison’s critical view is similar to that of many others who have tried visualisation and have come to the conclusion that ‘it doesn’t work.’ Unlike many others, however, she persisted for some time before making that decision. Alison acknowledges that she wears armour, as do we all without being aware of it. I have discovered some of my own and I have found armour plating on my own back thick enough to shame the dinosaurs. I know how unnerving it is to think of loosening the buckles and straps and letting it go. But what I once thought I needed as a protection, I now see as a confinement and having shed some of it, I find I can now breathe more freely and move more lightly than I did before.

Alison interprets visualisation as a practice far removed from real-life day-to-day mental processes and only to be used in a crisis. This reminds me of the way I tended to feel about my own first tentative experiments. I saw them as unusual actions undertaken on special occasions to remedy specific problems. Gradually I have come to see visualisation as a conscious-choice way of engaging with mind energies which I operate all the time but only semi-consciously. More and more I discover that I have allowed my mind to go about its business unmonitored, mechanically following its own stale programs which daily confirm my beliefs about what must happen and what can never happen in my life. I have come to accept that there is no honest excuse for continuing to do this. I can choose to be conscious about these things and I can choose to do them differently.

Unlike dinosaurs who were born with physical armour, our own armour is created in the mind built out of visualisation processes run amuck behind our backs. Fortunately, being creatures of intelligence, we can learn to exercise choice in these life-shaping forces. Whether we apply that choice or not is an exercise of that very same power of choice. As Richard Bach so succinctly puts it:

   Argue for your limitations, 
   and sure enough, 
   they’re yours.¹⁶⁸

Frances also has an inner sceptical voice which tells her that visualisation is very far removed from reality but her determination to be joyful takes over and she assures herself of the ongoing benefit to be had from "riding on elephants and dancing over hillsides". The two mandalas she drew and described illustrate the shift in consciousness which can arise from visualisation practice. Her first drawing seems as if it were done not only for herself but for all of us who have ever felt like Alison. The second drawing is of the dynamic harmony that I believe Alison and the rest of us are all capable of experiencing when we abandon our resistance to it.

A Fantasy on the Two Drawings of Frances

I will paint for him not only the visible universe, but all that he can conceive of nature's immensity in the womb of this abridged atom. Let him see therein an infinity of the universes... Let him lose himself in wonders as amazing in their littleness as the others in their vastness. 169

Blaise Pascal

Frances stood beside one of her two paintings which had been hung for display at opposite ends of the long gallery. She waited for a while as her guests assembled and silently viewed her work. With their eyes they explored the chaotic arrangement of discordant shapes and colours and then, as they began looking expectantly in her direction, she began to speak: "In this painting I have tried to illustrate the way you and I experience life when we have no sense of interdependence with things beyond our skin. I have thus attempted to capture the feeling of segmentation and division which we then project onto the phenomenal world and which is the antithesis of the mystic vision. You can see that I have drawn a solid border around the figure of Me and there are similar harshly defined borders surrounding the representations of You, Others, All Life, Earth and The Cosmos.

You can think of this as the way we experience ourselves and our world when we feel totally cut off from everything else. I have made the hard outlines clash and collide with each other so that there is no indication that any underlying unity can exist across the barriers. Each of the figures is in contact with the others yet at the same time is essentially isolated. The interactions are mostly in terms of conflict and at their best are merely attempts to find temporary resolutions. The painting, being a magical object, has its own

means of speaking and it can tell of these things for itself if you listen." The people listened as a voice came out of the air in front of the painting and, in haunting tones, spoke to them thus:

"Clad in my armour I feel
You and I, and all things utterly detached
As entities distinctly edged,
As Me and Other stiffly circumscribed
Each sealed within its skin encapsulated ego
User and abused, Offensive predator, defensive prey.
Yet here, beneath my armour, hides a need for something more than this.
I yearn for something more. But what that is I cannot comprehend."

Frances waited as the people stood quietly reflecting on what they had seen and heard. Then she led them to the other end of the gallery and, taking up a position beside her second painting, she spoke to them again:

"This is the mystic vision of mutual intercontainment. You can see that all of the elements shown in the other painting are again pictured here but in terms of their relationship with each other. There are no sharp boundaries and each element is embraced within larger versions of itself and within larger versions of the other elements. Each also embraces a microcosm of all the others. This is a vision of totalism. All things actually exist in such a condition of unity that the existence of all is to be found in the existence of one. Especially important is the way in which the existence of one depends on the existence of all." 170

The people were no longer listening to her voice. Each of them now gazed transfixed at the luminous images which shifted, revolved, interreflecteded and blended with each other within and without the picture frame. The images, sometimes receding to vast distances then swinging in close, seemed as though sculpted with a pulsing light against a backdrop of infinity. More extraordinary was the sense that each person had of being entirely inside the picture and dancing with a sense of wondrous freedom within those moving shapes. Simultaneously there was a feeling of having all of it held deeply in themselves so that the dancing for each one was an experience in the heart. A growing sound like that of a sustained chord played by a vast orchestra came rising from somewhere beyond the moving

forms. Above this an ethereal voice, which seemed to be one and yet many and which seemed to come from everywhere at once, began a richly melodious chanting:

"In my universal body I feel, I see, I know,  
Myself contained in you and you contained in me.  
You and I and a dance containing and contained within each other.  
You and I alive in everything.  
All things beyond our skin moving, breathing deeply within ourselves  
The eternity of you in a fleeting thought of mine.  
Infinity of all motion in a gesture."

The guests continued dancing in the magical painting for what seemed like forever and a day. Then the sound of the orchestra softened and faded and the painting gradually became no more than a beautiful arrangement of painted colours on canvas. Breathing deeply the people stopped and with flushed faces and sparkling eyes they turned to look at Frances.

Saying nothing, and with a gentle smile, the artist picked up a bag from the floor nearby and led her guests through a doorway. Down a flight of steps she went into the sunlit world outside the gallery. On the footpath at the bottom of the steps she stopped and opened her bag and as the people gathered round her she presented each one with an artist's palette, a box of paints and a set of unused paint brushes. With smiles and laughter, happy farewells and a waving of paint brushes, each went joyfully out into the shining world.
A Summation of the Inquiry

What is Really Happening? Reflections on the Research as a Process which Continues to Evolve.

The most beautiful experience we can have is of the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed.171

Albert Einstein.

"Can you say clearly and concisely what you think this research is for?" Mark had asked me during our preliminary discussion.172 This question itself could have become the basis for our investigation I suppose, but I preferred to work from a question which might arise in the inquiry group after there had been some sharing of experiences. This was forthcoming in the second meeting when, in the course of our story-telling, Carol had asked, "What is really happening?" Her question, I noticed at the time, caught the interest of everyone present. It was if each were thinking, "Yes, that's my question also." I certainly felt it was mine. I saw it as an expression of Carol's sense of being confronted with a wonderful mystery and I felt I shared that sense with her. I liked the question also because it was simple, direct yet all embracing and it implied that the research was concerned with finding out about processes rather than objects.

Carol's question was interesting in its use of the word "really", suggesting perhaps that we were looking for processes more real than those we had described, as if they were somehow "hidden" behind our experiences.173 Maybe this was something we could not even begin to do.174 Nevertheless, the question functioned very well as an expedient

172 See 'Epistemological Discussion.'
174 The Buddhist context of our activity might have us question whether our minds can understand their own processes sufficiently to say what was "really" happening. Some approaches from within Buddhism would suggest this cannot be done. For example the Lankanavatara Sutra says, "As a sword cannot cut itself, or as a finger cannot touch its own tip, Mind cannot see itself." Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro, trans., *The Lankanavatara Sutra*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1973. p.268. Carol's question would need to be answered in words. Could words fully contain what we might discover? The Lankanavatara Sutra tells us, that words "... are not the highest reality, nor is what is expressed in words the highest reality." Ibid p.77. Further challenges could be made from the position of post-positivist research. If we believe that "...we construct ourselves and our experience of ourselves." Laughlin, Charles D. Jr., McManus John, d'Aquili, Eugene G., *Brain Symbol & Experience: Toward a Neurophenomenology of Human Consciousness*. Boston
device or "skilful means", 175 providing a focus for a process of search and realisation which I, at least, found increasingly fruitful. Like a Zen koan, it did not matter whether it was, as Watts says, "a question which from the beginning meant nothing whatever." 176

The investigation produced a range of worthwhile outcomes apart from those directly concerned with answering our 'koan'. For Carol especially, the story-telling process itself appeared to have therapeutic value. About this she said, "I tend to be an emotional person but I'm emotional only on some levels. Some of my other stuff is really blocked and to begin to free up and share is good. When I had that sledgehammer one. That one was really worrying me, you know? The violence in it, the rage, the confusion and the fear was all .... ooooh! .... So to share it with other people who went, "Oh wow!" and then hearing other people sharing their own stuff made me feel less isolated within my own garbage. I felt able to come out, step out from it. I wasn't just alone in there." 177

I found that listening to and reading the stories of others helped some of us to look at our own experiences in a different light. When Alison had read stories by Frances and Patrick, after expressing profound doubt about the usefulness of visualisation practice, she had said, "... reading this, it's made me confront it all again and then you see how it works for other people and the joy you can experience through it." 178 Hearing other accounts of experiences suggested approaches we might try ourselves. Robert's story of seeing his mother as though dead inspired Julie in turn to try a similar visualisation for her mother. 179 There were cautionary lessons to be learned also, as in

177 See discussion in Scene Three.
178 From transcript of meeting held August 1992.
179 See Scenes One and Two.
the story from Linda of her two daughters which became a proverbial illustration of the importance of letting go of a visualisation.180

It appeared to me that one function of our story-telling was to engrave visualisation experiences in memory and that without giving them tangibility in this way, they tended to be as easily forgotten as are many of our dreams. Robert described how this had once happened for him in Japan with a visualisation that, he said, had been more intense than any he had experienced before but which had begun fading from his memory the following day. It had only become real for him again when he had an opportunity to discuss it with friends at a later date. Similarly, Joe told about a "powerful" experience which he said he had forgotten until reminded of it by hearing another member's story.181 So quickly could memory fade, that in a meeting held immediately after a retreat, some of the co-researchers needed to refer to notes to recall very dramatic experiences that had taken place only hours before.182 Some people were never able to recall anything of their visualisations after an extended lapse of time. One woman I spoke to one year after she had been in a Mantrāla retreat, and who had never discussed her experiences with anyone, could only remember that it had been a very pleasant weekend and that it was where she had learned to appreciate ambient music.

Our verbal revisiting of meditation experiences in our group sessions was seen by all of us as having value. I often found that talking about one of my visualisations seemed to go along with an internal recreation of the experience. For Robert it was like re-experiencing the visualisation with additional meaning. He said, "Part of the unveiling of the meditation is the retelling of it afterwards. It's as if I'm doing it again and it develops something in the telling. Talking about it is grounding it. It definitely helps with seeing new significance. I can't remember a time when it didn't." 183 Carol explained it this way, "First of all it's like an affirmation that I did it. Talking about it with other people makes it more solid within myself. Sharing it with other people allows me to feel again and helps me feel what I might be blocking off." Joe had a similar opinion, "To put the visualisation into words gives it some sort of shape. It's more tangible. After talking, I get clearer and clearer images of what actually took place." It therefore seemed that the act of telling functioned well as a hermeneutic

180 See Scene Two.
181 See Scene Two.
182 See Scene Five.
183 Unless otherwise annotated, statements of the co-researchers in this summation are from interviews conducted during September 1992.
process, developing extended meaning at rational, emotional and intuitive levels. So also did the later reviewing of transcripts made of the telling. Julie said of this, "It's not just interpreting, not just working over old ground. It's not analytical. It's as if you've never read this before. It's a fresh understanding."

While there seemed to be a consensus that story-telling helped to clarify our experiences to ourselves, there was also a feeling that the process was inadequate to convey the experiences to others. Joe said of his retelling, "I'm certainly getting across the gist of it but I'm never getting across the magnificence or the beauty of it. Sometimes it would take a hundred pages to describe one second of imagery, so it's impossible." In Julie's words: "When I describe it, I give it a form and a context that doesn't necessarily do it justice." There was a similar feeling in me. When telling my stories, I recreated the experiences internally but I sensed that no matter how expressively I spoke or how detailed I made my descriptions, the full impact of a visualisation remained privately mine

Within and around our main question of what was really happening was a ferment of many others, pointing off in many different directions and often appearing quite briefly. These added to the vitality of the investigation. As Rowan says, "To stick to one set of questions is perfectly possible, and may even be a defensible personal choice, but it cannot be convincing as a total answer to what research is all about." Of these short-lived questions many were situation specific, 'practical' questions of the 'nuts and bolts' variety. "What should I do about.... etc?" Some of these led back to our main question and some led away as a form of action research into the development of 'new' approaches to the visualisations. Occasionally we have asked practical technique questions of ourselves and found our own answers. Maxine for example, in a prophecy meditation was faced with the question of how to reach out to thousands of imagined well-wishers attempting to shake hands with her. Suddenly she found hundreds of pairs of arms sprouting from her sides, ".... me becoming Avalokiteśvara". Maxine felt this experience to be so rewarding that, after she told me about it, I suggested it to people whenever I guided the meditation subsequently.

Sometimes I had questions about the appropriateness of the terms we used in our discussions. For example, when we talked about seeing in creative meditation I often

184 Rowan John 'A Dialectical Paradigm for Research.' in Peter Reason and John Rowan, op. cit., p.105.
185 See my interactions with Andy and Robert described in Appendix A.
186 See Joe's descriptions of how he dealt with the stress of his wedding preparations. Scene One and how he dealt with difficulties of giving reverence. Scene Four.
187 Taped interview April, 1992.
wondered if we were using the correct word or were we really doing something else which only seemed like seeing? For me it was as if something was seen, yet not in the same way that my eyes would see. It was almost, as Chogyam Trungpa says, "not vision and not perception, not quite experience." 188 I felt that, in my case at least, I was talking about something out of the ordinary yet needing to use language from the ordinary to be understood. Our choice of terms to describe our experiences was therefore, I believe, an application of metaphor. By our use of familiar sensory terms when we discussed our visualisations we were facilitating our own understanding and usefully affecting each others' understanding. I thought therefore that I was using the word 'see' as a familiar frame of reference for something which lay outside the frame, applying what Heidegger would call a 'forestructure of understanding' 189 to make it intelligible. As he says, "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us." 190

Julie's description of her perceptions came closest to what I felt I experienced. She said, "It's like another dimension that goes beyond seeing. It's sensing that it's there. It's as if I see from the back of my head rather than from the front of my eyes." Robert described it like this, "It's a total body experience which I feel acutely but it's different to the way I usually experience things." Joe thought differently and said that seeing often was the correct term for him, "When it's been a wonderful visualisation, I've seen and felt it vividly, almost as if I've been watching a movie but more so, like a 3D movie. Other times I've seen nothing but felt it strongly. It was as if I had a blindfold on but was aware of what was going on around." Carol also felt that for her there was seeing but that it was secondary to feeling "For me the most important thing is the feeling. The more I feel, the more I see."

Questions of ethics arose, especially in connection with the apparent outcomes of celebrating divinity in other people. Deification of ordinary folk, as carried out in the sanctuary with the heartfelt deification of the guest, is the core feature of the practice we have been researching. It is also a unique feature, at least I have not found evidence of it being utilised elsewhere. I feel that deification in a visualisation is one of the most wholesome acts any person can undertake on behalf of another yet there were some reservations, even outright objections from people outside the core group based on the stories they heard us tell of surprising new behaviour appearing in people who had been received as guests in such visualisations. The main concern was, if we visualise other people as deities and if they subsequently appear to change in some way, is this not a

189 Heidegger, Martin, op.cit. p.192.
190 Ibid pp.191-192.
manipulative intrusion on those persons at a psychic level? Are we not attempting to exert some kind of control? What is really happening here?

Although I feel that deification visualisation allows us to be with another person in a non-physical way, I think that it is no more intrusive than the supportive, non-directive counselling described by Carol.\footnote{See Scene Two.} I think of it as something like opening up space and turning on light around another person and myself, forming a nurturing psychic environment in which I grow and in which that person may also choose to grow. It is a process which has little or no meaning if it is not coming from profound self-cleansing changes taking place within the heart of the meditator.\footnote{In the Buddhist context, self-cleansing implies becoming free of the 'three fires' of greed, hatred and delusion. A desire to control another person would arise from these three fires and so would stand in contradiction of the principles of Buddhist meditation. See Sangharakshita Bhikshu, \textit{A Survey of Buddhism.} Bangalore: The Indian Institute of World Culture. 1957. p.145.} I very much doubt that visualisation, within the range of practices that I have come to know about, can be made to operate as a way for one person to exert control over the behaviour of another. My deification of Rebecca, for example, did not function on her as a transforming spell. If it had been intended as such then it certainly failed for she continued to be a naughty girl.\footnote{See Appendix A for Rebecca's story. Attempts to influence other persons through principles of magic have been a major feature of folk religions and witchcraft throughout human history. These attempts seem to be bound up with notions of cause and effect and "...assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether..." Frazer, James G., \textit{The Golden Bough: The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings.} London: Macmillan. 1911. p.15. See also Crow, W. B. \textit{A History of Magic, Witchcraft and Occultism.} London: Abacus. 1972. Concepts of cause and effect do not fit in well with some descriptions of what occurs in meditation. "A Buddhist monk in a deep meditative state that transcends space and time can have no experience of causality. There can be no causality without space-time." Jones, Roger S. \textit{Physics for the Rest of Us: Ten Basic Ideas of Twentieth Century Physics That Everyone Should Know and How they Have Shaped Our Culture and Consciousness.} Chicago: Contemporary Books. 1992. p.82.} I know that my meditation produced changes, mostly within me, and I like to think that the subsequent change which took place in my relationship with her came from an alteration of the psychic space between us, a shift in the ecology of our interactions. Thus everything seemed to shift since, as Gregory puts it, "...each phenomenon is an organic part of the whole defined by the harmonious interrelation of all its parts"\footnote{Gregory, Peter N. 'What Happened to the Perfect Teaching? Another Look at Hua-yen Buddhist Hermeneutics.' In Lopez, Donald S. Jr. ed. \textit{Buddhist Hermeneutics.} Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. 1988. p.210.} I think therefore that the examples of changed behaviour exhibited by people consequent to them appearing in visualisations are natural and spontaneous reflexes, free expressions made within a totality of changed interrelations. They are not imposed by the visualiser on a passive non self-determining subject.
In connection with the question of relinquishing control over other people, Julie spoke of the importance to her of deifying people as they actually were, not as she wished they might be. "When I do very deep visualisations it's encompassing everything that they are. It's not just taking bits out and saying, "That's what makes them a really good person so that's the part I'm going to honour." I think that where I do see somebody in those very idealised terms, that always to me is a very strong hint that I'm trying to manipulate them. I'm trying to move them into some image of how I think they should be. I really like it when I can see people in my visualisations doing things that are quite typical of them and that in any other context might irritate the hell out of me. It's a real sort of warmth and acceptance. It's not like I see them sitting there being very good for the five minutes that they're in my sanctuary."

Carol found that her non-manipulative deification of her guests led to an identification with them which led in turn towards more of her own self-discovery. She said, "In a visualisation, when I'm with someone I'm wholly with them. I don't manipulate them. I am with them and they play around. It's all spontaneous and it happens as it should. It's an allowable space. It's opening up that space within yourself as well. It's a journey towards and getting to be with others who are me. That's what I find. As I discover that in a visualisation I can take everybody with me because (With emphasis) THEY ARE ME. These people have parts of me that I haven't discovered yet. I need to do more visualisations and tap into that, to make more of the picture. That's what I mean. It's on the edge! There's so much to discover, huge! There's something called a universal consciousness, that's what it's like I think, like a deep journey into and out of, and it's hugely wise."

The question of control appeared in our first meeting when there was discussion about whether or not visualisation meditation was a means to dominate over the subconscious mind. The question was later extended into the shaping of future events. If I imagine an event and then something like that event occurs, does this not signify control of some kind? For some of the co-inquirers there was no doubt that an inexplicable linkage could exist between a flow of activity in the heart and mind and a flowing of activity in the physical world. However many shied away from thinking that the linkage implied control and preferred to think of it as synchronistic in some way. Significantly, some of the more remarkable synchronicities were reported by people who were relatively new to visualisation practice and were innocent of strong expectations and therefore, I think, innocent of intentions to control.195 Some such

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195 See Julie's story in Scene One. See also Appendix B for stories by Linda, Sandy, Kerry, Simon and Jason.
occurrences were not even noticed until the subject was raised some time after the events. One woman said she thought that nothing coincidental had ever appeared for her out of creative visualisation but when, at my prompting, she hunted out a predictive manödala, drawn many months before, she noticed that everything she had drawn had already happened.

For some, after the initial excitement of a synchronistic event, there seemed to be an assumption, or a hope, that control of the future was actually possible through visualisation. This was followed by frustration when they found that their visualisations did not enable them to have all their wishes come true or become puppet masters with events and "play God" with the world around them. I heard of more than one person who angrily tore up a predictive manödala, "... after visualising and visualising as hard as I could and still it didn't work!" I had the impression, from the way they spoke, that some of these people had been attempting to use 'will power' to exercise control over future outcomes. 196

Only a few of the people in the inquiry seemed to find ways to continuously enjoy runs of fortuitous coincidences related to visualisations, after having become aware of their synchronistic function. Patrick was one of them. He told me, "I continually create my future. I'm always doing that. If I'm going to do a talk or a lecture or if I'm going to teach that night, I run it through in my mind clearly, the outcome, the feelings, trying to make it as real as possible and then it happens. It happens. And so I use it to improve my functioning at an everyday level." 197 Having known him for a long time, I felt sure that Patrick was not inclined to see himself as a puppet master, as a controller of fate, yet what he had described sounded a little like that. I questioned Patrick about this and he told me that he has found it necessary to deliberately eliminate such thoughts when engaging in his visualisations and when he has allowed himself to think of being a controller the outcome has not been satisfactory. 198

196 "Indeed deliberate willing could be counter-productive...This is the wrong state for such experiences, which seem to occur more frequently when one is in a receptive state, open to some form of unconscious decision making and flowing with the world rather than pitting oneself against it." Russell, Peter, The Awakening Earth: The Global Brain. London: Ark. 1985. p.195. According to Coué, who developed affirmation techniques early this century, when the will is compared with imagination, the will is found to be the weaker of the two in facilitating inner changes. This is especially so when the two are in conflict as they might be in a person prone to worry or pessimistic daydreaming. See Coué, E., Better and Better Every Day: Self-Mastery through Conscious Auto-Suggestion. London: Unwin. 1960.
197 Taped interview May, 1992.
198 Telephone conversation April, 1993.
From this I have increasingly come to think that being innocent of expectations or of intentions to control is a quality that people attempting predictive visualisation should develop and maintain. As well as this I think, a general attitude of innocence is important to give quality to the whole meditation experience. I do not mean by innocence the condition of never having done wrong. If this were so then the practice would be quite beyond me. The kind of innocence I have in mind is a fresh attitude of being open to anything, of not being caught up with guile and especially of being, at least temporarily, free from the heaviness of all that I think I know. It is like a restoration of childhood with a rediscovery of that special sense of wonder that we tend to lose as adults. I have found that when I allow myself to manifest innocence in this way and when I take a light-hearted approach to the whole process, events synchronistic with my predictive visualisations are much more likely to occur. Also I find it is best if the visualisation has the quality of a celebration, as if what I was aiming at were already achieved.\textsuperscript{199} Often at the end of the meditation the feeling is similar to that of reflecting with contentment on a past event rather than on a future one, a sense of pleasure in something worthwhile having already been experienced. What happens later sometimes seems like the universe coming to play with my visualisation theme in the same light-hearted manner. Perhaps, in this way, a playful innocence within is met by a playful innocence without. Sometimes, like Sandy and her sister in Alabama, I find the outcome of a visualisation can be something like a whimsical cosmic joke.\textsuperscript{200} A very beautiful musing on the significance of an innocent mind was shared with us by Christopher when he joined us as a guest during our meeting in Japan. A related theme, the restoration of a childlike sense of wonder was explored by the group during a later meeting at Katoomba.\textsuperscript{201}

At the other end of the spectrum from those who pinned their hopes on synchronicity and attempted to become puppet masters, were others who felt uncomfortable about their synchronistic experiences and chose to explain them away as if they hadn't really happened at all or, if they had happened, then they were nothing more than chance occurrences. Alison, for example, invoked "the long arm of coincidence" to explain her experiences. Others, like Simon, admitted to an ambivalent attitude. When he told me about unusual events at his workplace associated with his visualisations he commented: "I guess the fantasy part of me says, "All this is real." The dreamer in me says, "Yes, all this can happen." but I guess the other side of me, the sceptic in me says, "Well,


\textsuperscript{200} See Sandy's stories in Appendix B.

\textsuperscript{201} See Scene Four for Christopher's story See Scene Six for the Katoomba discussion.
where's the connection?" There is of course no answer to that question if we are confined in our thinking, as most people are, to assuming only local connections in space and time. Simon expressed an uneasy feeling, shared by several others, that the synchronicity phenomena implied dabbling with the supernatural, that there was something rather weird about it. I understand the uneasiness but I do not share it. I think that the principle of synchronicity is not necessarily bizarre or apart from the ordinary world but something that might actually be fundamental to the workings of the universe and therefore, as we are part of this universe, an essential feature of our own inner processes. Our synchronistic experiences may arise from, "...the human mind operating, for a moment, in its true order and extending throughout society and nature, moving through orders of increasing subtlety, reaching past the source of mind and matter into creativity itself." Visualisation meditation practice might therefore be one way of exploring, experiencing and benefiting from an important aspect of the way the universe actually functions. In this manner of thinking do we move towards shaping an answer to Carol's question?

Despite its particular interest to me, during the progress of the inquiry my core group of co-researchers have tended to talk less about synchronicities than I originally thought they might. Increasingly they chose to speak instead of spiritual learning arising from changes in self-perception. In our first meeting Robert had said that for him there had not been a "miraculous shift in the universe" but "a miraculous shift in my feelings." As our meetings continued, something similar became everyone's theme. Julie and Carol both spoke often about shifts in their feelings which both of them experienced as self-healing. Joe said of his practice, "It allows everything that I am to be integrated, my mind, my body, my imagination, and I discover how much I am

202 Taped interview August, 1992. See Simon's story in Appendix B.
203 Hiley says, "In general there is a reluctance to entertain the possibility of non-locality, a reluctance that stems from the pervasive feature of Western philosophic and scientific thought that implicitly identifies rationality with local connection ... From the mechanics of Newton through Maxwell to the relativity of Einstein, the notion of local connection in space and time is taken to be essential." Hiley, Basil J. 'Essay Review: Foundations of Quantum Mechanics' in Contemporary Physics. 18.4, p.411.
part of a whole universe." Robert told me, "There's a lot of unveiling going on in the sense that I'm finding out what I really am and what other people really are. The strongest thing, the most emotional part is the sense of communion with other beings. It always involves an elevation in that everyone is divine. It's the closest thing you could have to an enlightened experience without being enlightened. Everyone is transformed."

The core group members tended to mention uplift, integration, revelation and mystical communion as they looked back on their meditations. I sense that each of us from time to time, has approached a wider and deeper way of being with Everything-That-Is. The experiences may have been brief and sometimes quickly forgotten but during our "peak experiences", as Maslow would describe them, we seem to be celebrating something of a marvellous contradiction, as we find that each of us is separate and unique and at the same time is an expression of an indivisible cosmic unity. It is too as if we sometimes find that we are beings formed of light and yet have chosen to live mostly in a shadow world which seemed more real to us than the light which is our true body.

Did we move in these directions because our practice enabled us to do so or because we simply manifested what we initially thought was supposed to happen? I think it is impossible to disentangle the outcomes of our meditation experiences from the conceptual influences of the Lotus and Flower Ornament Sūtras which were discussed frequently before and during the inquiry. As Gimello asks of the Buddhist practices of ancient times: "... were they simply self-fulfilling prophecies, predictable mechanisms which induced just those experiential consequences that their own inner structures and operations prefigured, or did they somehow engender genuinely unconditioned change of the kind Buddhism finally promises?"

There have sometimes been questions from people outside or on the edge of the inquiry about whether or not the research had any significance, what Rowan describes as relevance questions ".... about how much it all matters, to the researcher or to anyone else. Who really cares? Are the findings going to be of any real use to anybody? Or are the findings isolated and separated from the real world? Could anybody ever

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act on them?" To find out something about this I asked my co-researchers how much importance they attached to the activity. Not surprisingly, those who had maintained a long standing engagement with the practice had the strongest sense of it being important. Patrick, who had followed the development of my visualisation programs from their beginning, answered by saying, "I use it constantly in every day situations to improve the quality of my life here and now as well as future projections of everything, from the work I'm going to do, to travel, to my relationships, to even the death that I want. ... To me it's the way I organise my life so, I mean, I can't give it any more importance than that. It's the way I look at the world and the way I think about everything from the little practicalities to the long-term future." Frances, who had also been involved with the programs from their inception close to ten years before, said that visualisation was "almost something that should be made compulsory in school education curriculums."

The process of throwing up new questions, exploring answers and making unexpected discoveries goes on without any end in view. An inquiry of this nature seeks ever to stretch itself beyond any boundaries I may try to draw around it. "The ongoing dialogue permits no final conclusion." says Gadamer. "It would be a poor hermeneutist who thought he could have, or had to have, the last word." In keeping with that sentiment I have left it to my co-researcher Robert to make a provisional closing statement.

Robert: I can only tell you what's at the top of my head at the moment. What I'm thinking about now is the emotional content of our relationships. I think that relationships include my relationship with myself and my relationship with inanimate objects and my relationship with non-human beings. And, if you put all of that in, then relationships adds up to the whole universe. It's not just relationships with people. With all of those things, the emotional content and the intentionality that's behind the relationship has a big impact on how you experience it.

So it seems to me, at the moment, that visualisation is a way of bridging and transforming those connections. The message for me, at the moment, is that you are connected anyway. And how you experience those connections is back to - to me. So, to me, visualisation is a way of putting a different emotional content and a different

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210 See Scene Seven.
intention into a relationship and also drawing on different resources to make that relationship than I normally would.

Malcolm: So it's mainly about relationships.

Robert: Yes. But then everything's defined in relationship. There's a Buddhist underpinning to that. Nothing exists in isolation. It's just such a trite fact but it's kind of monumental, so maybe meditation is this way of accommodating very simple facts about life which are just so startling that you can't actually put them into your head. You can't do it with reason anyway, and you can't do it with just your intuition either and you can't do it with just any one part of yourself.

That's the thinking part of what I'm getting out of it at the moment. It's a shift in feeling and then you can see the significance of that as just being huge if its part of everything. If I'm part of everything then if I do 'that' then it's changed the context for every single other thing in the universe. If I could reach a point of view through meditation where I felt that every single 'tiny' little thing was really, really as important as the whole universe. Then that for me would be the function of meditation - with the feeling that goes with that so - not an intellectual belief - but with the feeling that, you know, even every blade of grass and every thing is -

Malcolm: Do you think that's the actual function or is this just a hoped for function?

Robert: Oh, I think that's its actual function but that's also an ideal function too.

Malcolm: So this is the direction that it's heading.

Robert: Yeah, I think so. I mean .... I also think that it was the direction that it was intended for. Yeah - but also I experience it in relation to some kind of problem that I want to fix (laughter) so that's quite a different perspective. I'm not going in saying, "Well I really would like to value each thing as being important." I'm just saying, "I'm hurting and I want to fix it up."

Malcolm: So that's like two ends of the range is it?

Robert: I think so. Yeah. I feel that there's a whole range of explanations of why meditation is good but I don't know if that would be very helpful to someone in a very desperate circumstance, or me if I was in a very desperate circumstance.
Malcolm: Then maybe its function is to cover the whole range? Is that what you're saying?

Robert: Yeah, I think so. It seems that I'm just a bit reluctant now to define it in a way that objectifies it because it isn't a thing, it's a process, but it's very hard for me to stay in touch with that. But it can help take you from feeling a very powerless and incompetent person to feeling really, you know, profoundly spiritual and that can help you when you're really terrified. I'm sure it can solve the mystery of death and dying and all kinds of things.

Malcolm: So is all of this what you would say if you had to stand out in front of a group and explain to them what visualisation does?

Robert: If I was going to stand up in front of a group to tell about visualisation I think I'd put something more plausible than what I just said (laughter) because I think, if I was standing in front of a group, I'd say visualisation is good because it works. It helped me and it can help you.

Malcolm: Would you say that in front of a group of academics?

Robert: If I was in front of a group of academics I'm not sure. No I probably wouldn't. I probably wouldn't appeal to experience in the first instance I don't think.

Malcolm: If a group of academics wanted to know what visualisation was, what would you say?

Robert: If I started right now I'd probably say .... Well, I'd say it was a category term and behind that term stood a whole range of mental processes. And I'd probably try saying that these are the things that are under-acknowledged in our culture. I'd probably try and put it in East-West terms but I'd probably say, "Well look. These are mental processes that we don't value in our culture and behind this is the assumption that, if you shift your consciousness, your world will shift with that." You know, that the Buddha's Enlightenment is just a shift in consciousness. So it's placing our consciousness in its central role.

Malcolm: Then that is the function of visualisation for you and that's why it is significant?
Robert: When I'm really in touch with my feelings that's not the answer I would have given. I would probably have just cried really happy tears, I think. Now I'm imagining myself answering that when I was doing that visualisation only an hour ago That's how I would have felt. I would have felt floods of tears and I would have felt that some simple little thing like picking something up, or giving something, would have captured the whole meaning of the function and significance of meditation, like Mahā-Kāśyapa smiling at the Buddha when he gave him a flower and that really was something complete.\footnote{In the legendary history of the Zen sect of Buddhism, Mahā-Kāśyapa gained a full understanding of the Buddha's enlightenment when the Buddha held up a flower and they exchanged smiles. See Hsiang-Kuang Chou, A History of Chinese Buddhism. Allahabad: Indo-Chinese Literature Publications. 1956. p.91.}
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Appendix A

The Origin and Development of Two Visualisations Used in the Inquiry

The merits of this meditation will make them free from all hindrances and make them see the excellent forms.\textsuperscript{214}

The Threefold Lotus Sūtra

In 1978 I experienced my first journey into the inner world of visualisation meditation. It came about through imagined interactions between myself, a difficult student in a class I was teaching and the 'memory ghost' of a corporal in the Royal Australian Air Force, all of this being facilitated by a Japanese Buddhist missionary. The experiences I went through at his time had a profound effect on me and later became the basis of two guided visualisations which play a significant part in my workshops.

The principal character in the story of how all this happened is Rebecca, a little girl with dark hair, dark penetrating eyes and one of the most rebellious children I have ever taught. During 1978 her clever disruptions of the class I was teaching and the spiteful persecutions she inflicted on some of the other children, drove me almost to distraction. One of her most disturbing peculiarities was a habit she had of gazing steadily at me with sustained insolence. If I spoke to her in an attempt to correct one of her frequent acts of rebellion, she would sit motionless and fix me with an unflinching glare which I found very unnerving. Rebecca would focus her eyes on me in this way for minutes on end and even though I might not be looking in her direction she would continue staring at me in defiance until I looked her way again. As the teaching year rolled on it gradually became for me as if the class was Rebecca with appendages. She dominated every lesson and in my mind she seemed to become a gigantic force within the room.

In September of that year, a Japanese Buddhist missionary, Suzuki, came to help with our work at the Buddhist centre. He was enthusiastic about helping people find ways to benefit from Buddhist practices but many of those who came to hear him were dismayed to hear him say that the most important practice of all was repentance.

During one of our conversations Suzuki asked me if I tried to make use of Buddhist principles in teaching my class. Not knowing quite what he meant I told him that I tried

\textsuperscript{214}Katô, Bunno, Tamura, Yoshirô, and Miyasaka, Kôjirô, trans. op. cit., p.348.
to practise compassion and patience but often found this not easy to do. I described, as an example, my current difficulties with Rebecca. He was immediately interested. "Maybe she is teaching you something," he said when I had finished telling him of my daily ordeals with my difficult student.

"How do you mean?" I asked.

'Well maybe you did something like that yourself once,' he replied.215

"Oh no", I protested with a laugh, "I was never anything like Rebecca!" I assured him that as a schoolboy I had never been defiant of teachers or vicious with other children. Yet even as I was denying his suggestion, a picture was starting to form in my mind, a memory of years gone by -

In my mind I flashed back to a time when I had been in the National Service, training as an airman. During that six month period I had spent much of my time attending lectures, most of which I found extremely tiresome. I was remembering one of my lecturers, Corporal Blake, he had taken my group through a course of instruction in the workings of jet engines.

As I denied my resemblance to Rebecca at any time in my past, I was recalling my behaviour in Corporal Blake's classes. I remembered the profound contempt I had felt for him. To me he had appeared pompous and silly and very worthy of my contempt. To liven up the dull proceedings of his lecture sessions I would interject with frivolous comments intended to create merriment among my fellow trainee airmen. At the end of my time as an National Serviceman, I was dismayed to find that he had, quite justifiably, inscribed my record card with a note that I was a troublemaker.

As I was recalling all this I was realising that I must have affected Corporal Blake in very much the same way that Rebecca was currently affecting me. For the very first time I realised what a source of misery I must have been for him when I was in his lecture group.

215 "...when we discuss others, we are always talking about ourselves. Our images of "them" are images of "us." Our theories of how "they" act and what "they" are like, are, first of all, theories about ourselves: who we are, how we act, and what we are like. This self-reflective nature of our statements is something we can never avoid." Krieger, Susan, Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form. New Brunswick. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press. 1991. p.5.
I told Suzuki what was going through my mind. The sudden switch from denial to compliance with his suggestion did not appear to surprise him. It seemed to be what he expected.

"Ah yes, you must practise repentance to him," he said confidently.

Repentance! There was that word so evocative of sackcloth and ashes and self-flagellation, but I knew that Suzuki didn't mean it that way. For him repentance was a way of cleansing the painful effects of past wrongdoings. Far from being an act of humiliation it was a way of self-liberation. Without any hesitation I agreed with him that repentance was the thing to do. We didn't carry the discussion any further and he didn't elaborate on how he thought I should go about doing it. He seemed content that I had agreed to carry out his advice and I suppose he assumed that I would know what action to take. In his religious tradition it would be customary for repentance to be verbally expressed in front of a group. Maybe he thought I would do something like that when an appropriate group context was available. I felt, however, that I did not need to go public with my act of repentance. I needed to be alone. I decided that it would be something that would happen as a purely internal process.

It may have been the same day or it might have been the day following but it wasn't long before I found myself seated alone in my parked car, my head full of Corporal Blake. I conjured up an image of his face inside my mind. I saw him wearing his RAAF cap and khaki shirt with shoulder flaps and RAAF insignia. His features became quite clear in my mind and that was interesting because I had not seen him for twenty years.

I spoke to him inside my head. I told him that at long last I had suddenly realised how much my actions had contributed to his pain, to the nervous breakdown which I'd heard he'd suffered after the discharge of my National Service intake and which at the time I had thought quite amusing. I felt myself reaching out to him from somewhere in my chest, as if I could touch him with my regret and with it caress away his pain. Silently I spoke to him and told him that I was sorry, that I was profoundly sorry for my part in his misery. I told him that I sincerely wished that I had treated him with respect and friendship. I asked him to forgive me.

His features floated before my mind's eye and, as the vision continued, I acknowledged his dignity. I sat with my eyes closed regarding him with a respect which I could feel was something cleansing, something beautiful. I found myself able to send him waves of love.
When I finally opened my eyes I found myself experiencing a sense of inner peace. It was as if I had completed something which had been lying around unfinished for a very long time. I felt a gentleness and a warmth toward Corporal Blake and a feeling of ease within myself.

I felt that my meditation for the corporal had brought about a sense of release and over the next few days I found that it also made a difference to to my feelings towards Rebecca. I still saw her as a strange girl with a behaviour problem but she no longer filled the room like some dreadful carnivorous dinosaur. I felt much more able to to deal with the situation at school. I told Suzuki all about this.

"Now you must respect her as a bodhisattva who came to teach you," he said. "She is your great bodhisattva." 216

I wasn't sure at first if I could manage this new task. I had always thought of bodhisattvas as being gentle, wise and compassionate beings and Rebecca had none of these qualities. Although I had reduced her in my mind from the proportions of a dinosaur to those of an ordinary naughty girl, a further transformation into a bodhisattva was hard to envisage. Nevertheless I felt that I wanted to make the most of Suzuki's efforts to help me. Once again, however, I felt that the action would not be at all public but would be done privately within my mind.

The following morning at school before most of the children had arrived, I sat quietly alone in my classroom with closed eyes and imagined Rebecca. In my mind I saw the little dark haired girl dressed in her blue summer uniform standing on one of the desks before me. Then I began to introduce into my vision some features from Buddhist iconography.

In my imagination a white cape was hanging from her shoulders covering her to her ankles. The desk she was standing on became an ornately carved altar. Something jewel-like glittered in her hair and in her hands was a flower. In imagination I placed incense in a brazier and clouds of fragrant smoke floated up into the air around her. Shafts of light radiated out from behind her head as she stood on her altar looking very serenely ahead. I imagined myself placing flowers in front of the altar, placing my hands together and bowing to the vision with a feeling of genuine reverence. Something moved in my heart.

That day at school, was quite different from any of the preceding ones that year. I found it easy to look at Rebecca, even easy to smile at her. She in turn, was unusually placid, especially during the morning, and throughout the day I did not receive one glare.

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216 Sanskrit for 'awakening being'
From that time on until the school broke up for the end of year vacation, my relationship with Rebecca was reasonably comfortable most of the time and on some occasions actually pleasant. There was still naughtiness but the malevolence which I had previously experienced from her seemed to have disappeared. The most noticeable difference was in the way she looked at me. The stares and glares which I had endured for the greater part of the year were a thing of the past. We could exchange smiles if our eyes met, something which could not have happened before.

Suzuki went home to Japan at the end of the year. Rebecca went on to secondary classes and stayed in the school for another two years before eventually being expelled for bad behaviour.

**Celebration of the Deities in the Sanctuary**

The deification of Rebecca became a model for meditations that, at first, I did only rarely in response to problem situations. I felt for some years that it was something very special, only to be used when absolutely necessary when facing difficulties with my reactions to particular people. Eventually I came to see the practice as 'special' in a different sense. It was special because it added a deeper quality to relationships of all kinds, difficult or otherwise.

As I grew more confident in my own experiences and found more supportive imagery, I incorporated deification as a theme in guided visualisation exercises for my Buddhist classes. I found supportive imagery for the meditation when, in 1983, I took part in an Insight Seminar in which I was guided through a sanctuary visualisation. In this I entered an imaginary place of safety, furnished with objects which made possible expressions of feeling not easily experienced in the 'real' world. Although I felt that there was a somewhat Disneyland quality in some of the images offered, I recognised that a version of the sanctuary would be an ideal setting for a deity celebration similar to my experience with Rebecca. Over a period of years the visualisation which emerged became the source of significant experiences for me and for other people.

I have found that use of a generally acceptable symbolism is a very difficult issue. Symbols are so powerful yet so personal. They can evoke deep emotions, strong passions. People have fought and died over symbols though, fortunately, not yet at one of my meditation weekends. My symbols, though recognisably Buddhist, also have an origin in my own childhood daydream fantasies, conceived long before I knew anything about Buddhism, as
a more self-nurturing alternative to the drab and emotionally sterile world that I lived in at that time.

In the daydream fantasy worlds of my childhood I thrived on the imagery of legends. Magician’s wands, enchanted robes, miraculous elephants and other beasts, magic cities, thrones, auras, magical trees, appealed to me as fantasy playthings. Now, as symbols in my meditations, they become powerful tools in my alchemist’s workroom. I can use them to transmute my contempt into warm respect, my past cruelties into present compassion; my cynicism becomes reverence for ‘The Goddess in You - The God in You.’

But for others, with a different history, my symbols may jar. I am continually faced with questions of how to modify them to make them more generally acceptable or else how to offer alternatives which would have the same power. As I explore the variety of perceived meanings in symbols, the process of adaptation and modification continues. Among other things this process leads me to wonder about the existence or otherwise of archetypal images. Are there perhaps no archetypes with a message for everyone? Maybe there are but their message is confused by the labelling each one is given.

A lady who attended one workshop later wrote to me to describe how, as a lapsed and resentful Catholic, the image of a throne had implications of an oppressive hierarchy. It reminded her that once upon a time she had real-life enthroned hierarchies bearing down on her. For her a throne appeared as something like a vehicle for self-righteous cardinals riding on the lap of a triumphant Christ in judgement. She suggested that I use the expression ‘seat of honour’ as the preferred description for the symbol and said that in her meditation she had imagined a carpet of wildflowers. I mentioned this piece of imagery to people in later retreats to illustrate how flexible and individualistic symbols can and should be. Whatever the detail, whatever the form, the seat in the sanctuary is intended to represent hierarchy turned upside down. It functions as something of a spiritual left-wing revolutionary device for acknowledging dignity in the humble. Cardinals are left unseated while Mrs Mop from Minto East reveals her hitherto unrecognised glory.

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The Sanctuary - Visualisation Script

In this great forest, Circle of Branches with Jewel Flowers, was a sanctuary called Jewel Flowers Illumining Everywhere, arrayed with many huge jewels, with wreaths of crystal flowers blooming everywhere, blazing with fragrant lamps, covered by flaming clouds containing the colours of all jewels, with webs of light shining everywhere.\(^{217}\)

Flower Ornament Sūtra

Then the gods of the thirty three heavens spread for that buddha a lion throne a yojana high under a Bodhi tree so that the buddha on this throne should attain Perfect Enlightenment.\(^{218}\)

Threefold Lotus Sūtra

Having put on their robes, the girl and her companions circled the king in respect with the reflections of all the stars glittering in their robes.\(^{219}\)

Flower Ornament Sūtra

You are travelling along a path leading deep into a woodland. You hear the soft sounds of the forest all around. You can feel your body in motion. Foliage overhead and on either side passes your field of vision as you travel. As you go deeper the landscape is gradually transforming to become ever more friendly and inviting and you feel encouraged to journey onward. Somewhere ahead is your sanctuary. You can feel it calling you. As you approach it you experience a growing sense of the magical, a feeling of coming to a safe, welcoming place.

At the entrance to your sanctuary you pause and look around. All the features which make this place special to you are there as you expected them to be. There is also an entrance way for special guests, a throne and nearby is a carved chest, closed for the moment, but filled with magic gowns, all yours. All these things belong to you, for this is your personal sanctuary.

You approach the chest. Reach out and touch the lid with your finger tips and feel across the surface. Take a firm hold of the lid and lift it to reveal a brilliant heap of richly coloured robes.

\(^{219}\) Cleary, Thomas, trans., *op.cit.*, Vol.3.p.238.
each one vibrantly suffused with supernatural power. Reach in among the robes feeling the rich fabrics and slide your hands down in search of the robe of wonder. Bring the robe out of the chest and lift it over your shoulders. Allow it to hang down around you, letting go of any resistance you might have to its magical power. Turn to face the entrance way for your guest. You reach out with your mind invoking the guest’s name. Reaching across space and time your invocation is heard and responded to. A figure appears on the other side. You invite your guest into your sanctuary. Lead the guest over to the throne, gently encouraging this specially chosen person to take a seat there.

Stand before the throne. Allow the robe to suffuse you with its power. You feel an energy flowing to your heart and you are gradually filled with a pure, childlike sense of wonder as your guest sits quietly there before you. Reach forward with your hands cupped together and open them to reveal a gift which appears without any effort from you. From your heart you offer the gift which pulses with light as it floats through the air, turning in the air as it goes. It floats into the hands of your guest. Watch as the gift is received. Watch as the gift is taken to the heart and a look of peace, deep wisdom and warm compassion spreads over the face of your guest.

You allow the power of the robe to fill your whole body, mind and soul and it helps you to see and feel that the person sitting there on the throne is a being of pure spirit. The face becomes more radiant. A glow begins to spread around the head and shoulders. The radiance spreads as your guest raises a hand, palm facing you, and a beam of light springs across from the hand to touch you. You feel the light penetrate you, healing and cleansing you.

You create your own way to demonstrate your gratitude and sense of reverence, a gesture, a little ritual to express the feeling emerging in your heart. Look at the eyes of your guest. You have never before seen such wisdom, such compassion. Radiance comes from the head, the shoulders, the whole body and reaches to every corner of the sanctuary. The throne pulses with light and begins to lift slowly into the air.

The guest and the throne transform into shapes of brilliant light. The light hovers pulsing with marvellous colour. Then the centre of that shining radiance approaches through the air to hang suspended above your head. Your head feels transparent to that light. It is as if the top of your head is opening like a lotus to receive it. The radiance descends through your body to your heart - and your entire being is filled with a pure and wonderful pulsing brightness.
Descriptions of Experiences by Participants.\textsuperscript{220}

Julie's Sanctuary. 1990 Mandala Workshop.

Entering the path - it turns into a stream which I swim along - then a path which I walk along to the sanctuary which is guarded by a welcoming fire. Inside the sanctuary is a beautifully carved wooden throne and a woven chest garlanded with flowers. I open the chest and draw out a robe of deep shimmering blue which I wrap around me. My guest is Robert - I beckon him through the mist. I produce miracles - beautiful flowers, doves. Inside Robert I can see the faint outlines of something gold becoming stronger - I can see his Buddha Nature - manifested as Avalokiteśvara - the Cry Regarder. The fingers reach out and extend a golden light. Robert sits with an expression of supreme wisdom and compassion. I bow my head to the manifestation in reverence and the blue of my robe melds with the golden light in a golden blaze. The ball of light settles in my heart. I am suffused - Robert is alight - we are joined through the blaze of gold and blue.

Joe's Sanctuary. 1990 Mandala Workshop.

The Sanctuary was hazy at first. I found myself touching the chest before Malcolm guided me to do it. I had absolute fascination and joy upon feeling and discovering the magical cloth. When I opened the chest I had two visions. One of the lid almost flimsily falling back and one of the lid opening smoothly as if on hydraulics. I stayed with the second. As I began to go through the material I found two sections. One side was full of Persian rug style material. The other had single colour pieces, white, purple, red.

I was undecided which to pick so I put my hand deep into the chest. It was so full I couldn’t pull one out. So I lifted the top Persian rug style cloth out and underneath I found a rich sky blue cloth with green leaves imprinted. It was made of satin silk. Upon putting it on I felt my body smothered in warmth and comfort. Although the coat was ‘compassion’ I also felt my physical body heat up, not so that I came out of the meditation but so that at times there was a dual sense of reality.

Alison's Sanctuary 1990 Mandala Workshop.

I’ve never contemplated the concept of a sanctuary before but my mind really took to it. The meditation was really vivid. My mind didn’t wander at all. I was in the visualisation

\textsuperscript{220} With the exception of Anne-Marie's letter, these are extracts from notes made during workshops, immediately after the meditation experience.
one hundred percent. I was really happy with the sanctuary I had created and I could not just see it, but feel, hear and smell it. I was so excited about having my brother, Simon, visit it that I could hardly wait to invite him in. For the first time I could really visualise light and the glow which emanated from Simon. We felt happier with each other than we had in a long time—more accepting than we were before. I didn’t want the meditation to end!

**Linda’s Sanctuary, 1990. Mandala Workshop.**

It was a very deep meditation before I started to cough but I did make a sanctuary that I felt much more comfortable with. It was made in the South African scrub, thick bush we played with and made houses out of when we were children. They made wonderful shelters against the rain but the sun shines down into them. In my sanctuary I had a tall cedar wood throne embedded with rubies and emeralds— it had red satin armrests and a red satin footrest. There was a stone Buddha about two feet tall by the carved camphorwood chest and inside the chest were velvet robes in strong evening colours of purple, green, red, turquoise and blue.

Lora came to my sanctuary door which is made out of interwoven thatch from the scrub— and I parted the thatch and invited her in— (another coughing fit ). I tried to see her looking radiant and it seemed to happen once or twice but I did feel plenty of love and compassion. I learnt I have a long way to go toward accepting and loving people as they are— those I revere I revere too easily, others I am far too critical of, as I am of myself.

**Judy’s Sanctuary, 1990. Mandala Workshop.**

Walk through chosen beautiful scenery (forest?) feeling the body as it moves— smells, sounds etc. To the sanctuary where there is a throne/ altar (with magical things) and a chest. Throne and chest are crystal. The robe is of reverence but I didn’t feel any ‘seriousness’ just joy and happiness and a sense of fun because I was bringing Shadi into the sanctuary ( having clearly imagined her and called her name three times.)

She is all Botticelli with India/Tibetan decoration. There are jewel-like flames on throne edges. This is her ‘spirit’. Falling rose petals. An aura of her angel, blue plus gold. Her energy creamy peach and pink. Sense of fun and happiness. Gradually all, her plus sanctuary, turns into light which is then drawn into my heart.

*I will* use this for everyone - idea being to find their spirit and beauty which I feel are synonymous. To find the colour and feel of their true energy/ aura. Release enough to feel their their true glowing sparkling light or essence.
I will modify these meditations so that they feel right for me to work with. Find along with the aura/colour/light qualities, the mythological cultural symbols and touches that are the spirit of the person. i.e. that with Shadi, she is the Aphrodite femaleness touched with an eastern edge.

Kerry’s Sanctuary. 1990. Mandala Workshop.

Oh wow! It is so unusual for me to feel and also see a feeling. I can still feel it soaking into my body and mind. I feel as though a bridge has been crossed to an unreachable place, an unreachable space, a place it wasn’t even possible for me to see, just a vague knowing that I didn’t have it. The images, colours were very clear so was the sense of sound and touch and facial expressions. Objects and spaces were particularly clear and real.

Bernadette’s Sanctuary. 1990. Mandala Workshop.

As I turn to the door, which is filled with a light mist, I call Jessica and her name echoes through the mist and she appears, a little surprised, but pleased to see me. I welcome her and I lead her to the throne and she sits upon it. It is made up of all sorts of hues of sapphire but the back support is cushioned with plush velvet and she relaxes into it and smiles and she looks around at the walls of clear pink crystal which form high above us. She admires the birds of paradise and golden and silver pheasants and reaches over to stroke the tiger, the puma and the panther who have come to meet us from the grove around the sanctuary. I smile at her and I open my hands and a glowing candle appears with a flame which glows brightly but gently and has a warmth which warms the heart.

She held out her hands and the candle went to her and she opened her mouth wide and a smile broke out across her face and joy beamed down at me as the throne appeared to rise a little and caused me to fall to my knees and look up as a light appeared around her and the throne. And I looked at her with awe and wonder and she held out her hand and passed the light to me and it went deep into my heart and my heart melted and tears of joy and gratitude fell from my eyes and Jessica thanked me for letting her share some time with me in my sanctuary and told me how beautiful it was and we hugged and loved each other and saw each other’s inner beauty and wisdom.
Extract from a Letter Written by Anne Marie in 1991 from Thailand Describing a Meditation She Experienced after Being Tricked by a Jewel Store Owner.

In the sanctuary I put on a cloak of strength and powerful protection and magic before inviting her inside. Although I felt OK about her being there, I knew I would feel better if she had her own sanctuary so, after clothing her in a dark green cloak that made her possible powers ineffective, I led her out of my sanctuary through a very dark forest and to another sanctuary some distance away - leading her by a long gold thread. This sanctuary had all she wanted in it. Upon her arrival I took off her cloak, put it in the open chest and a golden light appeared, taking the chest away. It disappeared.

After paying reverence to this woman, thanking her for all that she had taught me, in such a short period of time, I turned to leave. I informed her that I was going and that she was staying in this sanctuary. I told her that I would never see her again and that her universe would never come in contact with my universe again or anyone associated with my universe. She was happy with that.

I closed the door and walked a few steps away before paying my last thanks to her for her teachings. The whole sanctuary glowed gold and was then ejected into outer space. I knew the universe was to look after her and that our paths would never cross again. Once this sanctuary was ejected the whole of the once very dark forest lit up and illuminated - a very beautiful forest with golden rays of light - enabling me to happily and easily return to my own sanctuary if I wished.

On my return I stopped and felt truly at peace and a very strong feeling of being AT ONE with the forest, my sanctuary and the universe - all breathing together - everyone being contained within the other.'
Apparitions of Elephants

A Meditation for the Healing of Guilt

In each of us is a pitiless judge who makes us feel guilty even if we are not conscious of having done anything wrong. Although we do not know what it is, it is as though it were known somewhere. 221

C.G. Jung

My experience with the memory of Corporal Blake was something that I continued to treasure as years went by. From time to time I would recount the incident to meetings at the Buddhist Centre hoping that by hearing the story some of those listening might want to explore a similar approach to their own relationship difficulties. People seemed to enjoy listening to the story but apart from Robert nobody seemed inclined to apply it. Only he appeared to respond to the implication that there was value in attempting to heal a buried guilt.

Perhaps the other people who listened to me picked up my feeling that the incident had been a once only special occurrence that needed the presence of a charismatic person such as Suzuki to make it happen. Perhaps they also sensed that, although hinting at its value, I had tried very little further repentance myself. Maybe it was simply that they didn't find the idea of healing guilt palatable.

Although wishing that I could find a method of successfully leading a group through a Corporal Blake type vision which would effectively purge guilt, I could think of no way to even begin to do it. I remember my wife, Nara, once making a brave attempt to lecture a small gathering on the value of repentance. She told them of her several attempts to pass driving tests and how those experiences had brought home to her the fact that driving was no easy task. She explained how coming to that realisation had led her to repent of being a back seat driver. Her audience, which included a fair number of elderly ladies, listened with worried smiles. When she finished her talk the ladies were all eager to express their concern over her admission that she had experienced feelings of guilt. 'There's NO NEED to feel guilty,' they said reassuringly. 'You SHOULDN'T feel guilty.' Listening to their kindly efforts to counsel Nara, it seemed to me here was a culture in which discussions about guilt and repentance were just as unacceptable as the exposure of bare limbs had been in Queen Victoria's day.

It was twelve years after my interaction with Suzuki that my explorations into ways and means of processing guilt took off once more. I had become concerned about the plight of a young Vietnamese friend, Andy, who was disposed to falling in love with girls who later abandoned him or who let him down in some other way. Andy suffered chronically from depression and self-blame and I had become particularly concerned about him at a time when he had made two attempts at suicide following a broken love affair.

I gave Andy my attention and interest whenever he wanted to offload his misery onto me. Sometimes I would attempt some form of counselling and twice I invited him to meditation retreats during which he devoted his time to seeing visions of his lost love and falling into deeper despair. Before his second retreat he asked me if I would help him by allowing him to perform a ceremony of confession after everyone had gone home but then when the retreat came to an end he apparently changed his mind, departing along with everyone else. I was left wondering if there was anything I could do to help him apart from offering him a sympathetic ear from time to time. Along with this there was a feeling that a way to cleanse guilt had been opened for me by Corporal Blake and that somehow it could be something that would be useful for Andy. Was there a way that an imaginary experience in meditation could address Andy’s guilt I wondered? There wasn’t the glimmer of an answer to this question.

On the Tuesday evening following the retreat Robert appeared to join me in co-leading a beginners’ meditation group. My head was still full of Andy’s problem and so, as we were going about setting up the room for the class, I wasn’t paying much attention as he began telling me in a very enthusiastic manner about a spontaneous and extremely vivid visualisation he had experienced a few days before.

He told me that he had been chanting through the closing section of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, when he had suddenly found that, without trying to make it happen, every image mentioned in the passage he was chanting was appearing for him in great detail. The main image was that of a fantastic elephant, extravagantly decorated and projecting great beams of light as it walked in the air carrying Bodhisattva Universal Virtue. He was quite exhilarated about the experience and wanted to know what I felt about using the image as a theme for a guided imagery exercise.

I felt a little irritated. I was trying to focus on what we would soon be doing with a room full of new people and behind all that I was mulling over Andy’s predicament and what I could do about it. Now here was Robert wanting me to think about going on imaginary rides on imaginary elephants. As much as anything, I think I was irritated at his enthusiasm
for what seemed to me to be a rather self-indulgent piece of imagery. What significance could there be in imagining yourself parading about on an elephant?

But as Robert continued describing his experience it began to dawn on me that he was talking about a vision from what is sometimes called The Repentance Sūtra, the main theme of which is that acts of repentance can lead to meaningful visions, self-cleansing and insight. I recalled that the image of the elephant signified great strength and the ability to travel unimpeded anywhere its rider wished. I began to get an inkling that an act of repentance could be supported by the strength of an elephant. Power and dignity came into this somewhere. I became more open to what he was saying.

Robert was very animated as he told me how, as he had chanted through the words of the sūtra, the imagery had all taken off by itself. His words flowed rapidly. "Much more vivid than usual" .... "Like watching a very vivid movie" .... "Like reading a film script and at the same time watching the film" .... "Every image was brilliantly clear" .... "Each sentence brought something fresh" .... "Every detail in succession" .... "Even the ducks in the pools on the elephant's tusks!" .... "While riding on the elephant the sensation of swaying was extremely real" .... "Would this be the seed of a meditation?" .... "How do you go about creating a new meditation anyway?"

Over the next few days the images Robert had conjured up kept tumbling around in my head. I felt strongly that he had provided me with the key to a repentance visualisation that would work. At first it seemed that the elephant might act as a support while the deed of repentance was done. Then it seemed that riding on the elephant might be the consequence of having performed the repentance, a sort of reward.

I began to see that riding the elephant would be a kind of triumphant climax to a dramatic action and, as I was thinking these thoughts, it was also becoming clear to me that a guided fantasy with that degree of challenge would need to be carried along by some very appropriate supportive music. I needed to find the right music but I couldn't remember ever hearing anything that would be suitable.

And then something very curious happened. Andy rang me to express his thanks for the weekend and to explain that he had not stayed on after the workshop to do his confession ceremony because he thought that I was too busy with other people. He then asked me about a cassette that he had lent me a long time ago and asked if I could return it the next time I saw him. I didn't recall the title Andy mentioned although I remembered that a year or two previously he had lent me a tape of ambient relaxation music. I hunted through my collection to find the borrowed cassette but there was nothing by that name. Possibly it had
found its way into a bag of 'junk' tapes stored in the cellar. I rummaged in the cellar, found the bag, opened it up and began sorting through. Andy’s tape wasn't there either but I came across something else which caught my attention, a cassette with the title 'Oxygene 1,2,3,' in my own handwriting. It was a tape that I had dubbed from an LP some years before. Obviously, at the time I had made it, the music had appealed to me for some reason. Feeling curious about this piece of forgotten music I temporarily gave up my search. I loaded it into a player and turned it on.

I was profoundly astonished. Coming from the cassette player was the most appropriate music for an elephant ride I could possibly imagine! The lumbering yet frisky beat of the synthesised tune generated the image beautifully. My imagination went into gear and without any words of any sortra before me, I was aboard a happily jogging elephant. I was on a great beast which frolicked and played as it ambled strongly along. While I listened, I could feel the comforting, gently bouncing motion of the animal’s progress. As the music developed and began to fill out with added harmonies and more complex rhythms, the celebratory feeling of a grand progress grew stronger. I imagined that we were being joined by a joyful escort. People were dancing alongside us, people were flying. Robert’s vision was coming vividly to life for me through the music that Andy had unwittingly sent me to find.

The following Wednesday evening, much to Robert’s surprise, I made my first attempt at presenting his vision to a group as a guided fantasy. I prepared the people by telling them that the exercise was for the purpose of cleaning up the past. I made no mention of repentance but talked about the healing of regret. As I guided the visualisation I performed my own act of apology towards a memory of my grandmother whose feelings I had clumsily hurt when I was a small boy. The exercise was well received and several people in the group said they would like more opportunities to try it. In due course, at weekend workshops, I began presenting the guided repentance and elephant ride that had been partly inspired by Andy’s unresolved feelings of guilt.

Curiously, although the exercise had come into existence around my concern for his problem, Andy never took part in it. He didn’t make contact with me for some while after the introduction of the elephant meditation and when I eventually spoke to him and raised the subject of self-cleansing some months later, he told me that he was feeling more settled and the need was no longer there.

The Elephant Riders

Extracts from Workshop Journals

I will mount the six tusked white elephant and, together with countless bodhisattvas surrounding me, appear before those people in the form all the living delight to see, and preach to them, revealing, instructing, benefiting, and rejoicing them.

Threefold Lotus Sutra

At that time the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, with sovereign supernatural power, majesty and fame, accompanied by great bodhisattvas, unlimited, infinite, incalculable, came from the eastern quarter; the countries through which he passed were shaken, jeweled lotus flowers rained down, and countless hundred thousand myriad kotis of kinds of music were performed.

Threefold Lotus Sutra

Kay's Meditation for Her Father

As I touched him I said I felt how his hurt had been and that I wanted my regret to heal his hurt if that was possible. I let it all channel through my body, through my heart outward to him. And my love, which seemed to be the cause of his hurt - my feelings and love which once would have fractured him - caused him to break - threatened to annihilate him - now, because he was a statue and frozen anyway, could flow. And flow them under my hand - Some warmth, a slight movement. His face softened - he began to breathe and come to life - he looked at me and acknowledged that he had shut down and shut me down and out to survive - not to break apart.

Now he was feeling - I was crying, and it was ON. He winked. Slowly I took him over to the statue of the elephant. We hopped on board, me on the back - supporting, embracing him. The future was way off - through the trees and over the dunes. I thought 'Let's go' I flowed my love out to the future and the elephant began to feel alive. Then it began to walk, slowly at first and then picked up speed - it was carrying us into the future.

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223 Descriptions written during the workshop within minutes of the conclusion of each meditation.
We began to laugh. Friends began appearing - celebrating, leaping for joy - the rift was healed and they knew it. All who had known my suffering and the rejection by and of my father were whooping with joy - acrobatics, fire eating - Dennis, Max, Dave. Sophie somersaulted onto Dad’s lap - kissed him and vaulted off again - a great healing and liberating. We marched, danced on. The joy rising. The heart swelling - pulsing with love. It was O.K. now and would be from now on. My father could feel without breaking apart - but with suffering - vitalising - invigorating and that part of me that was closed down and now allowed to feel - could feel as much as it liked - it wasn’t going to hurt him or anyone else any more.

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Linda’s Meditation for Her Father

So in the vision I saw him clearly again wearing his old green cardigan and looking so bloody sorry for himself and I found somewhere regret and suddenly I could feel some compassion for him and suddenly I could imagine how I would be toward him were he alive today. I could hold his hand without feeling sick, put my arm around his bent shoulder and feel very compassionate, even tender.

I had difficulty seating my father on the elephant as he would have been too dignified or nervous to sit astride an elephant so I put us both in a two seater armchair and I put one arm around him and held his hand. He was delighted to see all our old friends and to meet my new ones and to discover the work I am doing. He was very happy and astonished. I wept a lot in this meditation. I feel it has been very necessary and important.

Maxine’s Meditation for Her Mother

I went back to the past and saw her as a rose quartz statue with an expression of anger, hatred and betrayal, very fixed, immovable fury and rage. I felt a deep understanding of her feeling, as I have also felt that way. I felt regret for hurting her even though at the time I felt I was doing the right thing and regret and love welled up inside my heart and glowed through my body and down through my arms and hands to her chest.

I have never loved her because I never felt love from her and I have suffered from this lack of her love and she has missed so much from not receiving my love and my deep capacity for warmth. I felt compassion towards her for her loss and a deep regret sent with loving. I
issued the wish to heal her by my regret and she warmed to my touch and allowed herself
to be lifted onto the white elephant which had been walking beside me.

The elephant started to dance, crossing his legs one over the other and his bells tinkled and
he kicked up his heels and took off into the air and soared over the countryside towards the
horizon surrounded by all the people I had ever known, spinning in the air and doing
cartwheels amidst many coloured silk kites with long flowing tails, birds of paradise,
brilliant butterflies and exotic flowers blooming all over the sky. We then came down to
earth and my mother was ecstatic and glowing and happy and we held hands, she on an
elephant of her own now and our two elephants held trunks as we danced into the present
and the streets were lined with crowds cheering like the crowds in celebration at the end of
the war.
Appendix B

The Synchronistic Adventures
of Jason Mackenzie

A rational mind, based on the impressions that it receives from its limited perspective, forms structures which thereafter determine what it further will and will not accept freely. From that point on, regardless of how the real world actually operates, this rational mind, following its self-imposed rules, tries to superimpose on the real world its own version of what must be. This continues until at long last a beginner’s mind cries out, ‘This is not right. What ‘must be’ is not happening.’

Gary Zukav

When I experience coincidences and propitious happenings associated with creative meditation, it’s often not easy to discuss such events with other people. So much of it must sound like nonsense that I can hardly blame a person for taking two steps backwards when I try. The subjective nature of experiences like these usually makes it impossible to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that they have not been partly or even entirely fictionalised.

However, if it should happen that a meditation experience and an alignment of seemingly related events were to unfold over a period of time, and if more than one person were aware of the development of the process, there might be a shade more credibility to my reporting of the phenomena. Also the observations of a second or third person provide me with another hermeneutic. They help me to see the happenings in another perspective, as they seem to have occurred through the eyes of another.

Fortunately, I was in a position to do something like this during a sequence of events that began to unfold early in March 1990. The episode centred on a creative meditation experience of a man with a criminal background who was on the verge of committing a theft and who, after altering his intentions under unusual circumstances, was involved in

a complex sequence of unlikely coincidences. A meditation experience of my own was part of his coincidence pattern.

I had known the central character in the story, Jason, for about eight years, during which time I had seen much of his disaster-prone behaviour. At the age of fourteen he had called on me to ask questions about Buddhism, having discovered that there were connections between Buddhist philosophy and the martial arts which he was then practising. His interest in Buddhism was short-lived but from time to time he continued visiting me to tell me of his latest misadventures or misdoings. Sometimes he helped me with odd gardening jobs and at these times he amazed me with his strength. Once he pulled a gatepost set in concrete out of the ground with his bare hands, scorning to use the digging tools I had provided. He used his strength in less constructive ways however, often getting into drunken brawls. He told me how for a period he was an active member of a ‘poofer bashing’ gang which haunted a local cemetery, ambushing suspicious looking men and beating them insensible. By the time of his adventure with meditation and coincidence, Jason, had become well known to the police, having already served a six month term in prison as well as accumulating a history of court appearances for traffic offences. He was on bail waiting to receive a sentence for two break-and-enter offences one of which had been carried out in a house belonging to the mother of a former girl friend. As these offences were quite serious, he was likely to be put away for some considerable time.

During the preceding year I had invited Jason to take part in one of my creative meditation workshops. He did so, admitting to me later that he had been tripping on LSD just prior to attending. During that workshop Jason was guided through a sanctuary meditation in which the person to be enthroned and deified was to be someone who, in his mind, was not deserving of respect. This meditation experience is where the episode begins.

At the end of the session in which the sanctuary exercise had been presented, Jason told me that the guest he had invited into his sanctuary had been himself. I thought at the time that this was simply an example of his contrariness as I had previously explained that the exercise was intended to alter perceptions of other people and so the guest should have been someone else. I didn’t mention these thoughts to him and I listened as he told me how he had straight away thought of himself when he had heard me mention contempt as he had never considered himself to be a person deserving of respect. I noticed that he seemed to have been deeply touched by his experience.
It was subsequent to this meditation experience that Jason appeared to enjoy a break from his normal pattern of disasters and, possibly for the first time in his life, he actually found himself enjoying a run of good fortune. He had contacted me a few times after that workshop to tell me of his plans to make changes within himself, as well as within the eye of the Law, by taking part in drug rehabilitation programmes. He had entered two residential schemes although, as he had discontinued both, it seemed to me that he was not doing a great deal to help himself or to provide a judge with evidence that he had much potential for reform.

On a Wednesday in February, 1990, not long after Jason’s most recent phone call, he and I experienced a remarkable coincidental linking of meditation experiences along with some other curious incidents. On the morning of that day, I had presented a scripture class to a group of Primary School Buddhist children and on an impulse I had decided to revise a story I had already told them some weeks previously, the tale of Angulimala the Robber. 227 This legendary character was a man of extraordinary strength who had started life as a student of religion but had then taken up a career of violent crime and, after creating enormous havoc, was reformed by a dramatic meeting with Buddha. Without being conscious of the fact, the story I had selected was, in part, an allegory for aspects of Jason’s own life. Curiously, on that very day of the story-telling, Jason proceeded to develop the allegory further still.

The Buddhist children relished the story of the crazed bandit who hid in the forest and robbed and murdered the travellers who passed his way. Angulimala cut off the fingers of his victims to create a gruesome necklace which he wore to add to his ghastly appearance. The children liked to hear how single-handed he would overcome and slay travelling parties of dozens of armed men and even depopulate entire villages. A part of the story, particularly intriguing to the children, was when the robber was on the point of murdering his own mother after she had entered the forest in disguise hoping to bring him to his senses. Buddha, who had perceived the situation in his meditation, intervened and prevented this from happening. This incident brought about Angulimala’s conversion to a religious life. Much later, the king, who had come with an army and the intention of arresting and executing the ex-robber, changed his mind and pardoned Angulimala, having seen him in person.

Having briefly revised the Angulimala story with the children, I had some of them act it out as an unscripted play. To close the lesson I had prepared a puzzle in the form of a maze representing the many paths into the forest where Angulimala carried out his

macabre deeds. I gave the children the task of discovering the route which would take Buddha to the fiendish robber and colouring the connecting pathway. I later had a feeling that the puzzle, which had taken half the previous day to prepare, had been something of a mandala and that somehow it was related to Jason's experience a few hours later that same day.

During the evening of that Wednesday I conducted a meditation class at the North Sydney Buddhist Centre, part of a regular series. Jason had once or twice attended these meetings but he was not present at this one. Unknown to me he was at home preparing to get himself into further bother with the law.

On this particular evening I chose to guide my friends through the sanctuary meditation, the same one that Jason had made use of to see himself glorified and offer himself reverence. I usually keep this meditation for presentation in residential workshops where it can be adequately prepared for so it was an unusual choice for an evening class.

When guiding people through visualisations, I do them myself, giving a sketchy commentary on my own experience as a suggestion to the other people as to what they might be seeing and experiencing. On this particular occasion it came to my mind, just prior to beginning the exercise, that in my meditation I would have Jason as my guest. It was the first time I had ever done such a thing for him.

In my visualisation I prepared for Jason's arrival in my sanctuary by opening the ancient wooden chest to find a robe that would give me the ability to experience reverence and wonder. I knew I would need a mantle infused with very strong magic because, although I have a liking for Jason and a respect for the courage he has often displayed, his behaviour has often inspired feelings in me which are quite different from reverence and wonder. In consideration of this I took my time in selecting and experiencing the robe and in the process of doing so, I remember giving very detailed guidance to the group. I suggested a lingering exploration of the texture of the fabric, the colour, the design and the sensation of weight. As each of us placed a robe on our shoulders, I suggested the feeling of being deeply infused with its great power.

I sometimes find, when leading a meditation, that my concern for the experience of the other people taking part, causes me to lose the precise identity of my own guest. In this way it is often the case that, though I continue to be aware that I have a visitor in my meditation, it is no longer clearly apparent who it is. At other times this does not happen and I am vividly aware of the guest almost as if he or she were actually present. This was
one of those times when my guest was clearly identifiable throughout the entire meditation.

When I was ready to have Jason enter my sanctuary, he came through the doorway of mist looking tall, strong and very confident. I remember noticing that he was nearly dressed in a beige jumper and beige slacks. As he sat on the throne and I began creating ceremonies which would permit the emergence of his inner light, I felt that I had chosen my robe well. Jason began to appear to me as a very dignified and benign figure. His face expressed strength, calm and wisdom and as I continued to demonstrate my reverence in a variety of imaginative rituals he gradually became a radiant source of brilliant pure light. The vision was very real and very stirring and the reverence I found myself expressing was not at all pretended. As the meditation came to its conclusion, I felt that my uncertainties and apprehensions about Jason had evaporated and with this there was an inner feeling of excitement.

At the end of the meeting I talked about my experience with two members of the group who know Jason quite well and who share some of my concern for him. Robert, my principal co-researcher and Steven, have both known Jason as long as I have. A few days later I asked them both to write descriptions of their experience of that evening. Steven wrote the following:

On the evening of 28th February, 1990 I attended the meeting held at the North Sydney Centre. During the meeting, Malcolm conducted a visualisation meditation which he named the 'Sanctuary Meditation'. He began by guiding us through a body awareness exercise where we were able to release the tension in our body and to achieve a state of total relaxation. This was followed by a visualisation exercise. In the visualisation exercise we were provided with images which led to the creation of the Sanctuary. This Sanctuary, Malcolm emphasised, is the place where we can be in touch with our inner insights and wisdom and from which magical and serendipitous moments are created. It is also a place where we can provide support and healing for those in need, which was the intention of this particular exercise.

We were asked, before we began the meditation, to think of a person who we would like to bring into our Sanctuary. The person Malcolm brought into his Sanctuary, he told me, was (Jason). At the end of the meeting, Malcolm told me what he had done for (Jason) during his meditation which was to purify him and release him from his sufferings....
This is an extract from Robert’s description;

... Malcolm gave a very detailed guidance to the Sanctuary. I remember the altar and myself performing miracles for my guests who were seated on thrones. It was perhaps the most vivid and intense experience I have ever had of this meditation - which I’ve done before many times. It came as a complete surprise to me. It had a very esoteric and magical feel - I felt that I was doing an invocation of power and transformation before the altar. I could see myself performing mudras and causing physical objects to transform.

Afterwards, as I closed the meeting, I told the group that there must have been something really amazing happening during the meditation for Malcolm because I could really feel an extraordinary energy and the whole meditation had really been incredible for me.

Later, over a cup of tea I approached Malcolm and I told him he must have taken a pretty amazing guest into his Sanctuary or it must have been very vivid for him because I just felt carried along by the whole experience and especially by the seeming spontaneity of his guidance. He told me that he actually had picked a difficult person for him - (Jason). He told me it was hard because he had always seen (Jason) as something of an incorrigible troublemaker. However he had really been able to feel a sense of reverence for (Jason) and the whole meditation had ‘taken off’ for him - so he simply described, as usual, what he was doing himself.

I was not at all surprised that Malcolm had found (Jason) a difficult candidate for sympathy. I had known (Jason) from his occasional visits to Karuna at North Sydney and Katoomba. I knew (Jason) had awesome reserves of psychic and emotional energy, and physical, but as long as I had known him, since 14, they had almost exclusively been directed to destructive outcomes. I liked (Jason) very much but I knew he had a real talent for creating mischief and getting himself into unwinnable situations.

Before I left, Malcolm said he expected to receive a phone call from (Jason). He was sure the meditation had connected with him somehow.

The next day, Thursday, I rang Malcolm to congratulate him on the meeting and to see how he was. I said I thought he must be tired. Malcolm said no - actually he was really excited. (Jason) had visited him in person and had undergone a remarkable transformation...
When Robert rang me I was feeling elated about Jason's arrival during the morning. His visits are not frequent and so I felt that, after he had been so vividly present in my sanctuary meditation, his sudden appearance the following morning was quite exceptional. I was relaxing in a bathtub at the time and so my wife, Nara, was the first to speak to him when he came to the back door. Nara had overheard some of my conversation with Robert and Steven the previous night but there had not been time enough for me to discuss the evening with her in any detail. Later in the day I asked her to write a description of what took place when Jason appeared at the back door. This is her description:

... Someone was loudly knocking on our back door. When I opened it I found (Jason) standing there with a big smile. He seemed to be very excited about something. I asked him, "Have you got something new?" He said that he had a very strange experience the previous night. He had a chance to get $20,000. It was so easy to do that and he really wanted it but somehow a very strong feeling he had never had before came up within him.

He realised that all his life he had to have things he wanted and he always had them by all means even if he had to steal them. He also realised that this disease caused him a lot of trouble all the time. He strongly felt he's got to stop this habit. Strangely enough he no longer desired to possess $20,000 worth of stuff. He felt calm and strong. I asked him, "Do you remember around what time was it?"

He said, "It was about nine or nine thirty, before ten o'clock...."

When I emerged from the bathroom I was able to talk at some length with Jason. I was intrigued to hear him describe how he had been in an agony of temptation and how he had been praying on the previous night around the time I experienced him stepping into my meditation. While he was with me I made no reference to what I had done myself the night before and we concerned ourselves with talking about his current situation. For the very first time since I have known him I found myself giving him some very firm advice. I suggested that he return to the drug rehabilitation centre and ask for guidance and he left me with the assurance that he would immediately do that.

Later in the day Jason phoned me to say that he had carried out my suggestion and that an understanding had been reached between him and the program organisers. He also told me that on his way home he had applied for a job in a gymnasium and he had been accepted. I decided at that point that it would not hurt Jason to know what had
happened for me in connection with these circumstances so I told him what I had experienced during the meditation class the previous evening. He seemed interested and pleased to hear about that and readily agreed to my request that he write out his perceptions of what had happened the night before. Two or three days later he delivered what he had written. This is an extract:

... This incident which occurred was one where I fought with my conscience, a force which had been obsolete for many years, and having recently left a drug rehab' my only tools are faith and prayer and meditation.

Between 7 p.m. and 11 p.m. I was in a spiritual bind as to whether I should steal something or not, but as I had never thought twice about it before I was confused to feel the way I did.

I decided to sit on my own and meditate on it though was very hard and disturbing as I brought more feeling to the surface. I asked God to remove the temptation that was by this time putting me in a real spin and for the first time I thought of ringing Malcolm and asking for his guidance. After a while I felt much more at ease and I decided not to take anything. For the first time I could truly see my past ways and actions and I knew what I must do. There are many unseen forces in the world and having placed my faith in these it is starting to work

The next day I felt great. I got the first job I went for and spoke to Malcolm to tell him of my experience and the incredible circumstances leading up to it, whereupon he relayed how he had visualised me in a position of triumph through his meditation. I believe this was very important and helped me through the many unseen hands of God’s energy......

Jason’s dramatic change of heart took place in the house of his new girlfriend, Karen. It was several weeks before I met her for the first time and heard her version of what happened during that evening. She was quite willing to talk about her perception of Jason’s experience and in due course wrote me a letter about the event. This is a part of that letter:

Jason said that he had caught up with a few people today that wanted him to play bodyguard tonight and he would get paid $500 for literally doing nothing. Could he borrow my car? I replied that I would drive him anywhere he wanted to go, if that’s what he really wanted, but both myself and my car were going to have
nothing to do with such easy money making and I stressed, quite sarcastically, that I was sure he'd have enough cash afterwards to catch a cab home. This didn't seem to perturb him. He asked if I had any gloves - I gave him a pair. He asked if I had a balaclava - I gave him a skiing balaclava. I asked why he needed them and his reply was that he had to scale the outside of a building to get to a window where he could play security to a deal that would be taking place. I found this quite humorous, I think I laughed. Bodyguard had become Batman and 2+2 wasn't equalling 4.

Maybe I felt that this incident would provide solutions to a lot of decisions I had to make in relation to my involvement with Jason. I gave him everything he wanted and refrained from a lot of questions and accusations I would have liked to have made. Maybe I seemed too willing however, because Jason then asked what I thought about the situation- was it right or wrong? I told him my view was irrelevant as he was the one who had to live with himself - not I, and only he knew the answer. I also added that he thought he was strong, but really he was as weak as piss. This seemed to shock him, maybe it was the harshness of the statement, or maybe no one had ever told him he was weak before. He pondered on this for a while.

As the night went on, I could sense his indecision and unease growing. I made no further reference to the incident. As far as I was concerned it was his decision. His bag was packed ready. I didn't think he'd back down. He wanted a 'Triumph' motorbike and it was so easy.

It was about 10 p.m., he left the room and for about 1 - 1 1/2 hours he meditated.

When he came back into the room he told me the truth. He was going to steal approximately $20 000 worth of antique jewellery from a shop in Cremorne - a shop he'd pointed out to me a few days before as having having some great stuff and how easy it would be to break in - 'a perfect location.'

He seemed relieved, pleased and I think quite proud of himself. He said that he had to fight with his conscience and boy was it hard. It was harder than anything he'd ever experienced or imagined. But he'd won! 228

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228 Correspondence April, 1990.
Just as in the legend of the strong and violent Angulimala, told to the children on the morning of that day, the powerful and violence-prone Jason had undergone a religiously inspired change of heart when he was on the point of committing an unforgivable crime. If Jason had robbed the Cremorne store while awaiting trial for another robbery no leniency could have been applied when he was caught.

I thought this coincidence quite remarkable but there was more yet. The Angulima myth came even closer to being an allegory for Jason's story when he appeared in court to face his break and enter charge. Jason's solicitor, Les, had expressed the view that supportive testimonials from me and from Madelaine, a barrister and the person whose house Jason had burgled, plus the efforts being made by Jason, would increase the chance that the sentence to be handed down might be in the form of a good behaviour bond with an obligation to perform community service and make payment of compensation. There was cause for hope as the day of sentencing approached.

However, on the day of the court appearance I arrived at the King St courthouse and was dismayed when Jason's solicitor appeared with a worried look and some very disturbing information. The judge who would be passing sentence on Jason that day was, he said, one of the most severe that he could meet. It was normal practice for him to put people with offences of the kind Jason had committed into prison. The outlook for Jason seemed suddenly very bleak. It appeared that his run of good fortune had come to an end.

And then, after a long wait during which several cases were heard, there was a very unexpected turn of events. Les hurried out of the courtroom looking very relieved and told us the happy news that the judge had suddenly decided to refer our case elsewhere. Jason was to appear during that afternoon at Darlinghurst in front of another judge who, according to Les, was a man who didn't like sending people to prison.

Les thought this turn of events to be highly unusual but so also did Madelaine who was also present. Later, Madelaine wrote the following:

(Jason) had attended Court on two full days previously awaiting to be sentenced. The sentencing judges on those days were regarded as being 'middle of the road' in terms of sentencing.

However the judge listed ..... was regarded as a 'hard sentencer' and (Jason's) legal representative and I fully expected that he would be sentenced to a gaol term.
The judge had a long list of matters before him – (Jason’s) matter was No. 9
(although the matters were taken out of order). At approximately midday the
judge interrupted the matter currently before him, called for Jason’s legal
representative to come into court and indicated that (Jason’s) matter would be
transferred to another Court and judge.

This judge was sympathetic to (Jason’s) background and decided to give him an
opportunity to ‘get on with his life’. He placed him on a two year good behaviour
bond, with $1000.00 security to be paid by (Jason) and ordered him to pay only
one-sixth of the amount of compensation sought by the insurers of property that
had not been recovered.

This sentence was remarkably light in the circumstances. A lenient sentence
would have imposed a longer bond period, some form of weekend detention or
community service and ordered restitution in full of the amount of compensation
sought by the insurers.

The transfer of the matter in this manner was extraordinary in that it was
transferred from perhaps the harshest sentencer on the bench to the judge who
would be regarded as the easiest. In addition proceedings were interrupted to
effect this transfer – it was not done in between cases, but at a time when the
judge’s attention was focussed on the matter before him.\footnote{229}

In handing down Jason’s sentence, the second judge acknowledged the serious nature of
the offence but then went on to mention mitigating circumstances. He concluded his
sentence by saying:

All the indications it seems are that provided there is continuing assistance of a
supervised nature, the prisoner will be rehabilitated and will become a useful
member of society.

..... In each case I defer passing sentence conditioned on your entering into a
recognizance yourself in the sum of $1000, to be of good behaviour for a period
of two years from today and to appear to receive sentence if called on.\footnote{230}

\footnote{229} Correspondence April, 1990.
\footnote{230} From records of the court proceedings.
Apart from all of this being improbable, the myth parallel in this episode was also strange for, just as the legendary Angulimala had faced the prospect of harsh treatment at the hands of the king and then been set free, so had Jason faced the likelihood of severe punishment but then found himself released almost with a blessing.

To continue the parallel with the legend, Jason would subsequently have taken up a religious way of life but how far can coincidence be stretched? And yet such a development did take place. After the Easter holiday weekend he spoke to me by phone and told me about an incident which took place while he and his girl friend were visiting the Royal Easter Show. He said that, as he was walking through the crowd in the Hordern Pavilion, he had become filled with thoughts of God and, looking around at the surrounding people, it seemed to him that none of them would be thinking anything of God at all. Overcome by strong feelings about this he had a sudden impulse to pray. There and then he had gone to his knees but had been unable to think of what he should pray about. Two attendants had come over to him and helped him back to his feet saying, "You all right mate?" When Jason replied that he was quite all right and had been praying they said, "Well you can't do that here, you'll upset the other people."

Jason told me that he had been pondering a great deal about all his recent experiences and a thought had emerged. He said, "It's like everyone is in everyone else's mind. Do you know what I mean?" I found Jason's comment intriguing. I am fairly sure that he had never heard about the Avatāraṇaka vision of the interpenetrating universe. At least I had never discussed that aspect of Buddhism with him. I am also fairly certain that he had never read Schopenhauer who, I think, described Jason's situation very well when he wrote:

... each is the hero of his own drama while simultaneously figuring in a drama foreign to him - this is something that surpasses our powers of comprehension, and can only be conceived as possible by virtue of the most wonderful pre-established harmony .... Thus everything is interrelated and mutually attuned.231

None of this fits the way a rational mind says the world has to work. Why should Jason, for the first time ever, think of phoning me for advice then pray and meditate on the same evening that I, for the first time ever, thought of him in one of my meditations? And why should I tell a story on the same day which had such a parallel with what

happened later for him? Also why would the "harshest" judge on the bench suddenly interrupt his case to send Jason off to the easiest judge? Although there is no way to show that anything more than randomness was actually at work in all these incidents, to me it seems that there is a recognisable consistency of theme. Throughout the chain of unlikely coincidences there is an unlikely continuity of meaning.

From the time that Jason the burglar first creatively visualised himself as a dignified and enlightened being to the time that he walked from the court-house as a free man with honest intentions, the meaning of his adventuring was consistently related to the realisation of his original vision. Significantly, the coincidence chain, while it was in operation, carried a theme which was in marked contrast to that of self-injury, failure and defeat which has characterised the greater part of Jason's life. I think this series of events points to something of a synchronistic principle in operation. At the same time I have to admit that nothing about this is explained by Jason's experience and nothing whatever has been proved.

Further Stories of Visualisation and Coincidence

Linda's Story.

I chose my elder daughter Lana as my companion in the flying visualisation on the Wednesday before last. There had been some tension between us for months. When we flew together, we were separate yet very close. Our movements were fluid and free. I enjoyed watching her twist and soar and spiral. I felt weightless and supple, capable of soaring through space to infinity. When we reached the summit of the sky, our large membrane wings, tipped with silver, intersected and there was a brief and satisfying flash and crackling of lightning.

Three days later, on the Sunday afternoon, Lana asked me to go swimming with her. I had not swum for two years and had been missing the exercise. Lana took me to a crystal-clear heated pool and we swam for a long time, laughing, talking, playing games. Lana twirled more than I did, while I swam breaststroke steadily, feeling wonderfully strong and free. We were very separate and very together. It took me two days to realise that my visualisation had materialised and that many of our tensions had been washed away." 232

232 Correspondence 1990. See Linda's further experiences with her daughters in Scene Two.
Sandy's Story

The one experience I would describe as being extraordinary occurred when my sister was invited to visit America to attend the Mardi Gras in New Orleans, by Yon, an American male friend whom she met about 18 years ago, when he was touring Britain and Europe playing in a rock band. Wil was reluctant to go as it had been so long since she had last seen Yon and although she enjoyed his letters she felt it might be disappointing if they both met up again, and having been through a pretty traumatic divorce, her confidence was at an all time low. So when I next telephoned the U.K. I persuaded her to take the trip stating that as she had a return ticket, if she felt uncomfortable or disappointed meeting up with Yon after such a long period, she could always fly back to Scotland where she was then living, and to cut a long story short, she bought her ticket and off she went at the beginning of February.

I decided, having been learning meditation techniques at the Karuna Foundation for a few months, that I would try a visualization and sanctuary meditation in which I imagined my sister being confident and happy on a lotus flower. I practised these meditations on a number of occasions both before she embarked on the trip and while she was there.

The outcome was greater than I could have envisaged as my sister married Yon on the 4th March this year, 3 weeks after her arrival in America, much to her surprise and every one else's. It was totally unexpected. She had packed nothing for a wedding and had to buy her gown in the States, in fact the whole wedding was organised within 3 days. The crux of this experience and what really makes me believe that meditation had something to do with the outcome is that when I asked my sister where Yon proposed she told me, "In the Lotus Gardens in Montgomery, Alabama!" 233

Another Story from Sandy

(Laughing) You won't believe this, I know, but it's true. It really is true. It was two weeks after Wil had her miscarriage. I did this healing meditation for her and I imagined her all surrounded by white light. There was all this whiteness all round her. And, (laughing) this is true! I rang her later to see how she was getting on and Yon

233 Correspondence 1990. Sandy has told me of other similar experiences in which curious coincidental events take place for people who appear in her meditations. She has expressed puzzlement at why this should happen for these other people while she herself never experiences anything of a like nature. Her attempts at visualising situations in her own personal future have not been fruitful.
answered the phone. He said she wasn't there because she couldn't get home from work. They'd just had this huge snowstorm and she was stuck at the hospital, snowed in. It was the first time it had snowed in Montgomery for a hundred years. You know, you probably saw it on television. It was all over the States. Well, anyway, she was stuck at the hospital for fifteen hours and later when she rang me she said, "Don't you ever do that again." So we had a good laugh about it and I suppose that probably did her a lot of good.\textsuperscript{234}

\textbf{Simon's Story:}

I drew a prophesy mandala of my new employers being very open about where we're heading and what we're doing and all that sort of stuff. I mean it was only stick figure drawings but .... lots of arrows, communication arrows saying "Communication here is the key thing." And .... guess what! About a week later we received notification that the Asia-Pacific managing director was flying down from Singapore to talk to us all and tell us what's happening. And that's never happened within the company before. It's certainly never happened in my working life where somebody of that importance actually goes to each branch, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and actually sits people in a big hall and explains exactly what the future is going to hold for that company. And that floored me.\textsuperscript{235}

\textbf{Kerry's Story}

....This story begins about fifteen years ago .... Some friends of mine that I became involved with .... and things got nasty and sour at the end of it and I reacted with anger at something that was done .... and what I did, because my temper tends to be very cold instead of hot .... and I'm very calculating to what my actions are instead of exploding all over the place. I'll do one or two things that'll be very effective in their effects and with that it was very effective and much more so than I thought at the time. There was a lot of trouble in the family after that and they all stopped talking. The eldest boy was the one that popped into mind with the meditation. When you said about the meditation and for some reason.... I hadn't seen or heard of him for fifteen years .... Never even thought of them again .... And I did the meditation on that because he came to mind then .... and I realised then that it was my fault .... the whole thing .... to start with. In the meditation it had an amazing way of mirroring what's happened so that I end up looking at what I

\textsuperscript{234} Interview May, 1993.
\textsuperscript{235} Interview August, 1992.
did to cause them to do what they did .... to come back at me. (Kerry described more about how she had heard that following her action, ill feelings had developed within the family. She told how they had ceased communicating with each other and how, in due course, the son had experienced a nervous breakdown.)

I saw that during the meditation and accepted it and the meditation flowed on and, it was the elephant one. No it wasn’t. Yes it was. It was the elephant one .... and it all sort of snuggled together and .... It all healed in the meditation. (Kerry then told how a few weeks after her meditation experience she had travelled to the town where the family lived to visit a relative. She told how shortly after her arrival the former friend had unexpectedly walked into her relative’s house and had greeted her as if nothing had ever been wrong between them.) And we got talking and he told me that just a couple of weeks before, which is around the time when I did the meditation, things had started getting better for them and his father had come to see him and after that they’d all started talking again.

And we spent some time that weekend together. I spent some time that night with him. Actually we bought a bottle of wine and sat and drank it and the kids all played together, my children and his. I say children .... they’re fifteen years old, between fifteen and thirteen. And we talked and he told me about all the problems he’d had over the years and I could see how all these things related to this particular instance where they all dug their heels in. They all reacted the wrong way .... and because they did then .... then the next time they reacted it was the wrong way and so forth. And I didn’t .... When I went to see him, I didn’t have to say, "Gee Graham I’m sorry I realise I’ve done this." Nothing like that was mentioned at all. That was done in the meditation. By the time I got to talking to him, all those feelings and those angers and all those barriers had just dissolved. They didn’t have to be rehashed again. We didn’t have to remind each other of what we had done.

(Interjection from me, ‘Wonderful!’) -

It is wonderful. It really is. And I keep finding that in these meditations. They’re just magic. (Interruption of noise from people passing by) .... and stood back and watched the lights and shapes and colours that I see in these .... that the subconscious mind .... All our minds are linked. And my intention to do this .... my intention is a feeling instead of words .... and that’s what was getting through to that person. He knew what I was thinking and feeling without the words. His mind was connected to my mind and .... to me, that’s how the miracle happened. 236

THE MANḍALA
DANCERS

A Collaborative Inquiry
into the Experiences
of Participants
in
a Program of
Creative Meditation

An Investigation into a Means of Celebrating the Wonderful in Ordinary People

Malcolm Pearce
With Members and Friends of the Karuna Foundation

Research Thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of M. Sc. Hons. (Social Ecology)

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PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
ABSTRACT

This is the result of an inquiry into the experiences of a group of people engaged in a Buddhist inspired creative meditation program, the main practice of which is the recognition and honouring of the spiritual dimensions, the divinity of self and others.

The study employed a heuristic process of examining "inner world" experiences. It applied hermeneutics to this examination by a process of interpretation and reinterpretation through shared description within a group of co-inquirers. The inquiry was collaborative in the sense that its findings were not those of one person alone but were a compilation of the results of interactions within the group.

The inquiry was based on the hypothesis that creative meditation can facilitate changes in a person's perception of self and the external world. The principal aim was to explore into that possibility and investigate the group members' thoughts and feelings as to the main function, significance and eventual outcome of their practice. One succinct expression of this aim was made by a co-researcher who asked of her experiences, "What is really happening?"

The investigation seemed to show that for the core group participants there were changes in self-understanding involving more self-acceptance. Changes in attitudes to relationships of various kinds also took place and these also seemed to involve the development of a greater degree of acceptance. With some participants the association of the practice with favourable co-incidence was an interesting but inexplicable feature. For some there was an identification of mind sets which seemed to have a bearing on the quality of meditation experience and its outcomes.

The title of this study refers to the manner in which the meditations were often generated. A mandala, a symbolic picture, was designed by each participant and the features of this were imagined to move, sometimes dancing, through the meditations which followed. The second sub-title refers to an integral feature of the practice which was an attempt to arouse a sense of the wonderful as a quality of the people who were imagined to appear in the meditations.
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To Nara, my wife, and to my two children, Mark and Karina, I offer profound thanks for their patience and their supportive and loving presence while I was occupied with this investigation.
Dedicated to my wife, Nara.
Our normal waking consciousness ... is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence: but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are all there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question. \(^1\)

William James

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