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Prophetic teaching: A struggle to create spiritual community in the classroom

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PROPHETIC TEACHING: A STRUGGLE TO CREATE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

by

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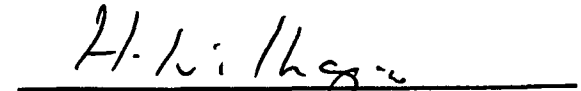

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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LEVINE, JERRY A., Ph.D. Prophetic Teaching: A Struggle to Create Spiritual Community in the Classroom. (1993) Directed by Dr. R. Fritz Mengert. 164 pp.

This dissertation puts forth the argument that prophetic teaching makes possible the formation of a spiritual community of learners thus enhancing their knowing and being in the world. It begins with the premise that the constructed world of our present society and its schools mirror one another and are dominated by pervasive principles of competition and self-aggrandizement. Those principles require people to live lives disconnected from one another and from their own deepest sensibilities. This results in an increasing degree of unnecessary suffering for many and spiritual alienation for most all.

As with the biblical prophets, the writing starts with the announcement that much is not right in the world and in our schools, in what we come to know and how we come to be. It then fashions another vision, another pedagogy, another way for teachers to be with their students which changes how people are and what they come to know. The writing makes use of the controlling biblical metaphors of Exodus, wandering in the desert, the search for the promised land, and Genesis, so as to accentuate individual and communal issues of freedom, responsibility, and the struggle against inner and outer oppression.

Narrative accounts and interpretive inquiries are used to demonstrate the problems of teaching both in the prevalent fashion as well as in the vision put forth. The narratives and the author's discussion speak to the personal struggle and ongoing necessity to confront the inherent weaknesses of human beings, the wrestling with issues of fear, uncertainty, authority, boundaries, and hospitality. In spiritual language it is the problem of having humility and maintaining faith. The author concludes that making community in the classroom is essential and possible. It is also clear that making community is a never-ending struggle that must be confronted each time that we teach.

CHAPTER I

A TIME FOR EXODUS: WHAT IS AND INTIMATIONS OF WHAT MIGHT BE

> Wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land, and the way to the land is through the wilderness. There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching. (Walzer, 1985, p. 149)

When I examine the ground in which our culture's educational efforts exist, I see a society full of misdirections, a falsified rhetoric of equality of opportunity and basic rights, a society full of oppressive and alienating features. Concurrently, I see the educational system's parallel and sustaining adoption and frequent reproduction of those same errors, abortive practices, and meaningless speech.

My analysis shows a degenerating, debilitating picture of the socioeconomic, ethical and moral structures and institutions of our society. Analysis shows that by and large the larger society and its educational system mirror each other. The economics of our current recession mirror too an equally severe recession in moral conscience, in compassion, and in the mechanisms necessary for our country and its educational system to move itself beyond the status quo of its survival-of-the-fittest mentality. We do indeed live much of our lives in a metaphorical Egypt.

It is obvious that something is wrong, terribly and fundamentally wrong. There are too many signs, clear indicators that as a country we are in great systemic trouble. Despite our compulsive and driven efforts to hide from that fact through our perpetual affair with getting more, being more, and doing more, our denial is worn thin. The unending troubling news is frequently turned into a blaming of the victims for the ills which are systemically visited upon them. Victims in our country are those without adequate education, shelter, food, and health care. However, on another level, victims in our country are those, with or without material goods, who are shaped into alienated, calloused beings: alienated from themselves, and incrusted with indifference to the crying needs of others. Those victims do not truly know what it is that they do, nor perhaps what it is that they are intended to do. Saint John's challenging voice cries out against those that turn away from those who are desperate need:

> If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4:19-21)

Hate is strong language, assuredly so, but it is justified when the manner in which our country conducts itself is so harmful -- John might say, 'so hateful' -- to so many. The "Us" in Pogo's famous statement -- "We have met

the enemy and he is us" -- amounts to our overall institutional structure, supported, promulgated, and infused by "Us" through nearly every type and size of organizational life in our country. From our families to our governments, we have inherited and continue a capitalistic response, mode of production, ethic of relationship, and accounting of progress as our ruling and guiding principle.

Families, schools, churches, government, business -- all adhere by and large to this same model. The capitalistic view and our ubiquitous practice of its principles makes inevitable the economic, political and social crises of our present time. In living those principles, a spiritual suicide is taught, advertised and almost required if one is to remain "sane" among the insanity of our world. In a highly commodified and competitive existence, giving freely of oneself without thought of aggrandizement, practicing a cooperative loving ethic, valuing caring for others over getting for oneself, is outside the normal limits of daily living.

Specifics

We have an outrageous, continuous, and recently accelerated shift occurring in income and resource distribution in our country. Since 1980 the top 1% of the country's population (according to income) "received 60% of the after-tax gain . . . while those in the middle received

only 4% . . . and those at the bottom 40% had actual declines in income" ("Good Time for the Rich," 1992). While the richest in our society build enclaves to live in, with walls surrounding and insulating them from the grit of life, while they and their governmental representatives construct tax codes to protect their amassed assets, our inner cities become isolated territories of terror and disregard. The health and well-being of a major segment of our country's population are abandoned, while others live in wealth and largesse.

> The United States has more poverty and is less able to cope with it than any of the major industrialized democracies of the Western world . . . Compared with Canada and six Western European nations, . . . poverty in the United States is more widespread and more severe; poor families here stay poor longer, and U.S. government assistance is less able to lift families with children out of poverty. ("U.S. Has Worst Poverty," 1991)

In order to live spiritually untroubled at the middle and upper levels of our hierarchical and morally bankrupt society, it is required that we bury our compassion, sensitivity, and moral outrage, and with those sensitivities disposed of, a true awareness of self, an awareness of our own pains of separation, and therefore, our care for the pain of others is also disposed of. In accepting that detachment, we fit into the commercialized structure which is determined to lift up some while leaving the vast rest of the world underneath as supporting superstructure -- bent and broken by

needs not met and hopes no longer possible. In accepting those conditions, we make the "spiritual suicide," which, according to Heschel (1965), "is within everybody's reach" (p.38). The supposed hopeful, and for many, mythical rhetoric, however, says that all in our land have the opportunity to gain, to make something of themselves. But the facts tell a much different story.

In our world it is fact that almost 15,000,000 children under the age of five die each year from nutrition related illnesses (Sivard, 1987). In our country almost 40,000 children die before they reach their first birthday. It is fact that our country ranks 144th among the industrialized nations of the world in infant immunization, and 19th in infant mortality rate. The list goes on and on: child abuse, sexual crimes, teenage pregnancies, number of persons incarcerated, violent crimes; the "land of the free" leads the world in these systemic results of our moral malignancy.

> Every 26 seconds an American child is abused or neglected (675,000 a year).
> Every 36 minutes an American child is killed or injured by guns (14,600 a year).
> Every 53 minutes an American child dies because of poverty (10,000 a year).
> Every day, 100,000 American children are homeless.
> Every day 105 American babies die before their first birthday.
> Every day 6 American teenagers commit suicide.
>
> In the 1980s 2.1 million children fell into poverty while the number of American billionaires quintupled . . . In 1960 corporate chief executive officers earned 41 times what factory workers made. By 1988 they earned

93 times factory workers' salaries. (Hughs, 1990/1992, pp. 400-401,410).

In 1991, Michael Jordan earned $36,000,000 from salary and product endorsements ($10,000 each day), Bill Cosby earned around $50,000,000, and in 1992 David Bowie, a baseball player, signed a contract guaranteeing him $40,000,000 in salary for five years of play! What is it that someone could do to be worth so much money? And more to the point, what sort of system would make that private and unnecessary wealth possible while simultaneously making impossible adequate public health care, housing, nutrition and education for 36,000,000 of its people?

What sort of system allows 3,000,000 people to be homeless while others have several homes? What sort of system has the very best medical care that money can buy for those of its people who personally have money to buy it, and likewise has no money to provide health insurance for 37,000,000 of its other people? What sort of system takes money away for feeding its poor children, allows one of every four of its children to live in poverty while developing and supporting plans to feed and house the wealthy at the president's inaugural for a cost of $23,000 per person for several days? The question here is what do our schools do with those facts and the current history of the land of opportunity? In what schools are those facts given to our children among all the other facts of our country's history?

God calls for justice in the world, and having been made in God's image, knowing good and evil, we have a fixed responsibility to work toward establishing a more just world. "Jewish tradition," writes Soelle (1984), "reveals to the human family that we are created for freedom and that freedom is our historical project" (p. 9). In a commodified world where practically all efforts become connected to their exchange value of what one can obtain in return for whatever one might do or not do, where relatedness is devalued and people are objectified and treated as exchangeable and marketable resources, in the hegemony of such a world it is often terribly difficult to discern a loving course and know what freedom and liberation might look like. It is a confusion into which we are born because the culture is hard at work separating us from the knowing of our own experiences, convincing and teaching us other ways of existing. In the presence of all this, schools are among the chief teachers of that alienated uncertainty and that confusion about what love might be. "Truth," wrote Palmer (1983), autobiographically, "was reduced to whatever would give me an "A" (p.3), and Heschel (1965) said:

> This seems to be the malady of man: His normal consciousness is a state of oblivion, a state of suspended sensitivity. As a result we see only camouflage and concealment. We do not understand what we do; we do not see what we face. (p. 75)

What we do not understand, what we do not see, is that freedom in our culture has become freedom from constraints, freedom from interference and ultimately freedom from a responsibility to others, from doing something about the pain of others not having. Freedom becomes the absence of guilt so that we may continue doing whatever it is we might do with little moral disturbance. The price of that freedom is our own callousness and subsequent emptiness. The manifestation of that emptiness becomes our culture's encouragement of an endless search to acquire and to control. Efficiency and effectiveness towards having not only needs but unending wants met replace care and concern. Consumption overcomes compassion. Having becomes a cheap but very costly substitute for loving and being with. Having is the major addiction of our culture, and like all addictions, it can never be satisfied because the sickness is spiritual, while the remedy we apply is material. Schools in our culture might help remind us of a prophetic voice of long ago which said;

> The Lord shall enter into judgment
> with the elders and princes of His people:
> It is you who have devoured the vineyard;
> The spoil of the poor is in your homes.
> What do you mean by crushing My people,
> By grinding the face of the poor? (Isaiah 3:14-15)

Schools could remind us of such voices; teachers could be such voices but most often they are not. Curriculum could

focus on the specifics of denied opportunity, and separated relationships, but it does not. Such voices and such facts are extinguished and buried, for otherwise the system could not continue as it is.

Schools and the Culture

The systemic malady in our country and its resultant effects strangle the noble possibility of education. For that national malady to continue there must be a necessary educational underpinning -- an almost universally effective and pervasive socialization. Schools are a major contributor and demander of that socialization. What exists is an unholy dialectic, a circular and mostly uninterrupted mutually reinforcing alliance between our schools and our culture. It is certain that the structure and workings of our schools must support and feed the larger organs and institutions of our society for that society to continue to exist in the form that it does. Likewise, our schools could not exist in the form that they do without the support and agreement of the greater society. Prophetic teaching is an attempt to announce and to interrupt that circular process.

Because of the strong hegemonic for passive or aggressive, disengaged, dis-passioned and alienated being, it is a struggle to be a prophetic teacher in our country. The socially given environment and the almost thoroughly conditioned personalities of our students and ourselves make

the need for Exodus often difficult to discern. In the land of the blind, not seeing is the norm. In the cave all believe the shadows to be reality. In the classrooms of today strong, passionate feelings of moral outrage against injustice (when they do occur) are seen as hysterical, irrational, and idealistic. Ideals of compassion and justice are ridiculed as impractical, utopian, and especially, socialistic, and those who live in desperate need of having basic requirements met are often viewed as meriting their needy conditions.

In our culture there is no mention or official endorsement of spirituality or reconciliation as goals and objectives or as step three in the "six-point lesson plan." There is instead great pressure to fit, to go along with the transmission of the accepted way of being a teacher, the official curriculum, and the taken-for-granted way of schooling. By and large, teaching is not much valued as a profession despite the rhetoric of most all national and state leaders to the contrary. In particular, our public school conditions of too many students and too little time, of too much control and a detached or nonrelativized curriculum verify the real place of education in the hierarchy of national, state, and local priorities.

There are certainly some exceptions to the horrendous conditions of public education. Those exceptions are out in the suburban enclaves. Jonathan Kozol (1991), in his book

Savage Inequalities, described for us places like New Trier High School, outside of Chicago, and the New Jersey schools of Millburn, Cherry Hill and Princeton. These schools stand in sharp savage contrast, to the inner-city schools.

> In suburban Millburn, where the per-pupil spending rate is some $1,500 more than East Orange . . . 14 different AP courses are available . . . the athletic program offers fencing, golf, ice hockey, and lacrosse; and music instruction means ten music teachers and a music supervisor for six schools, music rooms in every elementary school, a music suite in the high school . . . In mostly upper-middle class Montclair (there are) two fields , four gyms, a dance room a wrestling room, a weight room with a universal gym, tennis courts, a track, an indoor area for fencing (and) 13 full-time physical education teachers for its 1900 students . . . (At) New Trier . . . one wing of the school, a physical education center . . . includes three separate gyms, . . . a fencing room, a wrestling room, and studios for dance instruction. In all the school has seven gyms as well as a full size Olympic pool.
>
> It is impossible to read this without thinking of a school like Goudy, where there are no science labs, no music or art classes and no playground - and where the two bathrooms, lacking toilet paper, fill the room with their stench. At Irving High School where gym students have no showers, the gym is used by up to seven classes at a time. To shoot one basketball . . . a student waits for 20 minutes. There are no working lockers . . . 11 classes in one school don't even have the luxury of classrooms . . . in Jersey City only 30 of 680 students in one school can participate in instrumental music program. . . . The entire budget for art education comes to $2.62 per child for one year, less than the price of a pad of drawing paper at a K Mart store. (Kozol, 1991, pp. 63-64, 157-159)

That our culture would construct and maintain the funding mechanisms which allow this sort of inequality to continue and to grow is stark and convincing testimony to the power of our schools and our culture to isolate and control

us, and to strip away our compassion. The abandonment of these schools mirrors the abandonment of people. It is a disturbing reminder of what can come of the capitalistic ethic: an ethic based on competition, greed, consumption, bottom line mentality, cost effectiveness, and survival of the fittest. The obscene, future killing disparity is a clear indictment of our denial and numbness, or our rationalized, intellectualized, and calloused departure from the justice which God asks us to bring into the world. It is indeed our "grinding the face of the poor" (Isaiah 3:15). Heschel (1965) has written:

> The degree to which one is sensitive to other people's suffering, to other men's humanity is the index of one's own humanity. The opposite of humanity is brutality, the failure to acknowledge the humanity of one's fellow man, the failure to be sensitive to his situation. (p. 46)

What our culture demands and what our schools teach is denial of our inner sensitive self. They teach us to fight competitively for self-enhancement. Our denial makes compassion practically impossible on the one hand, and the competitive fight for self-enhancement makes conflict, greed and insensitivity inevitable on the other. Intentionally or unintentionally, our schools desensitize us, keeping us from the passion needed to rage against the conditions which hurt and doom so many. Without our passion, we can have no compassion.

Students for the most part come to us having already been quickly and repetitively conditioned to passivity and hyper-obedience, (McCarthy, 1979/1992) to silence in the face of injustice, to not seeing nor feeling injustice, to an aggressive, getting "mine" at the cost of others not having theirs. Or they come angry, resistant, and rebellious, exhibiting an unwelcome reaction to the culture's conditioning efforts. Freire and Shor (1987) wrote that "student silence is created by acts of domination. Students are not silent by nature" (p. 117). People do not rebel against being cared for, loved and appreciated for their gifts and uniqueness. The culture's denial of needs and affirmation for so many of its children creates the path to hate and destruction for all of us eventually.

After years of conditioning, the majority of our students have their mental habits reduced to memorization of unexperienced, unrelativized facts, and their emotional and characterological shaping more resembles that of the obedient factory worker cut off from decision making, from control, and from a full view of the other-directed end product. I have worked in those exclusive schools similar to New Trier which prepare the very wealthy for the creative and executive roles which Anyon described (Anyon, 1975/1992). I found those students were no more in touch with their passions and sensitive to the needs of others than those from the rural poor areas of New Hampshire and Maine, or the middle-class

children of Maryland where I have also worked. The national malady is a wholesale loss of inner affiliation with the emotions which might bring real connection and real justice into our world. Our schools are a major contributor to that loss.

Public education, though not exclusively, in the main more resembles the spiritually toxic, industrialized, product making approach of R.J. Reynolds, the vapid and rigged television quiz shows of the 1960s, or the highly successful, much duplicated game of "Trivial Pursuit." Learning in our schools, like life in our society, is in fact much like a trivial pursuit. Students are conditioned to obey and go along, and to compete and get ahead. Learning and knowing is flattened, generalized, and quantified so that students, schools, and states may be more easily measured, compared, ordered, placed in competition with one another, directed, and ultimately controlled. It is a sorting process, after all, a true preparation for the already established lines and paths available. Professed national rhetoric and the historic myth of equality of opportunity to the contrary, our schools, more frequently than not, produce producers who are numb and desensitized. Or they feed more and more people into the maw of growing rage and violence, people bred from a system that continuously denies many of its citizens the necessities for their subsistence while giving to others far more than anyone could ever truly need. The American dream of opportunity for

many is a true nightmare of uncontrollable, often unseen forces which keep vast numbers of people destitute, numb, and in their established place. They are kept there until they can be kept no longer.

The numbness, however, shows definite signs of wearing thin. The riots, the guns in school, and the rapidly escalating amount of serious violent crime committed by young people are clear evidence that the dream is coming to an end. If this is truly a "Nation under God," then one must question what sort of God we have. On the occasion of his inaugural address in 1803, Jefferson said, "Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just" (Jefferson, 1803/1985, p. 31). In our time there is not much trembling. Mostly we have posturing, blaming and self-protection. "Our rulers will become corrupt," Jefferson warned, "our people careless, if they forget themselves in the sole faculty of making money" (Jefferson, 1803/1985, p. 31). What trembling does occur comes in the withdrawal from drugs and alcohol used to escape the realty of denial and impotence. Who would argue that we have not had more than our share of corrupt officials, and are in the main focused on making money.

The Wrong Solution

Our national and state political leadership, aided by professional educators and business captains, attempts to right the course of our schools, to rescue them -- and our

society as well -- from a rapidly accelerating downward course. The rescue seems relentlessly bent upon greater universalization, quantifiable measurements, and the enforcement of tightly prescribed teaching efforts and student learning at all levels. There is an almost constant cry for more authority and more market-place conditions. "Schools of choice," a sham remedy for giving freedom of school selection to parents, threatens to make inner-city schools even more destitute, even less able to poorly educate the poor. Schools of choice is further means of taking from those without and giving even more to those who already have. What poor child could attend an expensive private school with a $1000.00 voucher? Even if one could, imagine the emotional dislocation and discomfort in that transition from the seat of poverty to the lap of luxury.

The remedy proposed is an increase in the same individualistic aims, competitive processes, and irrelevant curriculum which produced the malady of the system in the first place. Leadership calls for longer days, more days, higher standards, more homework, more measurement, greater standardization. By the so-called raising of standards we make more room at the bottom and gain a greater number of failures, further insuring that those who have will continue to have, and those that don't, won't. By increasing time in school and time after school doing homework, we increase the amount to be memorized, repeated, and forgotten. We

encourage more alienation with more time spent in alienating circumstances. What passion exists is that of rage or despair and hostile competition. We encourage more violence and rage as we practice tighter control and longer oppressions. Or we teach passivity and acquiescence, and foster hopelessness and depression.

Clear Example

Like the highly industrialized and mechanized production model, curriculum and methods at the elementary and secondary level are almost always preordained, often prepackaged, teacher-proof, and directed to students with already assumed ends in place. Everybody and every idea is thus ready for measurement. I see first hand, student teachers and their cooperating teachers at both the high school and elementary level who in effect perpetuate the problems of their students and their society by teaching to the predetermined end-of-the-year test. Regardless of the often desperate needs of students, it is the end-of-year test that drives teaching, which now passes for education.

Teachers bemoan the pressures to teach to the test. In fairness, they are caught, like their students, in a system which is sick, and for all its complexity and largeness, remains for the most part monolithic in its vision and approach. Is there anywhere that four years of English, two years of foreign language, three years of math are not

required for college-bound students? Is there anywhere that U.S. history is not taught in the eleventh grade and English Literature is not taught in the twelfth? Is there anywhere that income and social class of one's parents do not determine better than any other predictors who will succeed in school and who will not? How many college admissions offices weight a student's community service as substantially as they weight the students' S.A.T. scores in the consideration for admission?

Here is the experience I recently had while observing one of my student teachers in a local high school. Here is a local example of what is going on nationally.

> John had just finished teaching a class and we were talking with his cooperating teacher about what had occurred. This was a "general level" World History class. "General level" is code for students not doing well in the usual sense of grades, attendance, participation in class, and standardized test scores. John had been painfully trying to find ways to get the students to learn what the book and the test directed them to learn. In light of the lack of student response and the lack of their understanding, the energy put forth by John seemed a senseless endeavor in the face of other clear and unmistakable student communications about interest and readiness. There was so little energy, or emotion, so little coming back from the students.
>
> I tried to center our critique on teaching to the needs of the students. It was clear to me that John needed to help them engage and to become involved with their learning. It was clear they needed to work with issues which were situated by John and made relevant to their own lives. He had talked about hierarchy and the changing cultures during the decline of the Roman Empire. Surely I suggested, these students had their own vast and most likely pain-filled experiences with hierarchy; they were sitting in the midst of its crumbs,

> segregated and tracked by its practice, unable to find a stake in how they spent their lives, unable to positively direct their own interests, unable and unassisted in finding their own interests. Is there a more stark and relevant picture of hierarchy available? Why not speak to them about their own lives in hierarchy? Why not give them language and spoken consciousness of their own position?
>
> Surely they knew too about cultural changes and domination from their own lives. All had changed from middle school to high school. Most likely half or more had parents who had split up and new stepparents or stepsiblings who had come into their lives. All may have had their own dreams of making it in school in their early years, but all seemed over-run and engulfed in an alienated culture, as if they were being asked to talk and work in a foreign country with a foreign language. In many ways, they were.

My two colleagues, with all their care and effort, were primarily concerned with "covering the material." No matter that students had clearly demonstrated by previous tests and quiz scores that they were not retaining the material, not reading the material at night, not taking notes, and not asking or answering questions related to the material. There was no interest; there was barely any active pursuit of learning of the official curriculum on a daily basis, even in class with the teacher right there. There was for them no interest because there was no relationship to the material: the teachers had not made or helped them to make their studies connected to their own experience. More able students (able to read, able take notes, able to memorize) presented no such problems. Without their own experience, their own contextual relationship with the material, there

could never be any real learning of the issues under discussion for either the general group or their more academically affluent schoolmates. It only looked as if the others were learning.

Nevertheless it was the end-of-the-year test which figuratively loomed over the teachers and literally directed their activities. Despite the apparent and recognized needs for gaining something worthwhile from their being in school, it was the standardized measurement and standardized threat that controlled my student teacher's efforts with the resigned blessing of his cooperating teacher. Suggestions for making the issues relevant, taking time to read the material aloud, and making sense of it in physical and dramatic ways, in the context of the students' own daily lives, did not stand against the old ways of transmitting for minimal memorization and assuredly, minimal retention. This was a gross and apparent denial of reality.

I left our conversation mixed up between my anger and frustration. I left feeling absolutely inadequate and unable to convince them of the necessity of teaching in a different fashion and for different purposes. I did not have the words, the argument, and certainly not the power. I left too, with the uncertain and disturbing recognition of not knowing what compromises I might likely make were I in their shoes. That recognition was no small haunting voice in my own head. Discouragement seemed the norm for those students

lost and losing out, and for their teachers too, who felt helpless to change themselves or their students. Both the teachers and their students were unable to influence the oppressive course of their time together. This was for me an acute exercise and viewing of the powerlessness and unwillingness of the participants -- students and teachers -- to take control of the debilitating curriculum and thus of their educational lives. It was clear evidence of the force of our conditioning and the lack of freedom in our classrooms. The discouragement they felt -- and I too -- was merited.

In order for our schools to become full of meaning for students, a major change in our official curriculum and our standard ways of teaching would have to be effected. In order for schools to form communities of loving learners discovering their connectedness, to situate studies to the students' lives, and to find the means to solve problems collectively and humanely, something just short of revolution might have to occur. As it is however, the overriding and persistent talk among students about their educational experience is most frequently their perception that the curriculum is irrelevant and boring, but necessary if they want to get into college and get ahead. Relevancy is not living life now, but preparing for irrelevancy later.

Students with other aspirations, or with few or no aspirations, benefit even less from the standard official

curriculum. The number of students who drop out -- some say are forced out -- approaches 30 percent nationally. In our country's inner cities, where conditions often resemble battlefield experiences, those casualty figures easily exceed 50 percent. That so many of our teachers, administrators, and our national leadership basically continue to do what they have done, or argue for more of what has been done, that they do so in the face of such apathy, discontent and abject failure, with record numbers failing and fleeing, reflects a national denial of massive proportions and requires a personal alienation of equal significance. Schools fail as do our other social institutions to make good the promises of democracy: for dignity, for the full worth of all people, for justice for all people, for a true equality of opportunity.

The six lesson plan beginning with a review of what happened in the previous lesson, and ending with a summary of what happened in the day's lesson is a model of that standardized, mechanized approach almost universally touted as effective and efficient for learning in our schools. That form of teaching is the only way to "cover" the material in the time and irrelevant fashion prescribed. It is covering the material quickly that is highly regarded and considered the mark of good teaching in many of our schools. It does not seem to matter that students are unable to relate the material to their own lives, are not assisted in making an

inner sense and personal meaning of the material, and are unable to experience and thus to come to know the material. In that regard, John Dewey (1904/1964)warned us long ago that:

> The model lesson is a monument of the eagerness of those in authority to secure immediate practical results at any cost and depends upon the willingness of our teaching corps to accept without inquiry or criticism any method or device which seems to promise good results. Teachers flock to these persons who give them clear cut and definite instructions as to just how to teach. (p. 373)

The six-point formula replicates the factory mentality of turning out the same quality controlled product time after time with the least cost and most profit available. It ignores the complexity of human beings and makes destructive use of their highly adaptive quality. Thinking becomes primarily a process of responding with what others have thought and written in textbooks. It is decontextualized, suitable for decontextualized teaching and learning. Ceola Baber, a teacher educator, notes that the regurgitation required in most schools, by most teachers, is in fact "the teaching of mediocrity" (Baber, personal communication, December 11, 1992). To my mind, she is optimistic.

School Knowing and Alienation

Little has changed in the 87 years since Dewey (1904) stated rather clearly our penchant for surety, our need for

absolutes, our fear of uncertainty and our lack of trust in our students. Teachers and textbooks most frequently direct the energies and efforts of students. Knowledge is thought to pre-exist the child and to be outside the child, and the student is encouraged, forced, and threatened to learn what others think needs to be learned, when and in what order others think it is appropriate. In accepting that sort of known-beforehand certainty, teachers forfeit the freedom of learning, the adaptiveness needed to move in the direction of student interests and curiosity, and the intimate relationship between the subject and object of our knowing. We make both the material and our students into objects, killing not only the life in learning but the joy and relatedness of the knower and the known. The need for order and prediction overrules the innate desire to know, discover, and follow our interests. In that regard, Einstein wrote:

> It is in fact nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. (quoted in Rogers, 1969, p. iv)

Most of our schools, so it seems, have taken an individually and socially damaging mainstay of classical philosophy (the idea that truth and knowing exists apart from and prior to one's experience) and have institutionalized that belief into the ways of dispensing knowledge. Knowledge

is held static, generalized, and separate from those who are asked to come to know. Personal experience is devalued at best; more often it is ignored altogether. Teachers and textbooks are held to have the answers, the "right answers," and students must learn them. The truths of distant others are given unquestioned acceptance, so that the truths of current and present authority may receive like acceptance.

Schools have likewise taken a debased ethos and outcome of the pragmatic movement -- selfish and personal aggrandizement of material goods -- and converted them to individual grades, individualized honors, and the individualized options for the continued academic success of those, who for the most part come from parents who have had their own previous academic success. The system is adept, chillingly so, at perpetuating the numerous losers and scarcer winners of our society. For the most part their heirs receive like treatment and capture like rewards.

The current vastly problematic state of our educational system is in part due to the pretense of individualism and the mythical belief in a supposed equality of opportunity as guides to conducting public education. It is pretense because education in our culture is generally a mass accomplishment leaving out that which is most beneficent in the ideals of the liberal revolution: the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of every person regardless of station or accomplishment, the validity of self-

determination, and a trust in the humanity of human beings to transcend their own problematics. Were those beliefs firmly held and arduously practiced our educational practices would be radically altered.

Education and society also reflect that which is least vitalizing, and most inuring in its treatment of all as "equals." Equality of opportunity often undergoes an objectification and leads to conformity, a mass application and formulaic approach to education and to situations which need specific and particular attention. The special funding circumstances necessary to lift an impoverished Goudy school up to the level of New Trier (Kozol, 1991) is denied. At the state funding level, Goudy receives "equal" treatment with the New Trier schools despite the outrageous, and despicable differences. Individualized instruction becomes the means to get everyone to the same curricular ends regardless of specific inclination, want and need. Solidarity and belonging are reduced to a competitive tribalism, regionalism, or nationalism. In schools we foster a collective "kill the other team." In the case of Goudy, it is "ignore the other team," and the killing has a far more lasting affect. We have the worst of both possibilities of individualism and equality and lose the best and most life conducive.

Here is the work of one of my student teachers, "professionally" constructing his lesson plan using all the

"right" and current terminology to describe himself and his objectified fellow human beings. He has been taught by his professors to do this. In effect he has been taught to further the alienating process, to distance himself and his students from the rage necessary to deconstruct the mechanisms which insure New Trier all that it has at the expense of Goudy not having what it so desperately needs. In place of joy, curiosity and interest is substituted distance, direction, and control. As always, there is the threat of the test.

> The class will proceed according to the instruction sheet. The instructor will be available to each group to answer questions and suggest a direction. The culmination of the activity will be the students' report to the class. The instructor will remind the class that each student will be responsible for the information about each case and that questions pertaining to each case will be on the test.

As with my other student teacher and cooperating teacher, it is always the test or the threat of it, or some form of threat or gift hanging over or beckoning us and our students. It is the test which insures their obedience, their compliance. Tests become the motivating factor when interest and curiosity is extinguished. It is the test which insures the teacher's compliance as well. My own students, at both high school and college levels, openly admit they would do far less were grades not an issue. As we move through the semester together, this is a point we return to

frequently in one form or another. It is a reality of the system we cannot ignore.

It is not a moot question, this conditioning and socialization. What remains is just how deeply it runs in all of us. How impossible it is for us to imagine another reality which we might construct. Study without threat and rewards from the outside are at worst unimaginable and at best a rarity. In my own study, it is a constant challenge to remind myself that this work, this pursuit is for me, and that it is my struggle to find and make my world of meaning. Even when I have been assured and reminded by my own teachers, it has been difficult to believe. Such is the power and lasting impact of years of systemic control and personal alienation. Such is the power of being continually taught that there exists some ultimately right way and right truth which I must learn from my teachers and to which I must comply, and if I do not, I must suffer.

Additionally, there are risks involved, as well as the uncertainty that cohabits with the exercise of freedom. There is the loss of control and the perverse and pervasive view of human nature which have been ingrained and implanted within our minds. We do not trust the curiosity, interest, and inner sensitivity of our students because we have been taught and conditioned not to trust it in ourselves. Like us, they have learned to be outer-directed and dependent on the condition of rewards or threats for their own direction.

The conditioning has taught us to want security and certainty more than to want freedom and value curiosity. We have been taught to listen to others more than to listen to ourselves. It is a poor, damaging, and debilitating trade.

Losing Ourselves

Carl Rogers (1969) traced the forfeiture of our own valuing and the subsequent introjection of the values of those people important in our lives in exchange for their love and protection: the trade of freedom and self-determination for security. This exchange does not begin in kindergarten. This begins in our infancy with the loss of smiles on the faces of our parents and the purposeful withholding of positive regard. Rogers believes that as infants we operate with our own intrinsically directed fluid value system.

> The living human being has, at the outset, a clear approach to values. He prefers some things and experiences, and rejects others. . . . Hunger is negatively valued. Food is positively valued. But when he is satisfied, food is negatively valued and the same milk he responded to so eagerly is now spit out, or the breast which seemed so satisfying is now rejected as he turns his head away from the nipple with an amusing facial expression of disgust and revulsion. . . . It is first of all a flexible, changing valuing process not a fixed system . . . each element, each moment of what he is experiencing is somehow weighed, and selected or rejected, depending on whether, at that moment it tends to actualize the organism or not . . . Unlike many of us he knows what he likes and dislikes, and the origin of these value choices lies strictly within himself. He is the center of the valuing process, the evidence for his choices being supplied by his own senses. (pp. 242-243)

This sort of initial valuing Rogers (1969) calls "operative," but it does not last long because the socialization process comes early, within the first several months as parents begin to clearly indicate their own values and struggle to shape the child's will. As they do the child begins to give up her values in order to keep the love and affection she craves. These other values Rogers (1969) terms "conceived values." In giving up our intrinsic values, and the fluidity of momentary choosing, more than our personal preferences are abandoned. We lose touch with ourselves, our own experiencing of the world and begin to question and distrust our judgments. Rogers (1969) wrote:

> The infant needs love, wants it, tends to behave in ways which bring a repetition of this wanted experience. He pulls his baby sister's hair and finds it satisfying to hear her wails and protests. He then hears he is naughty. . . He is cut off from affection . . . he gradually learns that what feels good is often bad in the eyes of others. Then the next step occurs, in which he comes to take the same attitude toward himself which these others have taken. Now as he pulls his sister's hair he intones "Bad boy" . . . introjecting the value judgment of another, taking it as his own. He has deserted the wisdom of his organism, giving up the locus of evaluation, and is trying to behave in terms of values set by another in order to hold love. He learns from others a large number of conceived values, and adopts them as his own, even though they may be widely discrepant from what he is experiencing. Because these values are not based on his own valuing, they become fixed and rigid, rather than fluid and changing. (Rogers, 1969, pp. 244-245)

This socialization is a deliberate shaping for control and acceptable behavior gone too far. The training starts

early and continues unabated, accelerated by schooling, and broadened to include other facets of our lives, and other figures important to us outside the nurturing, controlling, conditioning nest of our home. This training is a ubiquitous factor of our existence. Schooling is only its first major extension outside the home in a continuing series of dislocations of self and further alienation from the experiences of our world. In a devastating and lasting blow to the uniqueness and in-touchness and the self-determining decision making of each individual, schooling becomes our preparation for life after school in the greater culture. Schooling is a decisive and crucial step in a lifelong process of alienation and denial of ourselves and lack of trust in our own sensibilities. Schooling complements the disembodied knowing of an idealist's world view. It supports the authority-centered world of the classroom and the work world for most people after the classroom. With such training schooling becomes not a search and exploration but an abandonment and massive introjection of permanent denial of the opportunity and responsibility for inner and outer reality making. We lose a sense of self and the options for a true response-ability.

> Since these value constructs are often sharply at variance with what is going on in our own experiencing, we have in a very basic way divorced ourselves from ourselves. . . this is part of the estrangement of modern man from himself. (Rogers, 1969, p. 247)

That sort of denial taken further makes for soldiers who must face their own death and their killing of others with little or no questioning; it supports an over-obedience, an uncritical view of life. "It is not the U.S. Army," wrote Kozol (1975), "that transforms an innocent boy into a non-comprehending automaton . . . Basic training does not begin in boot camp. It begins in kindergarten" (p. 54). It makes for children silent, passive, and unresistant in the classroom, until the suppressed rage, and depressed grief can be borne no longer. It supports the competitive ethic because all of us are struggling for care from others which has been made contingent on our performance according to the standards of others. We lose our self as well as our mutual regard of others, and our relations turn instead into an unrealistic idolatry and a hostile dependency.

It is rare that we hear or read of a vision on the part of our leaders to make our country (and its schools) exemplary <u>cooperators</u> with other nations in the world. Is there ever a widespread, consistent, and ongoing teaching practice focused on the cooperative potential of humankind? Have caring and compassion ever been made the norm for most of our schools? Matthew Fox (1979) said that "all competition is a kind of war" (p. 191). The competition which is so prized and accentuated is a way of feeding on one another; it is a way for those more able to take from those less able what often is a basic need for survival and to

convert it to excess. Schooling, however, as life in this culture, has taught us a variety of ways to deny, rationalize, and disconnect those connections.

Schools and our culture teach us to believe there is an equal starting place, an equal opportunity for all. Schools teach that one's accomplishments or lack of them are due to one's own hard work and one's intelligence. Lacks in accomplishment come always from our lack of work, our lack of intelligence. School, like our culture, supports a myth of meritocracy, denying the vast privilege of some and the stultifying, damaging conditions of others. Just as schools create failure by stipulating a "normal" time for learning certain subjects and then failing those who learn at a different rate, so too do they create victims and then blame those victims for their painful conditions. Soelle (1984) wrote:

> When we start with the individual, we have almost no recourse but to blame the victim, to tell the person that he or she could improve, could perform better, could suffer less, or could deal more effectively with her own instincts and feelings. (p. 70)

Making disconnections is what our present school system in its alienating practices is supremely adept at doing. Giving up our inner selves in trade for false security creates a never-ending search. That search for another's approval and comfort leaves one always at risk, always enslaved, and always ready to forfeit one's own truth. Truth

becomes attached to security, to another's power, to ultimate efforts at safety, which can never fully be achieved. In the constancy of our search we lose ourselves, our integrity, and our compassionate caring for others who might need us, who might need what we have to offer, but who also might stand in our way. The detachments, disconnections, and highly competitive way of living and schooling make it impossible to know and love ourselves and our neighbors, and thus to find truth. In such conditions most people feel frequently lost, threatened, and alone. Neither freedom nor security is gained. In such a world one must be always careful and ready.

Being born into a given world of socially alienating forces, none of us is internally exempt from the influence of the very problematics which we wish to address, to modify or to do away with altogether. All of us have existed, do exist in some form of alienated state. Each of us denies, avoids, and pretends about ourselves and the world for that is part of the hegemonic teaching of our culture.

Merton believed that "we are inhibited from seeing reality more as it is because we are immersed in a ceaseless pursuit of our own desires" (in Del Prete, 1990, p. 68). Furthermore, Jackson (1968/1992) wrote:

> As he learns to live in school the student learns to subjugate his own desires to the will of the teacher . . . he learns to be passive and to acquiesce to the rules, regulations and routines . . . to tolerate petty

> frustrations and to accept the plans and policies of higher authorities . . . Most students learn that the rewards are granted to those who lead a good life. And in school the good life consists principally in doing what the teacher says. The transition from classroom to the factory or office is made easily by those who have developed "good work habits" in their early years. (pp. 53-54)

The changes we seek must often begin in ourselves. "The promised land," Walzer (1985) wrote, "breeds its own oppressors, one doesn't need the Egyptians" (p. 31), and Palmer (1983) said:

> I have learned that hope and grace do not come cheap. They require an honest self-scrutiny and then confession, an offering up of our own inner darkness to the source of forgiveness and transformation. (p. 2)

"Honest self-scrutiny" is not much taught nor does it go far in the commercialized world we have inherited. Honesty aborts the denial and distortion which is so pervasive a part of our teaching and learning. Honesty requires intimate connections with one's inner state as well as openness to the consequences of our acts, or the omission of our acts. That connection seems to be more and more abandoned or falsified as we progress into the world, as we grow up in the school environment.

Nevertheless, the competitive, self-enhancing, and denying hegemony is not completely effective (Shapiro, 1990), because otherwise we would have little if any positive social change and no hope or vision which leads us toward other ways

of being. None would answer the call for constructing a different, more just, and loving world. But that call does go forth and is answered by some.

Possibility

Many of us have had teachers who helped us to see other ways of being in the world, helped us to see through our self-protecting and alienating individualism. There are indeed those teachers who put forth that call to the deepest part of ourselves which desires a unity which comes only from others and ourselves in communion. "Deep," surely does "call to deep" (Psalms 42:7). Certain moments in our lives give us that undeniable truth.

Even so, it would be romantic to expect education to steer the course and chart the direction of the larger culture of which it is a part. As Freire and Shor (1987) pointed out, school is not the "lever" for change in our society. Cremin, (1964) commenting on Dewey's view of education and George Count's idea that teachers build a new social order wrote:

> Dewey replied that in an industrial society, with its multiplicity of political and educative agencies, the school could never be the main determinant of political, intellectual, or moral change. (p. 236)

There is, however, no mistaking the fact that teachers individually and collectively influence and take significant

part in the shaping of their students' world view and behavior, just as students shape the lives of their teachers. There is also no denying that the culture requires the congruent socialization of its young if it is to maintain its present course. As teachers we either contribute to and reinforce that socialization in the status quo or we challenge and disturb the process. Either we resist, or we conform. In the face of such overwhelming power as the universally established curriculum and standardized ways of teaching exert, there is no middle ground. "In such situations," wrote Cohn-Sherbok, (1987), "one must inevitably take sides. Not to do so is to side with those in power: neutrality is impossible" (p. 87). Shaull (1970) wrote:

> There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.
>
> The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new era in Western History. (p. 14)

"Tension and conflict" are already rampant in our society, but they are not generated from an educational community enacting radical change as part of their vision for a "new era." Rather they stem from utter frustration and

fear; they most often mark a stark division between those who have material goods from those who do not. This too is a call, but its clamor is so loud and painful that hearing it tests all of us to listen below the din of anger, rage, and violence which is its overriding voice. Teachers who can speak of that rage and anger and do so adding a unifying vision in a unifying fashion are truly needed in our land today. Teachers who can encourage our communion with one another across the pain-filled divisions, who can remind us of our common ground and our obligation to one another, are essential to our individual and collective well-being. Teachers who make that sort of call are prophetic.

Each of us can witness to the impact and voice of teachers in our lives, sometimes in ways loving and generous, and sometimes not. Each of us has been led out, encouraged, empowered, and called forth to a more joined and loving vision, or we have been oppressed, controlled, isolated, and kept in. Sometimes there has been a confusing mixture of being led and kept. As teachers we are moment by moment confronted with the problem of how we shall be with our students, of struggling with the tensions of freedom and order, of accepting or demanding, of making our own humanity. As teachers, we must determine with what sort of voice we will speak and what shall be the call we put forth. How is it we should be? What vision will lead us in all those

moments of confrontation? Martin Buber (1950) suggested a profoundly spiritual answer:

> God's grace consists precisely in this, that he wants to let himself be won by (us), that he places himself, so to speak into (our) hands. God wants to come to his world, but he wants to come to it through (us). This is the mystery of our existence, the superhuman chance of (human)kind . . . Where is the dwelling of God? . . . God dwells wherever man (and woman) lets him in. This is the ultimate purpose: to let God in. (pp. 40-41)

Heschel has said that "to be is to stand for" (quoted in Friedman, 1987, p. 44). As teachers, we must determine and redetermine how it is we shall be, and what it is we shall stand for in our relatedness with our students. What are the ends to which our means take us? Each of us may let God into the world of our classroom, into the relations we hold with our students, and each of us may not! To realize that is to come to an awesome responsibility, a wondrous gift, an essential problem. The choice is always before us, never finished. The leading-out which education truly is turns out to be our letting-in of God. There can be no greater gift, no more holy responsibility.

CHAPTER II

WANDERING IN THE DESERT: EFFORTS TO KNOW, TO BE AND DOUBT

> There are more marvels hidden in the soul of man than we are able to imagine. He will act if he is inspired; he will respond if called upon. (Heschel, 1966, p. 51)

Ackermann (1985) wrote that "religion is a source of pictures of how the world ought to be, pictures that can be repeatedly reinterpreted to evaluate new and even unexpected social patterns" (p. 5). Additionally, Soelle (1984) tells us that "A religious language . . . of healing and freeing is a language that moves us beyond the status quo of our lives" (p. 130). The spiritual and the religious are then the point which inform my critique, which provide the standard against which I measure culture in general and teaching in particular. They give me a vision which informs my teaching and being in the world.

The spiritual and religious life calls for intimacy, care and compassion, for the making of justice in the world, for the loving respect and nurturing of all life, for humankind's endless search for the truth, for connection and relatedness. If God, as Genesis proclaims, saw that all that he created "was very good," and that "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 1:4, 2:18), then lives lived to the contrary -- without treating all life as holy and

connected -- are blasphemous. In truly critical and prophetic fashion, Heschel (1962) wrote:

> Our eyes are witness to the callousness and cruelty of man, but our heart tries to obliterate the memories, to calm the nerves, and to silence our conscience. (p. 5)

Thomas Merton, writing in that same prophetic manner, said:

> The world we live in has become an empty void, a desecrated sanctuary, reflecting outwardly the emptiness and blindness of the hearts of men who have gone crazy with their love of money and power and with pride in their technology. (Del Prete, 1990, p. 36)

Against those views, I am hopeful that my teaching will have a prophetic quality: a strong and provocative religious critique and judgment. That critique will be balanced by an articulated vision and hope for a different way of reconstructing our world together: a way of moving "beyond the status quo of our lives" (Soelle, 1984), beyond the "hearts gone crazy with their love of money and power" (Merton, 1990). Because of the prophetic aim and nature of my pedagogy, I have come to see the necessity for the use of spiritual language and a vision of spiritual relationships as integral to creating a loving community of learners. Ackermann (1985) wrote that "certain secular problems that become important but resist secular solution call for religious reference" (p. 69), and Brueggemann (1978) said:

> The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominate culture around us. (p. 13)

Religious reference and spiritual language are essential in order to provide a unifying vision against those standard individualistic and competitive ways of being which birth the alienation that makes justice impossible. Community enables our reconciliation with self and others, while spiritual language informs and directs us toward that being in community. Here is an example of that discovery of alienation and the fashioning of a more just relationship.

Finding New Truth In Community

Joan was a senior business major, taking the "Institutions of Education" (a required course for education majors) as an elective. Two weeks remained in our semester when she asked to see me after class. Our class had been through a lot: an Auschwitz simulation that startled and confronted us with issues of obedience, authority and complicity; readings from Kozol's (1991) Savage Inequalities and our subsequent enactment of a state legislature grappling with the appalling disparities of educational opportunity and what they could and would "do" about it; and the writing and reading of our autobiographies, in which not just a few members of the class shared very personal and private histories in small groups with one another. Now we were

facing racial issues, confronting our own hidden and not so hidden prejudices as best we could.

> Joan and I stood in the hall. "I need to tell you what's happened to me during the last few days of class," she said. And then she proceeded to tell me how when writing her reaction paper to our study of racism, she had started sobbing as she suddenly realized her own prejudice and discrimination toward her sister's black boyfriend who was the father of Joan's little nephew. She spoke about how she had hated their church's exclusion of the couple and the child but had completely missed her own bigoted view and acts toward them. She talked about how in the midst of writing and crying, she called her sister, confessed the discovery and tried to make some sort of amends. Joan also told me how she had to stand-up to her own boyfriend, who she said, "is more bigoted then me. " And then she talked about how, just this past Sunday, the two couples and the child had gone together to another church where they were welcomed.

Joan is the same young women who, when I asked the class early in the semester whether it made a difference if students got to know one another, said, "I'm here to learn. Getting to know the other students won't change what I learn."

Joan was wrong. What happened to her happened because we come to know ourselves as we come to know other people. Our relationships with others provide us a beginning place and moment for the reconstructing of ourselves. What we may see in others may be reflections of who we are, what we are doing, and what we are becoming. What we may see in others may also contrast with ourselves, sharply defining those differences. The dynamic intricacies and problems of relationship may then call out our interiors, awaken and

"remind ourselves," as Heschel (1966) noted, "that we are a duality of mysterious grandeur and pompous dust" (p. 12). Reflection on those moments with others can give new meaning to the knowing of ourselves and the world. Reflecting on the life we are living gives possibility for making a different life.

In that same dynamic, we come to love ourselves only as we come to love other people. In that way, our knowing and our loving are intimately connected. As Joan opened into new truth about herself, her ability to love expanded and widened. The door opened wider because truth exists within love and love is necessary for truth to be found. In this regard, Palmer (1983) wrote, "Knowing becomes a reunion of separated beings whose primary bond is not of logic but of love" (p. 32). In our culture's pervasive emphasis on individualism and independence, however, self and other are separated, and self is most always placed first. We are taught that love of self precedes love of others, and knowledge of self comes before knowledge of others. Before I can give, I must get. Before I can love you, I must love me, or we are encouraged to lose ourselves completely in the midst of sacrifice. Neither condition encourages community and the living reciprocity which is necessary to finding truth, for finding ourselves, for being in love.

Rather than an either-or, either me first or you first, I have come to believe that knowing, loving and being in

relationship, being in community are dialectical, although frequently, I forget that. Heschel (1965) has said, "In order to know others I must know myself, just as understanding others is a necessary prerequisite for understanding myself" (p. 15). Merton in similar fashion wrote: "We cannot find ourselves within ourselves but only in others, yet at the same time before we can go out to find others we must first find ourselves" (Del Prete, 1990, p. 32). For teachers that dialectical view translates into the idea that if we help change how students know other students in our classrooms, then students' knowing themselves and how they see the world changes. In Dewey's (1904/1964) view of education, the students' experience of themselves and the world has been reconstructed.

Palmer (1983) also supported that idea when he wrote, "relationships -- not facts and reasons -- are the key to reality; as we enter those relationships, knowledge of reality is unlocked" (p. 53). The "unlocked reality" of Joan's prejudice and the reconstruction of her experience of herself were created as she came into more personal relationship with the black students in our classroom and with the vivid and personal pictures of the pain of discrimination. The more personal knowing of the lives of others helped Joan to know her own evasion, her own bigotry, her own self more personally. "Truth," wrote Palmer (1983), "is between us, in relationship, to be found in dialogue of

knowers and knowns" (p. 55). Joan's truth is the result of the dialectic Heschel and Merton encourage us to think about. Joan's new truth is her response to the "call" which Heschel (1966) speaks about.

It follows then that the degree to which I as a teacher can help form a caring community of learners in my classroom is proportionate to what, how much, and to what depth and breadth my students come to know what our study is about. The caring community opens us more to others and to the truths within ourselves. For to know is to be intimately involved with what we know. Being intimately involved with ourselves and with others is the prerequisite for knowing because knowing is the making of connections and relationships with ourselves and the world. Palmer (1983) wrote:

> We find truth not in the fine points of our theologies or in our organizational allegiances but in the quality of our relationships - with each other and with the whole created world. (p. 50)

In order to help students make personal connections with the subject matter (as Joan did with racism), I focus on the building of relationships among students and use a situated pedagogy in most all the issues of our study. What I encourage over and over again is that students experience as fully as possible their own experience. Then I ask that they reflect upon that experience with one another. Coming to

know one's inner experience and then listening to the experiences of others is what brings us more fully to ourselves and the world. Others act as mirrors which reflect back to us. Others also act as foils that challenge and confront us. While we are given new insights into others, we simultaneously find newness in ourselves.

> We had been working in class on Phillip Jackson's "The Daily Grind" (1968/1992, pp. 29-57) and looking at issues of socialization, objectification, hierarchy, delay and denial of our impulses and feelings, constant evaluation, living in a crowd, the use of authority and student alienation.
>
> I started class by having the students sit alphabetically in straight rows and instructed them to "clear your desks, take out a pencil and piece of paper" and then proceeded to give them a quiz. Afterwards I had them exchange papers with their classmates for public grading and public announcement (at the suggestion of one of my students) of "those who got a hundred." As we talked about our in-class experience students related their histories of embarrassment, and discomfort with the frequent public knowledge of how they had fared. They recalled instantly their conditioned response to the command "clear your desks," and most related how they felt nervous and anxious today as well as in all those past times when hearing those same words.
>
> We then did a role play where I as a "teacher" accused and admonished a "student" for looking at another "student's" paper during the quiz. I "told" him he would get a zero and then sent him from the room. They volunteered (in the safety of our discussion after the role play was over) how they actually felt intensely angry with me and embarrassed for Chris when he was sent from the room.
>
> We wondered together about why their feelings and thoughts had been so incongruent with what they actually did. For what they actually did was to remain silent or giggle nervously. I asked them to remember other times in their past when classmates had been treated harshly in public. All could remember such times. I asked them

> to remember their responses at those times as well. Two out of twenty-seven in our class could recall a singular time when they had acted on their feelings. Two times out of perhaps our collective hundreds of times over the course of all our combined years of schooling, students could recall standing-up for a classmate in such circumstances. What, we considered, had become of all those other moments of anger? What had become of our sense of compassion and our ability to act compassionately?
>
> Then we moved the desks back, stood and formed a circle. When I asked them to hold each other's hands in the circle many giggled again. We stood quiet for a moment, trying to feel what it was we felt. Gradually we got a bit more comfortable. And then I told them that as infants we come into the world requiring and welcoming the touch of others. I told them that we know from clinical studies that infants need that touch, and will actually die from "failure to thrive syndrome" if they are not sufficiently and lovingly touched and held. I suggested that in elementary school touching and holding hands was quite common. And then I posed for them the question of why it is that we are now so ill at ease when touching each other? I asked, why it would be that as a culture we teach our young to refrain from, and ultimately to be uncomfortable touching or being touched by others? Why so much emphasis on "doing your own work," and "keeping your mouths shut and hands to yourself."
>
> As students talked they came to understand Jackson's views in a far different manner. They came to know personally of the development of their own alienation from self and of course from others as well. They came to see that repeated denial of feelings and human touching has serious consequences for our impassioned being in the world and for the compassion we have and act on in behalf of others.

If we do not touch others, if we do not have passion, if we do not act on our feelings or experience our feelings for others, what then remains of our being-in-touch with ourselves? What is our knowing of the world? What truth

remains for us to know without our feelings and our inner experience?

Why Community

Dwayne Huebner (1984) believes that changing ourselves, giving up old truths which are familiar and relatively comfortable, is often a threatening prospect. That is why alcoholics are so difficult to convince that their drinking is excessive and that they are ruining their lives and often the lives of others around them as well. What alcoholics do in order to hold to their current view of themselves, is called denial: an unconscious means of distorting reality and defending themselves against the painfulness of truth and need for change. That is why alcoholics need such devastation in their lives before they can stop denying reality, before they are able to begin giving up their old picture of reality.

All of us practice some degree of denial to avoid facing truths which hurt and change that is necessary. Denial is another way of describing Joan's previous lack of reality about her own racism. She did not lie to herself; she simply did not know herself. New truth, new ways of seeing and being in the world are for Huebner (1984) like threatening "Strangers." He asks us:

> How can we face the threat of the unknown and the threat of the stranger outside of us and inside of us? It is

> not easy. We need the assurance that we will not be destroyed, that life will indeed be enhanced rather than destroyed. Love is that assurance. We can face the threat of the unknown and of the stranger if we are not alone; if we are in the presence of love which affirms life. (p. 117)

What the Alcoholics' Anonymous (A.A.) people have come to know through their own monumental pain is that love is what eventually affects and changes the alcoholic. They know too that love happens best (and only) in community. The A.A. groups -- all the twelve step groups for that matter -- attempt to establish and practice a loving relationship among those who come into their midst. Epistemologically, Heschel (1973) wrote that "It is impossible to find truth without being in love" (p. 45). The finding of truth, the knowing of reality and the recovering from addiction are all matters of love, as is the making of justice. These are spiritual matters which require that people be in community. These are the so-called "secular problems which require religious reference" (Ackermann, 1985, p. 69).

In my classroom the community I envision and try to make with my students is guided by an ethic of love. The care and comfort of love are essential because as Palmer (1983) wrote:

> Good teachers know that discomfort and pain are often signs that truth is struggling to be born among us . . . Because a learning space can be painful it must also have hospitality, which means receiving each other and other ideas with openness and care. A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless, but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur -like exposing ignorance,

> challenging false and partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. (pp. 73-74)

As teachers, the classroom community calls on us to let go and hold on, to demand and to accept, to encourage freedom as well as to maintain order. Love, I believe, tells us when to do either and how to construct the necessary mixture. Love allows us to rise above the dualisms and meld the opposing forces into constructive, liberating mixtures.

As teachers we must, as Palmer (1983) suggested, "challenge the false and partial information of our students" and "expose ignorance," our own as well as our students'. For me those are not always easy and comfortable ways of being with my students. Saying "it is my job," or denying my feelings is a dehumanizing amelioration when watching my students' embarrassment, pain, and disappointment.

Though my teaching rests on Heschel's (1973) concept of love as essential to finding truth, it is not necessarily a secure and comfortable place because loving relationships in our day and age are frequently confused with control, domination, and manipulation, or the other extreme of permissiveness. My own human vulnerability, my need for acceptance, approval, and self-esteem, too frequently leads me to falsify my own behavior in order to maintain the picture of me I hope that they see. How many of us had more than one or two teachers (if that many) who invited an openness and mutuality of care in their classrooms while at

the same time making strong demands on us for an honest search for truth? How many models have we seen for forming loving and caring communities in our classrooms? How many teachers easily and repeatedly expose their own weakness, the ignorance, uncertainty and neediness of their humanity?

Being loving does not absent one from feelings of pain and discomfort. Paradoxically, love increases awareness and knowing of the other's pain as well as the pain experienced within. Moreover, loving others does not absent one from the obligation to speak the truth humbly as one sees it and knows it to be. Love requires that we speak, and love helps us form the words with which to do so. Love also guides us into silence when that is more appropriate.

It is in my speaking a truth which opposes a student's way of being and in the making of demands on my students as all good teachers must, that I most frequently feel the pain of teaching. Sometimes that pain comes from the public exposure of my own inadequacy as a teacher, my own not knowing what or how. But far more frequently the pain comes with the knowledge that the truth which I ought to say or do will hurt one of my students and dislodge the harmony of our relationship. In those situations I am still frequently at a loss to know what to do, and how to do it. Knowing that loving relationships exist only in our struggle for intimacy and honesty does not ease my discomfort. Rather that knowing makes it even more imperative that I speak humbly what I

believe to be true. Love in those circumstances helps shape the words best said and most easily heard in spite of the pain. In speaking that painful truth within the uncertainty of what will happen next, I am almost always confronted with new truths about myself. Speaking in such circumstances is always a test of faith. Having faith and being humble are perhaps my two greatest challenges. Not having them is the cause of many of my difficulties.

> Bill, one of my student teachers, was older, mid-forties, polished and articulate. He was coming into teaching after a varied career in business. But he was in trouble. His teaching demonstrated a lack of "proper authority" (Greene, 1984, p. x), a reasonable setting of limits and boundaries so that his students could hear, think, and struggle with the issues before them. Authority, paradoxically, was necessary so that there was the freedom to explore and come to know. He was struggling with those tensions of freedom and order, acceptance and demand, and he was not resolving the conflict well.
>
> His class was at the opposite end of the performance scale from my other student teacher's class. This was the honor's group of ninth graders: code word for full of themselves, articulate, consistently adept at succeeding in the school, mostly middle and upper class, mostly white. In Bill's class, these students were out of control, irrelevant, and irreverent. They interrupted each other, interrupted Bill, changed the subject, talked when Bill or other students were talking, talked while taking tests, threw things across the room, and generally did most anything they wanted until Bill finally exploded in frustrated anger sending several out of the room. Uneasy quiet and order remained until the next building of chaos rose to the necessary combustion level finalizing in Bill's explosion, ejection of a student, and the ensuing period of quiet and building chaos. Even watching him in such circumstances was painful and exhausting.
>
> Over the weeks his school-based cooperating teacher and I made careful and consistent suggestions for his need

> to make greater demands on his students for different behavior, for him to take stronger control. Bill would listen to us, agree, and then continue to do what he had done before. And the students, would of course, continue to do what they had done before. There was no external change in Bill or the class, nor was there any change in his cooperating teacher and me. It was an ongoing drama and dance, and the end of the semester was getting close. Our collective discouragement was building as was our sense of powerlessness to make much of a difference in the situation.
>
> And then we stopped. His cooperating teacher and I stopped making suggestions and instead made demands on Bill. Our language changed from, "you might try . . .," to "In the next observation, we specifically want to see. . . " We scheduled an extra meeting to go over those demands face to face with Bill and to make clear our insistence that Bill's teaching must change. And it did, at least for a while.

As the A.A. people note in their profound, direct, and sometimes biting wisdom, it is the height of insanity to expect different results from our same old behaviors. This lesson seemingly needs to be learned over and over because our educational system and the wider culture practice their own brand of wholesale avoidance and wholesale denial. In that denial they encourage and teach alienation from oneself. It is the alienation from ourselves which in part keeps us from feeling deeply the painfulness of such times as Bill and John spent with their students. It was denial which insulated us from our own feelings and delayed us changing our approach to Bill.

It should not be missed within the narrative that the change in Bill's teaching followed changes in his cooperating teacher and me. Nor should it be missed that his

difficulties forced us to change. This affirms the dialectical nature of relationships mentioned earlier in regard to Joan's learning, which is another of the A.A. teaching points, (actually developed in the Al-anon groups for relatives of alcoholics). The teaching is that when one person in a family begins to change, others very often change too. The truth and dynamic of it lie in the fact of relationship. The system readjusts; it must because the components of the system, be they members of a family, students and teacher in a class, or the balance of trade in the world are in constant relationship. For the system to survive it needs some degree of stability as well as growth. It must seek to redefine and reestablish its own equilibrium, incorporating the changes made. One person coming out of denial or avoidance makes highly problematic and difficult the continued denial of others. As Bill's cooperating teacher and I accepted the pain and frustration we felt, and changed our behavior, Bill changed his. In our present system of schooling, much effort is made to disavow the relationships between students. That is necessary so as to continue the highly competitive, individualistic and pain producing nature of the enterprise.

The disembodied, rationalized and individualistic approach to knowing held sacred by western culture slows down the change process because it ignores or devalues bodily awareness, emotional responses and relationships. It holds

intellectualism, individualism, and independence sacred as well, keeping us more isolated and unaware, unable to read the change indicators quickly, unable to know ourselves.

Being alienated, we are disintegrated from the emotional and cognitive information we need. "Real criticism," Brueggemann (1978) wrote, "begins in the capacity to grieve because that is the most visceral announcement that things are not right" (p. 20). The grieving and the real criticism which it prompts bring the reality of our lives to us and thus help us to begin making the changes needed. Disintegrated living makes criticism and grieving impossible at worst, and delayed or distorted at best. Real grieving gives us the imperative to stop doing that which injures us and others. It is the giving of that criticism which sometimes is most troublesome to me because my own early childhood experience of getting it was so malevolent and destructive. It is love and the honest and humble search for truth which allows me the only path acceptable to giving that sort of criticism. It is love which allows me to take that kind of criticism as well. Love does not erase or prevent the pain, it only makes it bearable.

As Bill's struggle awakened us to the limits of our old ways of helping our student teachers, it became impossible to continue doing what we had always done before. Buber's words, "You shall not withhold yourself" (Buber, 1919/1957, p. 109) imply that we can always be more than what we

presently are if we will let ourselves come forward; that our being is always a becoming if only we will let ourselves grow and accommodate the change which life indicates and demands is needed. New truth for Bill as well as for his cooperating teacher and me depended on not only our openness to ourselves and our inner experience, but also on the relationship between us.

Calling out a loving community in my classroom enables me and my students to know and experience ourselves more fully as well as the results of our actions on others, because we become knowledgeable of and invested in the lives of others. We are encouraged to make sense of our own experiences and to consider and honor the experiences of others. "Truth is found," wrote Palmer (1983), "as we are obedient to a pluralistic truth" (p. 68). I have found that listening and honoring the truth which others hold is next to impossible when I am worried about winning and getting ahead, or perhaps what is more often true, when worried about losing and falling behind. The loving classroom community helps me change the manufactured scarcity which rules our commercialized world view, a view which propels us into competitive living, into dominating those who may be weaker, or complying with those who are stronger. The loving community forms for me and my students another reality: one which is far less threatening, a reality which encourages our

opening to the world and those other truths instead of protecting ourselves from potential humiliation and pain.

Community makes the loneliness and alienation less penetrating, less certain, and gives repeated opportunity for the practice of reconciliation with others and ourselves. It teaches us to gain help when we need it and to give of ourselves to others because we are more open to the needs and the gifts of others. As we become more open to self and others, we are far less defended and consequently more vulnerable. In order to tolerate our increased vulnerability, we literally construct a sense of trust and support through the public risking of what used to be considered our weaknesses. In the relative safety and freedom of community we acknowledge our not knowing, our uncertainty and confusion. We show that we can change our minds and ways of being. Community makes risking and vulnerability far more possible. The trust we must have depends upon our willingness to risk, just as our risking depends on our trusting. It is another dialectic.

Community also encourages our faith in others and ourselves as well as our humility. It is our humility which opens us to the possibility of other truths. It is our faith which allows us to take a stand and say, "this is what I think," while knowing that it is impossible to have all the information we need or want. In that way we are more able to tolerate freedom, to live with increased uncertainty and

openness to change. Education becomes an experiment and a finding out through experience. We begin to hear the views of others with less fear and with less need to defend and deny, knowing that we are still able to hold our own point of view.

Community helps us tolerate the disruptions of those conflicting views. As conflicting positions and strong emotions are expressed, lived through, resolved and sometimes not, the strength of our community increases. Gradually we find that conflict need not be avoided. Communities -- be they couples, families, or classrooms -- are bounded by the width and depth of their ability to have, accept, and tolerate their conflicts of differing positions and differing solutions. Weathering those times and building trust result in a decreased need for security, so that our adventurous search for truth, for knowing ourselves and others, and being in honest relationship becomes more prominent. The freedom to hold one's own view, to stand one's ground, to be different and still be accepted, to still feel welcomed, and to welcome others though they are different, becomes a true security not based in compliance to or power over others, but rather one based in the search for truth. In Huebner's (1984) language, we have learned to make the "stranger within and without" welcome.

Clear Example

My last 381 class for the semester began with my invitation to all of us to make explicit and place "on the table" our experiences which led up to and followed my walking out of class after discovering that half of them had not done the assigned reading of "The Grand Inquisitor" (Dostoyevsky, 1958). The underlying and directing ethics involved here were of prizing relationship, and knowing that mutual respect, openness to possibility, effort toward understanding, and the validity of differing points of view formed essential qualities in loving relationships. What was at stake was our honest relationships; what was at risk was our continued passionate communal expression. What was available and ready was our retreat to some habituated student-slash-teacher, school-normed postures. The ethics of struggled-for intimacy or denial, avoidance, and alienation-as-usual beckoned.

The invitation tendered, some students spoke of their guilt, their pain, their worry. Others spoke of my "strategy," my "disappointment" and my "vulnerability." My strategy, according to some, was less than appropriate. My vulnerability, according to others, was too risky. One had even theorized that my exit from class was preceded by my exit earlier that morning from the proverbial "wrong side of the bed." We were struggling with critique, grappling with our personal knowing and hearing each others' positions. Some were tentative, afraid of where the discussion might lead, but all seemed willing to venture forward in an effort to understand. The critical elements of critique, openness, mutual respect, validity of various viewpoints, and search for truth were in process and community was in progress. Our history of caring for each other made the discomforting search for truth possible.

For my part I spoke of my uncertainty, fearfulness, disappointment and NO strategy. I related that the major concern after my "walk" was that we would, as a class, be mostly left with a sour taste in our mouths after struggling so hard over the semester to build the living community we had accomplished. My faith about our relationships, as it almost always is, was uncertain. As to vulnerability, I held it was essential in any loving relationship. My walkout was not strategy; rather, it was a manifestation of boundaries I

> wished to maintain and evidence of the passion of my promise to me and my covenant with them.
>
> And in a moment of bridging insight, I understood (and then, what was most important, shared with them) that the child I had been from age seven to fourteen, the child who had been publicly humiliated weekly, or who had lived in terror of that humiliation, who at that time, at that age was unable to say "I will not accept this," who could not walk out, was honored and redeemed when on Tuesday I did, when I drew the line and stood my ground. While as a child I adopted a "strategy" of emotional concealment as my option for survival, now as an adult I had other options. As pain-filled and uncertain as it was, the dignity gained through the making of that freedom, albeit infused with doubt, was what enabled me now to critique with them, to entertain their views, continue to hold onto my own, and move on. Neither they nor I required that false harmony and pretense necessary in the practice of avoidance. We were able to live with who we had been, what we had done, and who we now were.
>
> And then it was ostensibly over. That is, it was part of our history together, our being together in the world. Conflict begets growth as frequently it must and does; and mutual understanding and acceptance of our humanity bound us even more tightly within the boundaries of our community where being our selves is an essential freedom that yields pleasure as well as pain, where our courageous and risky act of critique and responsibility led to our reconciliation. We had accepted our differences and demanded only an honest and humble search for our truths. The fact of our being in community made the fact of our holding conflicting truths acceptable.

To me this classroom experience is a clear example of Dewey's (1916) concern for the school community struggling with real and present problems of concern to that community. The reasoned listening, the consideration of all points of view, the open airing of differences are uses of his concept of "social intelligence" (p. 72). It was indeed an unexpected lesson and new truth for many of us. It came out

of important conflict between us and was lived through because of our history of care and compassion and our learning to openly speak our minds. It marked a significant risk and significant growth in our relationships. It was an important learning about the necessity of boundaries and the searching for truth.

The problem of boundaries is critical in teaching. Boundaries maintained by the teacher make possible the search for truth, and the respect for the plurality of truths which exist in any classroom. Palmer (1983) stated:

> To teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced. . . . A learning space has three characteristics, openness, boundaries and air of hospitality. . . . The openness of the space is created by the firmness of its boundaries. (pp. 69,71-72)

Bill's initial problem with boundaries made it impossible for his class to enjoy and practice learning; it made impossible their "obedience to truth" (Palmer, 1983, p. 69). My willingness to maintain and stand by the boundaries of mutual effort and honest discussion, an openness to that "plurality of truth" (Palmer, 1983), led to the growth and resolution of our class conflict. Boundaries, so it seems, may be another way of languaging those demands and painful criticisms which trouble me in teaching. In such circumstances and in such caring fashion, boundaries and criticism are an essential part of "proper authority" and may be viewed as acts of love.

That view notwithstanding, the unending problem for me in prophetic teaching is how to criticize within the uncertainty of my particular truth and live with the pain which often accompanies speaking that truth. Of the prophet, Heschel (1962) has said that "His images must not shine, they must burn" (p. 7). He has also said that "there is no redemption without affliction" (1962, p. 88). I have lived with (do live with) those images which burn and with an enduring sense of affliction. Criticism and affliction do not always come from true prophets intent on making justice and making one whole. Criticism can damage and destroy as well as it can enlighten and direct. Criticism can serve truth. It can serve arrogance just as well.

The authority, the boundaries, and our criticism can slide into coercion, dogma, and rigidity. How to avoid that human propensity to control others unjustly is an ongoing dilemma for teachers. Humility and honesty are two means which form part of the boundaries and must accompany our classroom struggle to promote the search for truth, and to serve the cause of justice. And courage, nurtured by the over-arching vision of a community striving to lovingly pursue truth and fed by courageous acts within that community, must also prevail. Courage helps us face ourselves, examine ourselves, and make those admissions and amends which become necessary.

Thus, one needs both that humility which makes possible our welcoming of the stranger and our openness to change, and the critical consciousness by which we maintain our vigilance. One needs also to maintain a constant place for constant doubt. While holding to one's vision and means, one must hold to a doubt which both comes from and allows for an ethic of humility. The "absolute commitment and infinite suspicion" (Welch, 1985, p. 91) which Sharon Welch believes we must employ in our lives pertains especially to our own position, our own acts. "There is," as Brueggemann (1978) maintained, "no un-anquished way out,. . . our ministry [our prophetic teaching] will always be practiced through our own conflicted selves" (p. 112). Doubt than is painful as well as it is essential. Our humility which lives and gives rise to doubt, like the affliction necessary for redemption, must accompany us in our journey and wandering in the desert. And while Heschel (1973) rightly believed that "it is impossible to find truth without being in love," (p. 45), I believe it is impossible to be in love without being humble.

The idea of a learning community humbly loving its members into finding truth seems an extraordinary way of being a teacher and of being with my students. Through it the uniqueness of the students and myself is honored while at the same time we forge the community which is essential to our finding truth. In that new way of being in the learning space of the classroom we open ourselves more fully to the

world; in that way our family is extended, and in that way we build a whole new reality. Community encourages the reconstruction of our experience of ourselves as the community itself is constructed. In doing that we are making education. In doing that we are making love.

Why a Spiritual Language

Being spiritual requires spiritual language because language brings us consciously to the world. It is language which directs our attention and informs our knowing of the world. Spiritual language lifts up the possibility of being a loving community and illuminates for its members the problems when we are not. Spiritual language, like love, changes our way of making meaning and seeing reality. It is critical to creating community because it is involves our full reintegrated selves, which must take the place of our fractured intra- and interpersonal relationships. This fracturing is encouraged and mandated by present ways of teaching which often deny and falsify our experiencing of the world. Individually and collectively we only partially exist without the spirituality of our lives fully expressed and fully directing how we are in the world. "Our current crisis," Purpel (1989) has written, "is a crisis in meaning . . . and it is the function of religious and moral language to provide the essential dimension of education - the language of meaning" (p. 27).

The pendulum's swing away from unquestioned obedience to the supposed source of spiritual being, the oppressive authority of the Christian Church, has swung too far, to an often unbridled individualism, opening the door for capitalism's new kind of hierarchical control. Of individualism, Merton had this to say:

> Individualism is nothing but the social atomism that has led to our present inertia, passivism and spiritual decay . . . This individualism, primarily an economic concept with a pseudospiritual and moral facade, is in fact mere irresponsibility. It is and always has been not an affirmation of genuine human values but a flight from the obligations from which these values are inseparable. And first of all it is a flight from the obligation to love. (in Del Prete, 1990, p. 53)

In our time office towers replace church offices, and expensive suits, power shoulder dresses, stock options and Rolex watches replace the incense and vestments of church power. In the teaching profession degrees earned, papers given, and books written replace the color and shape of the cleric's hat and the Bishop's ring. In the nations's classrooms, more often than not, the intended or unintended prizing of individualism and competitiveness is destructive of mutual care and mutual regard. The culture fosters Joan's view that it doesn't matter to her learning whether she knows her classmates.

The argument for the inclusion of a spiritual language is then an argument for regaining the true spiritual aspect of our lives. It is an argument for wholeness. It is an

argument for another measure of living our lives beyond the efficiency ethic, the competitive mode, and the accumulative process. Spiritual language provides critique against which to measure those capitalistic ways of being in the classroom which make most difficult the loving of one another, our compassioned relatedness, and thus our finding of truth.

It focuses us on our obligation to do God's work in the world, to make justice, to have compassion, to search for truth, to struggle for freedom for all life, to respect all of life. It is a joining force, directing one's vision and one's acts in a holy endeavor, reminding us of in whose image we are made and of the task we have been given. In Merton's language, "What we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are" (in Del Prete, 1990, p. 54).

If spiritual language reminds us of the obligation to love, care for, to have compassion, and to make justice, then to absent that language from our classrooms and our relations with our students leaves those actions and aims potentially absent as well. To encourage students to see one another as children of God and related instead of competitors for the prizes they want for themselves helps to change our way of being in the world. To see and call education a hallowed path, as Buber did (1950), is to change the reasons for study and the ways in which we come together.

Here is the language of Chief Seattle, who in 1854, when signing a treaty over the transfer of ancestral lands to the federal government, said:

> If we sell you the land you must remember that it is sacred, and you must teach your children that it is sacred . . . the water's murmur is the voice of my father's father. . . . I have seen a thousand rotting buffalos on the prairie, left by the white man. . . . I am a savage and do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive. . . . What is man without the beast? For whatever happens to beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected. . . . This we know. The earth does not belong to man: man belongs to the earth. (in Soelle, 1984, pp. 17,20)

Imagine our speaking such a language. Imagine the creation of Seattle's way of naming and seeing the world when we teach history, geography, science, English, or economics. Imagine especially, such a language and such a view when we educate our future teachers. Consider how that language might make highly visible and equally unacceptable the currently accepted way of viewing and using the earth and of using one another. Such a language and view could change significantly not only how we do business, but what business we allow ourselves to do.

There is not of course, a monolithic spiritual language, nor a singular way of interpreting and using that language. The differences between Pat Robertson's and Patrick Buchanan's understandings and expression of being spiritual and those of Jimmy Carter and Daniel Berrigan are enormous.

Presidential election politics has recently shown us that it is possible to use language (like education) to divide groups of people and to foster hierarchy. That is not the sort of spiritual language I have in mind.

Spiritual language describes and informs that aspect of our humanity which refers and directs us to our relatedness, our interconnectedness with all life. It demands our humility. It is a way, like Chief Seattle's way, of reverently seeing ourselves and all others as kin, related and relevant. It repositions humankind into the world responsible for and engaged to all life, and doing so invites our humility, our sense of proportion and obligation. It answers Cain's enormous question to God and his wish for denial of responsibility: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9), with a resounding "Yes"!

The inclusion of such language and emphasis in teaching gives place for the prophetic quality necessary to critique our practice and our relationships to others. Right relationships with others, with ideas, with all of life is a spiritual relationship, inclusive of our acceptances and demands, our humility and faith, our love, and when necessary our outrage. We are obligated to hear the call and obey the command to make justice. As teachers, we are just as obligated to call to others. Heschel (1966) wrote:

> The cardinal sin of our educational philosophy is that we have asked too little. We prepare the pupil for

> employment, for holding a job. We do not teach him how to be a person, how to resist conformity, how to grow inwardly, how to say no to his own self. (p. 45)

Palmer (1983) said that "seldom do we live up to the truth that we are given. But that does not mean that we must cease speaking that truth" (p. 105). Here then are truths spoken by two of my students in our last class of the semester. It is the same class in which we struggled to critique my "walk." Here is the sacred fruit of a new knowledge and a loving truth of community making. It is born from contending with our conflicts, from struggling with uncertainty and making freedom, from building both boundaries and relationships, from confronting one another as best and honestly as we are able, from wrestling with that essential problem of criticism and from living with our essential doubts. Listen to the use of spiritual language. Listen to the relationships which they prize, their sense of self, and their part in our community. Listen to their reverence for life. These are the voices of two of Joan's classmates. For Tara, it was difficult to speak in our class, for she is shy and softly spoken, but here are the words which she spoke to all of us.

> In this class I have learned more about myself and about relationships between myself and others and about humanity. This is a class about life; it's seeing the emotions and feelings of other humans in relation to yourself. It's about breaking through the pretense and the walls people put up to see what's really there, and

> sharing your beliefs openly while accepting the beliefs of others. (Marsh, 1992)

In contrast to Tara, Sally came into our class bold and accomplished at speaking in a strong and impassioned voice.

> In this class I have expanded my capabilities of understanding. I've learned to bite my tongue and open my ears. I learned that if I let my guard down it was O.K., I might learn about human feelings, and learn to listen to others' views and not just my own. I've seen everyone in the same boat. I didn't feel as alone anymore. (Terry, 1992)

Palmer (1983) wrote that "a person can only be a person in community" (p. 57). Making a loving community requires an intimacy and honesty with my students which is often difficult; so too, is the ongoing critique which is also essential. The alternative -- the prevailing consciousness of a dispassioned, disconnected school-as-usual -- is unacceptable. The desert is so much more passable when those students with whom I travel bring forth such magnificent ways of being as these students have done.

Heschel (1966) is right, there are indeed, "more marvels hidden in the soul of man [and woman] then we are able to imagine," and it is altogether true that they "will act if . . . inspired; will respond if called upon" (p. 51). Heschel is right, and my students are his clear witnesses. As teachers it is for us to make that call. As teachers it is our call, and it is our students' response that can bring

"God into the world" (Buber, 1950). But that is too one-sided.

In truth it is that students and teachers witness and call to each other. We call to one another. We bring from each other answers of the spirit. And in doing so the presence of spiritual community is made live in the classroom and our education is made holy.

CHAPTER III

MOMENTS IN THE PROMISED LAND AND ELSEWHERE: WHAT DO THE SCOUTS REPORT?

In the Exodus account only two scouts, Caleb and Joshua, returned from a reconnaissance of the promised land with favorable reports about the Hebrew childrens prospects. Caleb said, "Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are able to overcome it" (Numbers 13:30). The ten other scouts urged a return to Egypt, and spoke of dangers too great to overcome:

> it is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. . . . And there we saw giants. . . . and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight (Numbers 13:32,33).

Are we not all, to some extent in our lives in general and our teaching lives in particular, in and out of the promised land, back and forth between the desert and Canaan? Do we not all feel at times as if we are "grasshoppers" confronting "giants," as if we are the scouts with hope as well as those without?

Like the wandering Hebrew children, a generation has to die before we are able to enter into the promised land. Parts of ourselves as teachers have to be given up, turned around, or abandoned if we are to make sense of the living of

our teaching lives, and if we are to develop the aims and live the means we set for ourselves. From what our collective histories tell us, it is likely that the giving up, turning around, and abandoning must continue throughout our lives. We must maintain a constant vigil.

We bring to our classrooms all those conflicts, uncertainties, defenses, hopes, and histories born out of our life-long larger efforts to grow and develop our own personhood, our own place in and with the world. Each of us contends with tensions of freedom and order, individual and community, acceptance and demand. That contention takes place outside in the larger community and in our own families, just as it must in our classrooms, just as it must within ourselves. Ambivalence and ambiguity are the concomitants to the insecurity attendant in our human freedom. Only human beings pretending to be machines can pretend to abide without doubt and live in certainty. The rest of us must knowingly wander, struggle, and live our lives in and out of the promised land.

This chapter explores the lives of several teachers who are known to be paying close attention to the community of learners they are creating in their classrooms. Those teachers are our hope-filled scouts whose voices need hearing. But as we shall see, they each share a full measure of that doubt which both encourages their freedom to explore and question, and results from their attempting to live new

answers. They are also the scouts who sometimes see themselves as grasshoppers. Their hopes and ways of being with themselves and their students need proclamation. So too does the humility which opens them to uncertainty as well as to the possibility of necessary change.

In paying heed to their stories of struggle, we may receive both comfort and inspiration. Listening may also cause us some discomfort and disturbance as significant learning often must. Their teaching lives may both affirm and criticize our own lives and teaching practices. Their stories may give us pangs of uncertainty and new challenge, as well as moments in which to rejoice for the mutuality of our humanity and our shared vision. For teachers committed to community making, like all of humanity, are rarely "all of one piece" (Buber, 1950, p. 22). Rarely are they completely consistent and focused on their vision. Rarely are they able to completely "live the truth which (they) are given" (Palmer, 1983, p. 105).

In talking with these teachers about their lives, I have wanted to hear articulated the vision which informs their teaching: where it came from, what it was based on, and how it evolved? I especially wanted to know of their own particular encounters with competing tensions and claims on their teaching practice. I asked about the inner struggles and the conflicts in which they lived.

I have not sought to focus on the outside systemic pitfalls although those are certainly substantial forces which press against all teachers. Rather, it is the inner conflict which most interests me because it is within ourselves and our wrestling with our inner struggles that each of us can be most affected and effective. It is also to our inner conflicts that each of us can be most blind and make use of protective denial. It is those inner conflicts, unresolved histories, and tensions which we carry into all our encounters, regardless of the outside environment. It is the environment -- our students, the system, the mandated curriculum, the cultural press -- that brings forth our conflicts, that stimulates us and gives constant moments for us to create new ways to solve old dilemmas being reenacted in the present. So too do those same moments give opportunity for us to continue in our oppression of ourselves and others.

Perhaps then, all of us who are teachers have within those courageous scouts of favorable report as well as those scouts fearful and longing for a return to the oppressive safety and bondage of Egypt. Each of us can desire the knownness of slavery rather than the doubts of freedom. Each of us is both the desert and the promised land, the faith-filled and the frightened that murmurs against the uncertainty while looking backwards to a known Egypt.

What I desire is that these stories may give us courage, insight, and a certain recognition that "hope (surely) does lie within the struggle" (Soelle, 1984, p. 161). It is true, as David Purpel (1989) maintains, that courage does come from our vision. It is also true that each of us can feel desperately alone and unsure while in pursuit of that vision. The openness of these teachers can form for us some moments of reconciliation: some moments of knowing that in our own struggle to create teaching lives that are meaning-filled we are together with others. As my young student, Sally Terry (1992) said, we can find out that "we are not so alone anymore, that we are all in the same boat."

Eyes That Do Not See And Ears That Do Not Hear

There are some inherent difficulties in any attempt to listen and try to understand other teachers, other human beings. First, it is impossible for me to hear them describe their teaching lives without juxtaposing my own experience alongside and onto their descriptions. Seeing is always contaminated with the image one expects or wishes to see. "Concept" as Pierce (1988) said, "guides our precept," and "the way we represent the world arises from our whole social fabric" (p. 6). It is not exactly that the world we see is a reflection of ourselves or a projection, but it is clear to me that any "seeing" we do is tempered by the socialized eyes that do the looking. What I choose to view I may in part

have already judged. What naming I attach comes from other experiences, other names fitting (perhaps) for those other experiences. Heschel (1962) wrote that "conventional seeing, operating as it does with patterns and coherences, is a way of seeing the present in the past tense" (p. x).

The comparison of myself with these other teachers is necessary. Comparison not only may preclude more accurate seeing, it also makes possible the understanding I am able to construct through the context or reference point of my own teaching life. Having a reference point (a context) is essential for me to know just as it is paradoxically also an impediment to my new knowing. Like language, my own prior experience provides both an enabling point of beginning as well as a potential limitation on present experience.

At times the other teachers had constructed what seemed (and may in fact be) better solutions. In some situations they had more advanced practices, greater ease and less problematic teaching lives. It was not always a comfort to listen to their particular resolutions (e.g.: "I used to be that way. . . ") while knowing I still toiled against the same problems. Listening to others requires humility if one is to truly hear, and if one is to avoid the poison of envy.

The essential dialectic of knowing self through meeting and knowing others is seminal and potent as a means of making meaning of not only their worlds, but my own as well. My occasional languaging of their acts, (e.g. "You lost faith?")

was at times the exact meaning which they were trying to grasp as they endeavored to put into language an uncertain experience. At other times I was far from the mark. Learning is often the coming to language of that which we tacitly know. Acquiring language we come to greater consciousness. Both their concurrences with my offerings of language, and their refusals brought opportunity for us to know self and other more fully. Only now do I wonder what would have come from my silence!

Heschel (1962) has said:

> What impairs our sight are habits of seeing as well as the mental concomitants of seeing. Our sight is suffused with knowing, instead of feeling painfully the lack of knowing what we see. The principle to be kept in mind is to know what we see rather than to see what we know. (p. xii)

In that regard there are points, I am certain, which have been left unrecognized and others which have been de-emphasized, not only because they seem less important, but also because they are lethal. They are destructive of my own hard won view of life. Sometimes I am simply not ready to "know more than I can say" (Shapiro, personal communication, April 5, 1992). So, like Heschel, (1962) "I have long since become wary of (my own) impartiality" (p. xii).

Heschel (1962) also wrote that "we must forget many cliches in order to behold a single image" (p. xii). In Palmer's language (1983) that is the humility of our

emotional and intellectual openness: in Huebner's (1984) it is our "welcoming of the stranger within and without" (p. 117).

In talking with these teachers there were moments when we were noisily engaged in a covering and busy chatter; there were also precious moments of silence, of listening to our insides and then speaking into our mutual accord. There were indeed those times of essential humility, which made possible our truly hearing each other's attempt to carefully articulate the vision and tell of the ongoing struggle to live that vision. At the best of our moments together there was a wonderful laughter at our own repeated teaching ineptness. There was laughter too at the irony of being stuck in conundrums of our own making. And there was for all of us the anguish that comes from not knowing "how" to make our classroom vision happen.

One teacher unknowingly quoted St. Francis as he told of a recently found principle from reading a recently published leadership book that instructed him to "seek first to understand rather than to be understood." Another teacher honestly and painfully confronted the possibility that his own passionate expression of his particular truths intimidated his students and made the passionate expression of their truths all the more difficult. Together we wondered if his own way of being in the classroom was what most prevented the enactment of his passionately hoped for vision.

I am well aware of that very same disturbing question in my own practice. And especially, there was the tearful and profound recognition by one of the teachers that above all else her teaching is a holy endeavor to love her students. The very process of listening to and being with these other teachers was full of that search and wandering. Gratefully, there were indeed times of our forgetting of "many cliches" (Heschel, 1962, p. xi). In themselves, by themselves, the conversations were just like our teaching. They were truly a matter of our being in and out of the promised land.

Sam

Sam (a pseudonym) is in his early forties and currently serves as an assistant principal of a large middle school. Prior to that appointment he was a public school music teacher and band director for ten years. The evolution of his vision for teaching and his practice has had its share of unusual twists. After an initial focus on building community and prizing relationships he gives way to an emphasis on getting the job done at whatever costs.

> It's a very odd progression actually. I think when I first got out of school I was very, as you would say, community and relationship oriented with my classes. It was important to me that the kids felt like they had a place, that they were respected, and that their contribution was desirable. I felt that I could get the best out of the kids from the standpoint of building musicianship and generally becoming knowledgeable in music if I worked from the standpoint of building self-

> esteem and doing the things that we all hear are appropriate for helping kids do well.

Sam kept to that approach and way of being in the classroom until after he had received his master's degree and became director of the band in the very same high school from which he was graduated. In accepting that position he stepped into a world filled with legacy, old memories, and great pressures to produce. That change directed his own teaching in a far different manner. It called out of Sam other ways of being with his students.

> I went back to grad school, got out and went to high school teaching. I don't know if it was the age of the child, or if it was something in me changing. I suspect it was a little of both. Maybe even more than those two factors it might have been I had taken the directorship of a well-known, well respected program. He (Sam's former band master) had a reputation of excellence from way back, and I began to feel some pressure to produce for the larger community, not just for my kids in the classroom. I began to value the relationship part of it all less. Let's produce! Let's get on with it! Let's do whatever it takes to get the result we want!

Sam does that sort of "producing" for several years, adding to the string of "superior" band ratings and running that string up to almost 30 consecutive years! He is living in the shadow of his bandmaster, standing on "the very same podium," and has taken on those very same methods of tyranny, control, and "success by whatever it takes" that were used on him.

> After two or three years of feeling that way, I began to see so much of my own high school band director in me . . . the tyrant . . . You know it's the mission at all costs. And there's none of the personal part of this important to him. I began to see some of that in myself and did not like it at all . . .

Looking back now he is able to identify some of what happened to him. I ask if he has "a name for what was happening to him then?"

> Yeah I do, now. Ego. Trying to look good in front of someone else's eyes and my own eyes too. Going about it in all the wrong ways and not realizing that it's not just you, but you're also part of something much bigger. That there's another way to serve that larger community than building up your self and doing it at the expense of a lot of other people.

I ask Sam if that tight control is a product of being afraid, of fear?

> Yes in a sense. The fear part does play into it because if you don't do what you perceive the larger community expects or the professionals or your colleagues expect than you will lose respect in their eyes. . . . It's more like keeping my head above water, keeping myself from being shamed or humiliated, of not living up to others' expectations.

Shame and humiliation are part of the language children of alcoholics and abused children often use to describe the prevailing feelings of their growing-up years. In that regard, the language coincided with Sam's personal history.

Eventually he recognizes that he has abandoned his preferred inner sense of direction. Gradually, over the course of several years, he is able to let go of both the

fear as well as the overly controlling behavior which was a product of his fear. He is able to envision another way of being a teacher. In talking about making those changes he articulates some important wisdom about the struggle to change our habituated ways of being.

> I did get rid of it, but not then . . . You know when anyone recognizes something about themselves they'd like to change there's a period of recognition . . . relative immobilization, when you figure out how you're going to do it. And that was a several years period. I didn't like the way it was but felt powerless to change it. Then, finally as I say, after the string was broken and . . . the ghost of my former band master didn't come out of the grave to take me away, that's when I really began to realize that my mission was in serving what I knew to be good and right and at the same time it was letting go of a lot of the control.

Then, in a telling realization, one which clearly reminds me of what the A.A. and Al-anon people tell us about giving up old behaviors, and what I learned again in helping the student teacher who needed to take stronger controls, Sam says quite specifically:

> I had to see enough pain and things not working before I decided this can't go on, this has got to stop . . . something has to give here.

Over the years that follow, Sam is able to enact his more humane vision in a variety of ways.

> You're not teaching for other people. Now you can teach for yourself and do the things you know to be valuable. (Things) which sometimes are in conflict with those things you got to do to get those superiors year after year. Every six weeks I had a one-on-one conference

> with every kid, and we're talking about a 100-plus group! But that was important to me. It was our setting down, just as you and I are doing now, and the kid really self-assesses. And it was dialoguing. I'd say, "what do you think you should get," and they'd figure it out. They'd be responsible for it. I would tell them "this is your grade, your evaluation, don't put this on me. I will help you assess yourself if you need help."

Sam's enthusiasm is wonderful as he talks about this time in his teaching. For me he is talking about the concept of community, the importance of relationships of equality, of respect for and faith in others.

> It worked very well. I loved it and for the first time in my life I felt like the right kind of thing was happening. And again it wasn't the grades or whatever, it was the fact that here I was as a coach, a teacher, a helper, an assistant to their progress, to their desires, to what they wanted from band. It wasn't like I'm the boss, you're the worker anymore. It was almost like a collegial atmosphere.

I ask him to describe a specific time when his vision seemed to happen.

> Well it was a performance and we didn't think we were going to do very well. It was a concert in the spring. There had been a lot of interruptions, lots of illnesses. But about three days before something electric happened to everybody, myself included. The rehearsals were fantastic, the concert went great. You could not have predicted it would happen. It was something exceptional. Everybody went beyond themselves in order to pull this off. Because we were all in it together, it was ok. It was somehow not selfish, not egotistical, but rather something very transcendental. That was one of the most spiritual episodes. It was producing and feeling, it was altogether ineffable. You couldn't talk about it, it was the most musical . . . across the board. It's something that happened because

> somehow everybody got on the same wave length, the many became one.

Sam now sounds almost exactly like my student Sally Terry when she said, "we were all in it together." His language of "transcendental," and "ineffable," and "the many became one," has for me a far different quality and origin. For me he has incorporated a spiritual language.

Sam now has administrative responsibilities and in talking about those challenges and problems, and about his vision for the total school community he tells me:

> It's a place where people are free to follow a combination of their own interests with what others believe is important as well. It is a two way sort of thing. It's a classroom where there's a lot of discovery method going on, there's a lot of projects which are personally meaningful to the person. It's not a lock step procedure at all, although it could involve some of that. Sometimes I think with children, sometimes they become egotistical, egocentric. There does need to be a sort of catcher in the rye, pulling them back saying "ok, as a group . . ."

In my language, Sam is now describing that essential "proper authority" which makes both freedom and responsibility possible and which is necessary to any community. He is talking about the balanced and judicious use of freedom and order. He is also describing Dewey's approach to learning as well. Then, in another of those moments which connote for me the spiritual view of education, he says as perhaps Merton or Buber might also say:

> When I am doing something that makes me feel good it's also doing something for other people, it's helping other people . . . building relations. It's a more service oriented approach to life. I do believe that everyone comes to this world with some sort of mission. If you're lucky you'll find it, and the best teachers are those that help their students find that mission. They are helping the child realize who they already are and realizing their best self and their own talents, their own abilities . . .

Then unknowingly, in a wonderfully genuine way, he paraphrases Palmer's (1983) concept of humility and faith by saying:

> You've got to be willing to risk a lot of yourself, your own ideas. You've got to be willing to say, "I could be wrong about this, but here's what I think. What do you think?"

Later I ask him if there is a repeated area of his teaching and administrative practice which is problematic for him. He says;

> I guess when the old ego thing gets involved. When I feel like someone's actions, however well intended could end up embarrassing me personally . . . in weaker moments when you feel more vulnerable, that's a time I would do it. I am desirous of them learning and growing from their mistakes, and if I tell them what I think is right or wrong all the time they won't learn. So I've got to be willing to take some heat sometimes from parents or outside groups who say our teachers have done something wrong, when in fact the teacher may have felt very right about doing it . . . And if I fall down it's when I doubt myself, or when I doubt their ability to self-correct.

And taking from my own familiar spiritual language the concept of faith, I ask, "Do you mean you lose faith?" And Sam answers:

> That's right. I lose faith, it's like that.

I ask Sam to articulate both his vision about administration and what seems to guide him, what principles he attempts to hold himself to.

> I think a young staff is exactly who you need to start giving some responsibility to right off, right off. . . . And letting things look a bit of a mess for a while, and taking some heat, catching some heat from the central office. If they're expecting some instant results, I'd say "Hey, it took a lot longer than one year for the school to get in this condition, it's going to take me longer to get it out!" But when it is out you're going to have a staff that you won't believe. It's going to be a learning organization. It's going to be a community, they're going to be very competent at what they do and . . . you know very professional because I'm not going to dictate to them. We're going to discuss, we're going to take time, we're going to build a community here.

Then in a wonderful moment of humility and innocence, Sam echoes St. Francis without knowing he is doing so.

> When I'm talking with teachers about curriculum matters, it's more of a negotiation, more of a "help me understand, help me understand this situation better." In fact I've begun just in the last year, after reading Steven Covey's <u>Principle Centered Leadership</u>, to tell myself . . . "seek first to understand before being understood."

When I mentioned to Sam that he had just quoted St. Francis, he characteristically quipped, "Oh well, I guess

there isn't anything really new under the sun, is there." Then I asked if him whether he had a spiritual component to his teaching and administrative practices?

> Yeah, I think there is. The spirituality part of it comes into the mission thing. Many people believe we come onto the earth, we live our lives accidentally, and we die and that's it. I don't know about after life and all that, I'm a Christian, but that's open to many interpretations. Maybe we're living our heaven as we live our life here. When I finally decided to really let go of the authoritarian thing with kids and my faculty, I began to see those people as fellow journeyers.

While for the most part Sam's views are pragmatic in the very best sense of that outlook, I find them equally underscored with a strong spiritual basis. His use and view of the concept of mission, his concurrence with my language of "faith" and "humility" at particular junctions of our conversation, the emphasis on relationship and community formation, the sense that we are all "journeyers" all suggest to me that had he read St. Francis, or Heschel, or Palmer, or Chief Seattle, instead of Covey, his vision and practice would not be appreciably different.

Seeing these similarities, I wonder if the spirituality which I embrace is another way of languaging those essential humanistic values and practices which others espouse without religious and spiritual references. It is more likely that the humanistic view has taken the most humane and loving ways of being in the world from older religious and spiritual

teachings. And so, I am reminded, as Buber (1950) believed, that there are many ways to God, that all paths can be hallowed.

Bernie

While Sam's educational life has evolved from teaching into administration, Bernie is a teacher who plans to continue in that practice. He tells me:

> I can't imagine ever leaving teaching unless it was to go to a third world country, (to teach!) and then only after my own children have finished college.

Given that he is about to reluctantly be a father again, he has by his own formula at least another 21 years of teaching to go.

Bernie is a high school teacher of social studies, now serving as department chair in a large, highly regarded independent school. He has been teaching for 13 years and is in his mid-thirties, married with three children. Two of his children attend the lower-school division of the school in where he teaches. Bernie and I taught together for about four years.

In our conversation he immediately focuses on what for him is described as a question of "how much do we want kids to do, and how much do we want them to think? Do we require them to read books, or give them books to read?"

> There are times, I think, when I need to give homework so that the kids can have disciplined habits, so we can cover the material, and go through the curriculum. And other parts of me want to say, "here's a bunch of books, there's no established homework for the next three weeks. Why don't you just read . . . open yourselves up . . . read for pleasure . . .

The mixture of elements of cultural transmission, freedom of inquiry, personal interest, and control or teacher established order are all evident in this quandary. That conflict also is evident in his experience with his son's education.

> I look at my own second grader, David, and he's in a classroom now that is extremely structured, and very difficult for him. He gets very high marks at school for being well behaved, for being in the right place in line, for having a nice neat desk. And he comes home and lets off steam and goes nuts! . . . Why do they have them stand in line, in numbers? Every kid has a specific number. They have to stand in that order? They go to P.E. and have to march in that order.

Bernie recognizes that freedom and order are dependent on, as he says, "what grade I'm teaching," and that "there are things I would do with ninth graders that I wouldn't do with seniors." He recognizes that freedom requires some order. Then I ask him about his vision, about "how you want your classroom to be."

> In my classroom I want to be myself as much as I can. (I want to) provide an atmosphere I am comfortable with more so than provide an atmosphere that students are comfortable with. I can't worry about what they are going to like. Some are going to like to sit in rows, some to raise their hands, to be called upon, some are going to like very structured kinds of classrooms, some are going to want open discussion, free flow of ideas.

> I can't worry about what fifteen kids want because they are not all going to want the same thing. Maybe it's selfish but I want a classroom that I'm comfortable in. I want a classroom the way I like it, four or five times a day, five days a week.

As he talks, I am reminded of the differing facts of public school teaching and independent school teaching. There are no doubt many public school teachers who would love to have the dilemma that Bernie has: of making an environment where they feel comfortable with only 15 students. I am also reminded that teaching can be, often is, a very isolating experience. In my experience, teachers typically do not talk with one another about their vision of teaching and their struggles beyond or below the level of "how shall we control." Bernie has a vision and thirst for a way of being in his classes that is not part of the usual discourse.

Equality between people and critical analysis of <u>all</u> ideas is not in the conversation of faculty meetings because it would seriously challenge the practices of school as usual; especially it would challenge the existing hierarchy of teachers and administration. Struggles between freedom and order which open out to issues of equality can not be talked about if present practices are to be maintained. That lack of discourse is painfully evident, and contributes to his frustration, as does his desire to have meaningful contact in his classes.

> What I'm comfortable with is I don't like rows, it's almost like hierarchy, cause you hear about kids in the back and kids in the front row sitting according to achievement levels (or achieving according to where they sit). I want to have everyone see each other's face so you can have dialogue. I don't want it to be teacher centered, although it typically is because they are responding to my questions much more so than to each others . . . I want conversation, not everybody writing down what I say. I would much prefer to have them read and we talk about it.

Then he specifically describes a class where perhaps his students' socialization and resistances coupled with his own lack of knowing "how" and that lack of essential dialogue with other teachers who might know or also want to know "how," combine to produce a high degree of frustration. Bernie is unable to enact his vision.

> With the senior class it was a very frustrating semester . . . I had a group of four who wanted nothing to do with that discussion style of classroom. They wanted lecture notes. It must have been four or five times a week, when I would say, "O.K., we just had the presidential debate, what'd you think?" And they'd just sit there. Wait for me to say what I think. And we would just sit there, for a very long time staring at one another. Half of them just wanted to sit there. It was very hard.

Bernie's frustration is clear to me because I have tasted it far more often than I want. Clear in that same fashion is his passionate desire for the engagement of his students and his inability to have that happen as consistently and completely as he wants. But something does happen to those reticent students which partially satisfies Bernie's quest as well as it adds to his frustration.

> By the end of the year something had changed. They had to write a research paper on some topic in the world today. Three of the kids who never said a word all year wrote outstanding papers. And part of me said, "God damn it! These are neat ideas. You're thinking about what's going on . . . if you shared this with us. I would have loved it. I would have loved to hear what you thought . . . And the rest of the kids would have loved it too." A couple of them just smiled and said, "that's not the way I am." So part of me is very pleased. Wow, they <u>are</u> thinking. They are understanding. They are concerned and they have the interest. And the other half of it is it would have been a much better course for me, if they had spoken up.

I suggest to Bernie that one of the aesthetic and moral problems for all teachers is to challenge people's current level of knowing and acting, while at the same time supporting and honoring them. It is the teacher's sensitive mixture of challenge and acceptance which helps students believe they can venture their own ideas and encourages them to open to other possibilities. And as we wonder about that dilemma (as Bernie and I construct the missing discourse), Bernie comes upon the possibility that his own way of being in the classroom may be part of the problem for some of his more silent students.

In that engaged community of learners we both want, we recognize the problem of passionate teaching. If teachers want their students to be passionately and thoughtfully engaged, challenging and expressive in that engagement, then teachers must live those ways of being in the classroom. Doing so sets the boundaries and the stage, establishes the

tone, establishes the ethics of the classroom. It also creates problems. Bernie says:

> That (our present conversation together) made me think that perhaps the reason some kids don't speak up is that I'm too ready to speak myself, or guide and correct them and make them understand. Maybe I'm too used to wanting to treat them as equals, as I would in a faculty discussion.

In further thinking through this dilemma, Bernie reflects on a recent faculty discussion during lunch about "nuking" Saddam Hussein. He relates his own passionate challenge to a colleague. He wonders if that is an example of how he may be affecting his students.

> We had a faculty table in the lunch room and talked about the latest bombing in Iraq, and one of the guys said "We really should have bombed the hell out of them. Just get rid of that damn Saddam: nuke 'em." I said, "Are you serious?" And I really got into it because for me that is the wrong thing to do. What the hell is that? And then I got into the environmental ethics of nuking places. I wanted to respond at that table. I didn't want to let that go.

And then in a moment of critical reflection he says:

> Maybe I do that in class too. I'm too much involved. I'm so invested in the issues we're discussing, so interested in them, that too often, I don't know . . . not preach, but give my views. And therefore kids who are not at my level to articulate as I am or who haven't thought about it as much as me feel overwhelmed.

Bernie and I both realize that the question for sensitive teachers who want to encourage their students to risk sharing their views is not: Do we share our

intellectual power and our passion? The question is, How much of ourselves are we going to let go here, and what are the consequences of doing that? How does that affect the kids in my class when I do that, and what happens when I hold back? Bernie responds with a wonderful searching honesty.

> I want them to have a sense of equality with me. Let's give the pro Clinton, Bush and Perot views here. What's going on, what are the anti-votes? And I would say what I think. Yeah and I guess I'd go back to what you said, If you want to develop passion, you demonstrate passion. I don't know, it could be that there are kids who feel it's dangerous to say what Mr. K. doesn't believe. It could be that there are kids who believe that this is not a class to be pro Bush in.

I say to him:

> That has to be demonstrated. It seems to me we have to clearly show that it's perfectly o.k. to challenge us, to have a really different way to see the world. I think kids really don't believe that. So we have to show them they don't get hurt by disagreeing with us.

This dilemma is not of course settled once and for all by any teacher. It depends on the ability of teachers to carefully construct the ethics of their class, the relationships with their students, and to intuitively sense how to be with them at any given moment. Given the cynical, competitive nature of public debate, teachers have to actually teach students that questioning and challenging each other's views is a matter of learning respect, care, and courage. There are no formulas for the aesthetics of this sort of teaching. There can't be.

The frustration in Bernie's teaching and the pain of those described silences in the classroom leads me to ask him if he thinks there is a natural place for discomfort, uncertainty, frustration and pain in the classroom. I am asking about my own discomfort with making my students uncomfortable. He says:

> Well I think there is some pain in being called upon, not responding, and having silence for a while. I'd like to avoid giving pain to people. I think good things can be accomplished, good things can emerge from pain, suffering and anguish. There are some levels that are accepted, some that are not. The holocaust: some say it taught us to be aware of human suffering. I don't buy that. Humiliation isn't worth it. I don't try to put down kids.

And then as conversations often do, we double back to the question of Bernie's vision. I ask him about having that vision of people sharing, being equal, and much less hierarchy? I ask him where that comes from? What informs that position? How do you know that that's what you want?

> I look at the way I went to high school. We had both sorts of formations: rows, and classes where we sat around a single table, and others where we had upholstered chairs, to lean back (in) and to have discussions. I found I enjoyed both for different times. I wanted to have discussion, share ideas, think thoughts, rather than to work problems and come up with solutions, although there is a challenge to that. But I knew right away . . . I mean I had an 800 in my math SAT and people are saying "that's awesome . . . you need to go into math in college" . . . I have no desire to do that.

About math, I ask him if, "There's an absence of relationship with others?"

> Yeah, and so a future in which I was only reliant upon myself, didn't need anybody else . . . I did not enjoy that prospect at all. I wanted to do reading and thinking . . . a discovery about other people.

I ask Bernie if some of his vision and desire to construct a critically oriented classroom with lots of contact has to do with his own family life.

> I think in the religious faith and training I had (Unitarian) which was don't accept answers as truth unless you come to believe them, and that whole religious expression of freedom of thought and inquiry . . . and there is no credo . . . That religious training had a lot to do with it. And also my mother, who often said, "why do you think that?" "What's the answer?" "Why do you believe that?" She never told me what to believe, always told me to explore it. Yeah I guess a lot of it is in the family. I never felt afraid to speak up or compelled to believe in a certain way, except compelled to believe that every individual has a right to dignity and life.
>
> So I guess if we look at the classroom, I believe that all people have values, that they are equal, have rights and responsibilities.

When he says that, I am reminded of those four silent kids and his frustration and I say:

> I want to go back. One of the dilemmas I have found in my own teaching is the problem of accepting kids where they are and making demands on them to change. You talk about these four kids who don't talk, who are doing brilliant stuff in their heads, and nobody knows about it. Would a dilemma be for you, "Do I just let these people be who they are, or rather, to say in whatever fashion, "You've got to talk?" Would that be a problem for you? Making demands versus accepting people? What

about that and your notion of rights and responsibilities?

He tells me:

> I think if you look at my political views, yes. I do not believe in shunning, ostracism, and if you don't pull your own weight, you don't get. I believe in welfare, assistance of those that have to those who do not. In the classroom, does Zack have a right to sit in class for 180 days and not say a word? On the one hand he must have that right because I didn't kick him out of the class. I allowed him to continue to come, day after day. I continued to give him homework and expected him to do written work. I think as a teacher I have certain responsibilities. . . . Does he have a right to be quiet? Yeah, he has that right. Do I have the right to encourage him to speak up? Yeah, I have that right . . . maybe not a contractual responsibility. But I see it as maybe a moral responsibility, to, as much as I can, seek to get people engaged . . . Let's look at situations, let's consider solutions, lets get involved . . . Because together we can be much more effective than separate . . . Become engaged, don't ignore. Don't walk away.

Bernie is now passionately emphasizing community in the classroom. Then in a telling comment which lays the base for his teaching practice and his attempt to be in the world in a certain fashion, he says:

> I believe in human rights - that all men and women are created equal, that you have a responsibility to one another. I don't have a responsibility for 6 billion others on the planet. It's hard for me to identify in a tangible way. I have a responsibility for those that I come into contact with to try to as much as I can to see that they retain their dignity, their life as much as I can.

Then in a final question I ask: Do you ever think that this is spiritual, that teaching is a spiritual process?

Because it sure as hell doesn't sound like you're embarked on a corporate career path. Bernie says:

> I would say, yeah, I think there is something in me that demands that I do this. That says this is worthwhile, this has great value. Every year you come into contact with a hundred young persons. And after 13 years of teaching you have come into contact with several thousand. You're in touch with people, involved in helping shape ideas, shaping thinking skills, getting kids to respond, trying to validate the way people feel about themselves, trying to make people's lives happy, provide enjoyment, provide interest. I do see it as a calling in that sense. There is very much a part of me that wants to do that, and I think that that is part of the same spiritual need to be engaged with young people.

I mention Heschel (1973) and that he believed "It is impossible to find truth without being in love" (p. 45) Bernie says:

> I believe in a safety net . . . you can struggle and I will not let you be humiliated. I don't think I do a great job at that. I think there are times when there are humiliating remarks made in the classroom and I couldn't launch a preemptive strike. Boom, it gets said. And then the problem is how do I lift that kid up.

And then he says in a manner which John Dewey would heartily endorse, which again speaks powerfully to the essential of his vision of relationships and community:

> There is (for me) love of the classroom. Maybe it's not the love of the classroom, but the love of being with other people and of working together for something.

What seems clear to me in my conversation with Bernie is his passionate commitment to being with his students in

meaningful ways: hence his frustration when that does not appear to be happening. Passion is what fires his teaching of ideas which become acts of human beings in the making of history. His is not an abstract, theoretical approach to history or to current issues. He is engaged in a moral critique tied to moral or immoral acts, and wants that same level of engagement with his students. It is important and essential work, this looking at the world through moral lenses. It is bound to be frustrating given the dominant mode of teaching that his students encounter in the rest of their school years. That a forum does not exist for a searching discussion of his teaching serves both to impede his practice and to perpetuate the more general practices of school-as-usual.

In listening to Bernie, I am reminded of Heschel's (1965) words that "all that is creative in man (and woman) stems from a seed of endless discontent" (p. 86). In that regard, Bernie has plenty of motivation to be creative. I am also reminded by his underlying imperative to be "with" his young students, that Heschel (1965) wrote, "that for man (and woman) to be, means to be with other human beings . . . existence is coexistence" (p. 45).

Bernie's strongest sense of frustration in teaching comes (as does my own) when that quality of being with others does not happen as we wish it would. It is a wonderful albeit painful mark of his truly humane being in the world.

His anguish, so directly examined and honestly expressed has to do with the matter of loving his students, of being in love, so as to find truth. His vulnerability and pain come from that love. So too does his ongoing struggle to construct community in his classroom.

Joan

Our last scout is a high school English teacher with whom I worked for four years. I know firsthand from previous conversations of her passion for teaching and some of the battles she has waged with teachers and administrators in behalf of her students. Being a colleague with Joan, as I was with Bernie, does not mean that we ever had occasion to say "this is my vision, this is what I am about in the classroom. " That sort of understanding comes, if it comes at all, through hearing our mutual students talk, and through impressions formed of one another from various interactions. It comes too from having both Joan and Bernie debate (in my psychology class) with members of our school administration the educational significance of Kozol's The Night Is Dark, And I Am Far From Home (Kozol, 1975).

Joan's reactions to our conversation affirm and extend some of those impressions. I ask her to make specific her vision of her classroom.

> I would consider a class very successful if there is participation from everyone. . . . that everyone at

> least talks a little bit. I think that's important. Definitely involved . . . there is discussion and disagreement. But the disagreement doesn't just polarize, and then sort of die. There is some kind of resolution to the disagreement, that people's ideas are somehow affected by other people's ideas. There is reciprocation . . .

Hearing her description, I ask if she is talking about openness to considering other points of view? She elaborates:

> Yeah, and the admission of someone changing your point of view - if kids can feel comfortable saying that. Involved in that is open expression of admiration and disagreement with somebody else's point of view. I'm thinking of someone who is just very, very good at saying when someone has said something that she considers really enlightening, truly enlightening. She just spontaneously will say, "Wow that's great" and clap even. That's infectious. She's changed and helped the class, and the tenor of the class a lot.

In talking more about this particular student, Joan gives further evidence of what she is after in her teaching. Besides the critique of ideas, she is concerned very much with relationships.

> No matter who's talking, if the idea strikes her it gets a response. And it's neat because it's spontaneous and other kids pick it up too. I can think of a number of examples when other kids say it's wonderful, surprising, and terrific, and I don't have to say that. They say it. It's great . . . I think an appreciation of differences is something I strive to develop, and I don't just mean differences in background, or race or whatever, but also differences in learning styles, pace, quickness with each other. That's hard, but I know it's something I am striving for, that they not be impatient with someone who takes a long time to say what they want to say, or they don't put ideas down, because they seem

> at first to be illogical, or in opposition to what they think. So that kind of mutual respect.

Joan talks about asking one of her students to encourage and to support another student who "runs hot and cold, who gets behind," particularly since they are beginning a Victorian novel that runs about four hundred pages! When she says that, I look at her incredulously, and we both laugh recognizing the challenge to high school students (and their teacher) of doing such a work. I ask about the issue of responsibility of student to student in the community she is constructing.

> One of the ways that comes out is that they read each other's papers before they come in for a grade and they evaluate them. And I tell them, sort of in a joking way but I'm partly serious, that if a student writes a really weak paper and it comes in for a grade in that condition, that I feel the peer editor is partly responsible if they did not give advice to that student that is not at all helpful. I say, "if you read a paper that you don't understand, that doesn't for instance have a controlling idea, and you don't tell the person that, then I feel that you are letting the person down . . . this will work a whole lot better for everybody if we will support each other that way." That I guess is an example of mutual responsibility, but you can't carry it too far. The kids seem to have the idea that they are sort of helping each other out. For example if a kid forgets his book, they'll share willingly, or suggest they go get someone's book out of their locker and return it later. So, I don't feel it's a real competitive atmosphere . . .

Joan moves in her conversation to moments of conflict and the struggle to deal with it constructively. Especially difficult is the issue of student resistance and hostility.

In this area of uncertainty and frustration, she reminds me of Bernie's inability to get his "silent four" talking and engaged with the rest of the class.

Joan also recalls for me the idea that other people acting as foils and mirrors for us dialectically bring us more and more to ourselves. Others may draw us out or force us to look inside. Students in particular do that for their teachers. They offer us opportunity, as one of my colleagues recently said, "to confront our old dragons." Good teachers do the same for their students. That is a reciprocity of another kind. Joan continues:

> In talking about community again: Yesterday I put this quote on the board, "Character is fate" to talk about in connection with a Hardy novel. And I wanted them to debate this . . . and that's exactly what happened. The feelings got to be a little uncomfortable because there was a statement made by one student who has a tendency to be a little hostile sometimes . . . (He said,) "that's just a ridiculous statement not even worth discussion!"

As we talk more about this student, Joan's own issues of authority and her strong inner feelings begin to surface. Here is a clear example of that reciprocity, that calling one another out.

> I've been thinking a lot about him yesterday and last night. He's getting under my skin. He's a kid who has a lot of problems and he's beginning to be antagonistic in class in ways that are probably aimed at me. I tried to sort of taper it off, close it off. But what I realized (is) that since my mind keeps going back to this, I need to talk with this student. First of all I

> need to tell him that his behavior is not helping anyone in the classroom or me . . .

As she continues not only feelings come out but questions of responsibility and control surface as well.

> It was my fault for letting it go on for such a long time, I should have asked him to move his seat because he seemed to have such a difficult time restraining himself. I didn't do that, I hate that technique . . . I hate that tactic. But I need to talk with this person, it is undermining the community.

I ask her if this gets at a dilemma that she has as a teacher? "Not this particular student so much, but something that is a general problem for you?"

> The authority thing? Yeah, yeah, I would really like it if I never had to do that . . . That is . . . to discipline, or break out of the role of monitoring ideas, in the sense of a discussion so that it facilitates the development of ideas . . .

Here Joan reiterates her vision and clearly indicates that the freedom we wish to have, the community full of mutual regard, discussion, and critique of ideas depends on the boundaries and the order we construct and impose. Equally clear is the fact that I am not the only teacher who dislikes the disciplining part of our responsibilities, nor the only one who loses sight of the critical dialectic of freedom and order. Here too is a clear example of that aesthetic of teaching seldom discussed, but always one with which we must contend.

Joan continues to elaborate on her vision of the classroom, highlighting a mutuality of being with her students as well as a difficulty that I know from my own teaching.

> And everyone really feels part of a group. We sit in a circle, I like sitting in the back of the room when kids are writing, I'll sit in the back of the room and write also. And I'll see some of them look around wondering where is she, and then, 'Oh yeah, she's sitting in the back of the room.' And I like feeling a part of the group in that way, not that I want to feel like a kid again or a student again. So when I am in a role that I have to tell a kid that he's going to be out on his ear, 'I can't take it anymore' . . . it puts me in a role that I don't like.

Hearing her be so clear, I say:

> I have that same sort of dilemma, and for me it's like a freedom-order tension. It also has to do with acceptance and demand. Am I going to accept you as you are, or am I going to make demands that you change? And the last piece for me is that I fail, as in I forget to see that saying "no" to somebody can be an act of love. I've got it constructed in my head that it's harmful and I keep forgetting that it is not harmful. I keep forgetting that saying "no" is not only essential but that it is also a way of saying "yes" to something else.

She responds:

> I also have the same difficulty. I have less trouble with the freedom-order, because I feel like most of the time there is a fair amount of freedom in my classroom. But the idea of disciplining out of love is a real problem for me because I have reached the point where I really don't like this kid very much. He's annoyed me this much. And I have figured out it is just like disciplining kids at home. You really are not helping them, are not even attending to them by not disciplining . . . and not attending to this student is damaging.

We return to her vision and explore where that idea comes from. With a wonderful light candor for a seriously passionate teacher who has just completed her Ph.D. in womens' literature, Joan says to me something quite reminiscent of Bernie and Sam.

> I wish I could say that it (my vision) is because of a theoretical belief (mutual laughter). It's because of instinct. I think it's the kind of classroom I like being in because I am creating what I enjoy being in. But I know that I taught this way from the very first day I was a teacher. Probably I do it mainly because I enjoy it. I enjoy a classroom like this. I think it makes me really glad to be doing what I am doing.

When she says the vision replicates what she really likes, I am reminded of the times of being in my own classroom with students fully engaged, struggling to figure out something difficult and complex, something at odds with their present knowing, or something taken for granted and previously unexamined. I recall my own time as a student: of being with teachers and classmates where we thrashed about trying to make sense of difficult issues. I am also reminded that Joan's words about constructing a classroom in which she is comfortable almost identically mirror the ideas of both Bernie and Sam.

Joan continues by talking about her college years at Duke which had the same sort of discussion-centered atmosphere. And like Bernie's, her own family encouraged inquiry and critique. Then she says:

> I think the bottom line is this is what I enjoy and this is what I want to be doing when I am doing it (teaching). If someone said you need to teach in a different way, you need to construct your class in a different way, I probably would go into another field.

She returns to the issue of authority and the need for order so as to maintain the classroom environment she wants and further elaborates her vision.

> People want to be connected, they want to be able to speak, and they want to be learning in an environment that they don't feel put down in and also that they are challenged by. I usually don't think about them (balancing order and freedom) in those terms. I guess a lot of it's intuition. When I feel for example that it's too disorderly, (when) I don't feel like anything is happening that is very positive, I'll pull in reins in one way or another. Reconstruct the dynamics. . . . it is fluid, it isn't that the classroom is always this way and that there are never changes . . . there's some variety, some days are more structured than other days. I'll tell you what I have a tension about, about other classes and other teachers who to me seem so structured and . . . tight assed.

As Joan says that we laugh with one another, and I say, "It (the quote) <u>will</u> be in there, in the paper. I wouldn't miss putting that one in. I'm going to love that one. Now teaching English literature at _____, Dr. _____ says . . . "

Our history together enriches our understanding of issues, our knowing of ourselves, one another and the struggle to teach in the manner we believe essential. Like a well constructed classroom, Joan and I have the freedom to explore and share spontaneously the insights and feelings we have for our life work. We both know the teacher to whom

Joan is referring. We both also know that he dearly loves his students and is considered by many (including us) an exceptional teacher. But his style and use of authority are completely different from ours.

After our laughter together, Joan continues:

> I know that there are many ways to be a good teacher and many ways to construct a situation for positive learning. This is probably more my hang up, because I think that what really goes on in the classroom is much more mysterious than questions of control or relaxation, or whether you sit in straight lines or a circle.

Intrigued by the use of the word "mysterious," I ask her to talk about that more. She goes and gets a quote from Norman Maclean, author of "A River Runs Through It."

> I was reading an article about teaching, and he is talking about the enormous range of teachers who are all great teachers. What do they share in common, because they are all different . . . different styles, kinds of classrooms. . . . Basically he said what knit teachers together is their passion . . . This is Maclean's definition of a great teacher. "A tough guy that cares deeply about something that is hard to understand." I would add: "that is able to have his students care deeply as well." If it's not hard to understand you don't feel you really need a teacher. That's why doing the difficult issues is more satisfying then doing something that you can learn from a programmed text.

And then, in something quite similar to my conversation with Bernie, Joan adds:

> It's the passion of the teacher that cares so much about this that . . . brings you in, I think. That's why sitting in rows you can still be brought in to a caring for something that is hard to understand and somehow satisfying to get closer to understanding of it, and

> that's why I say that the style of the classroom ultimately obviously affects the experience in many ways but does not necessarily create or ruin great teaching.

And I say, "So long as the straight rows didn't also represent straight ways of thinking."

> Exactly. Yeah. Because I think that people who care passionately about things that are hard to understand know that they don't necessarily have the handle on it. They're probing all their lives which is why they remain interested in it.

Remembering Bernie's dilemma of his own passion which could shut down the students in his class, I suggest, "the danger in passion is you can have a passion about a point of view that disallows possibilities. The passion needs to be about the search." Joan responds:

> Yes, exactly. I have problems dealing with what I consider narrow-minded, bigoted, arrogant attitudes among students, and I don't want to preach . . . but every now and then . . . the blood rising . . . some patience and anger . . . I don't know how to both express myself and yet allow or maintain . . . I am not going to tell them what to think, I want them to question, but I have some kids who just mouth what they have heard at home. "America's the best country, there's no discussion of this." I had some of that last week.

Feeling my own frustration and threat from similar challenges, I say, "Why is that hard for you? Why don't you just say, "that's too bad, and now we're going to talk about it?"

> I guess that probably I don't mind some confrontations, but when I feel that . . . I don't like confrontations that I feel like almost from the beginning it's going to be a pointless, useless discussion. . . . What I should have done is open it up; what do others think of that? I sometimes have a short fuse. I feel like it's too much centered on me and I should open it back up to the class and act as a facilitator. I end up feeling this responsibility that is really just my imagination . . . Because there are probably members of the class who could come to what I just said, and I don't trust them enough.

Here again is Bernie's issue of passion as well as Sam's lack of faith which Joan calls trust. Where, I wonder, in the world of teaching teachers to teach do they ever tell us to give the question back to the students, or have other students answer their classmates' questions. Where do they emphasize questions and not answers in teacher preparation?

I ask her about the pain for her in teaching and she voices what is at the heart of many of our teaching frustrations: the limits of our effectiveness, our inability to enact our vision, to make the sort of change we want to have happen in the lives of our students.

> I can't get through to a student. I just don't know how to help. (there is a very long pause, full of emotion) What happens in my classroom . . . I don't like seeing what's going on between the students, and I don't know how to change it. It doesn't happen a lot, but it sometimes happens. No matter what I'm trying to do it still is no good.

Joan and I continue to talk about a "sense of powerlessness" in some situations, much like Bernie's

inability to get his students talking when he so desperately wants to. Many teachers hold themselves fully responsible for what does on or does not go on in the classroom. In that regard Freire is both humble and helpful when he says, "what helped me at the worst moments was understanding the limits of my own powers . . . because student consciousness so determined the outcome of my class, I could stop blaming myself for classes that didn't go anywhere" (Freire & Shor, 1987, p. 26). Understanding and accepting those limits is a difficult lesson to learn about our teaching lives. It is also a learning necessary for the rest of our lives as well, if we are to have some measure of self-acceptance, some realism upon which to make judgments of ourselves and others.

As we ponder those limits, I ask Joan if she has a spiritual sense about her teaching.

> Yeah, well I don't think I have articulated this for myself very well so it's going to be hard. In the classroom when we talk about important things to each other and there's an honesty and a giving to each other, I think that . . . I guess that's a form of worship in a way.

From the emotion in her voice, from knowing of her deep care for nature, I ask if she means a holy experience.

> Yeah, yeah it is . . . we're dealing with things that combine us, or we share as human beings and that we suffer as human beings, and those inevitably get to be kind of religious issues . . . or spiritual issues, in the sense of what's important? Why are we here? How are we all connected? How are we connected with the natural world? Those things come in to play. In the

> English classroom the subject matter itself is spiritual. But the experience of doing it together (very softly) there's an intensity . . .

Then using the exact same language as Sam does to describe the best of his teaching experience with students, Joan says,

> I feel like together we're kind of involved in a journey, that it's organic, an emergence. . . . It's more like the Hopi symbol of life, looks like a womb. It also looks like a maze, and the idea is of continuous emergence, you emerge and you go back, and then you're reborn again. It's sort of like that during the year. And that's a spiritual experience.

I ask her if her teaching is a calling?

> I have always shied away from thinking of it as that. I don't know why, I'm not comfortable with that. I am glad I'm a teacher. A teacher affects eternity; they have no idea when their influence stops. Kind of awesome too. I have tensions about that calling; I wish I didn't.

In listening to her, in sensing her mood and deep feelings, and in responding to my own wish for affirmation, I tell her as I did Bernie of Heschel's view that "It is impossible to find truth without being in love" (Heschel, 1973, p. 45).

> I guess that's something I have said to myself. I don't know why I didn't say it to you . . . and I have almost wanted to say to my classes but I don't have enough courage to say that I love them. I'm going to cry.

In times of teaching and being with people, there are indeed spiritual moments of coming to our deepest truths. Listening to Joan and listening to myself at this moment is one of those times. It is exactly these moments of deep truth, of passion coming forth, that I most prize in my teaching life.

She goes on exploring herself and her way of being with her students.

> I guess because it sounds so sentimental. I am afraid of it breaking the safety that they have. Do you know what I mean? It's too strong. I'd rather they know that and or feel it. I don't want to say that I love them but there are days when I really feel it. I really do.

"That's wonderful," I say to her, "the whole thing of breaking <u>your</u> safety. . ."

> Maybe that's good. Maybe I should do that. I think that the teachers students respond to the most have to feel that love for their students.

And when Joan says that, I recall the "tight-assed" teacher she spoke about earlier whom we both know and admire. I say "that's what Bobby does. He loves them in that other way: that structured, iron-strict way that I can't do." And Joan says:

> Right, right. His style, his actions just show a whole other thing. Kids know that. Kids are very, very, smart in that way.

And with that Joan and I stopped.

What Do the Scouts Report?

Being with these three teachers, listening and reflecting on their words, beliefs, and struggles is a stunning experience. My only regret is that I did not plan a conversation with "Bobby" whom I am sure would have expressed a far different vision of the classroom. Knowing him, I am equally sure his vision is also based on loving his students.

The essential here is that one must be oneself, must find oneself and be themselves in the classroom. That is what Sam, Bernie, and Joan are telling us when they construct classrooms in which they are comfortable and where they enjoy being teachers. And that is also the message Buber (1950) teaches through a tale of Rabbi Zusya when he relates:

> In the world to come (Zusya said), I shall not be asked: "Why were you not Moses?" I shall be asked: "Why were you not Zusya?" (p. 17)

These teachers tell us we must be genuine, conflicted, full of doubt and sometimes humble certainty, faithful and faithless, and full too of our particular passionate truth as best we know it at any particular time. They also speak to the ongoing, evolving effort to construct their vision and the classroom of their vision. While Buber (1950) tells us a unified soul is required for unified action, he also said unification is never accomplished once and for all. So it is

that the selves we try to be are always becoming, never completed. And is that not also the case with the promised land of teaching? It too is always a becoming. Such a land, such a classroom, and such human beings would be mechanical were they always the same. Certainly we are not searching for a mechanical land and mechanical ways of being with our students.

One Other Scout Reports

Recently, after a swim at the University pool, I spoke briefly with a professor of very long standing. He mentioned that his students would come to class regularly in the beginning and at the end of the semester, but that they had high rates of absenteeism during the middle of the semester. I responded: "If that were happening to me I would wonder about my teaching having something to do with it." He said, "I've been teaching for forty years, and I know what I'm doing."

After hearing and thinking about the lives of these teachers, my initially arrogant (and thankfully unspoken) reaction to the professor is different. He, like the iron-strict teacher Joan and I both know, has his own truth, one worked-out over the course of his teaching experience. To criticize his view without an openness, a humility to other possibilities different from my own, is to ignore "Bobby's" love for his students. It is to be afraid that our own

truths cannot be true unless someone else's truth is false. It is to construct a formula of absolutes and eschew different ways of being and certainly different ways of loving.

Western classical philosophy gives us that dilemma. It closes too tightly the boundaries of community. The promised land is only for those select few. The rest are unable to gain entrance unless they hold and practice our truths. Following that formula, "Bobby" would not be allowed entrance. That is both a lack of humility and a lack of faith.

From "successful protest," Ackermann (1985) has said, "comes orthodoxy" (p. ix). From our open and "accepting" ways of being can come a closeness, a lack of accepting other ways of being, of accepting other paths as hallowed. From Bobby's strict and seemingly closed structure come firm boundaries and exceedingly strong demands for his students to produce carefully crafted writing according to his specific guidelines. His promised land has a different sort of truth, a different way of loving. But, I am convinced it is love.

<u>The Scouts Say "It Is Journey."</u>

In the Exodus story, the Hebrew children must wander in the desert for 40 years until the original slaves from Egypt have died off; only Caleb and Joshua remain to enter the promised land with the descendants. It is necessary before

entering Canaan for the slave mentality to be gone. Perhaps it is that everyday we enter our classrooms and attempt to construct that vision we hold, we are both the old generation and its descendants. We must learn from our fathers and ourselves what those enslaved lives have taught us while still looking forward with our vision. We must remember that we were slaves in Egypt while prizing our trek in the desert. We must let go of our slave mentality, but not forget it.

Heschel (1966) believed that "faith is neither easy nor a secure achievement. Nor is it an attitude acquired all at once or once and for all" (p. 64). Could it be that the promised land, like community in our classrooms is like faith, always a matter of coming to it, of constant reconstruction, of overcoming slave mentality, or Pharoah mentality again and again? Perhaps it is that each moment we live with our students and ourselves, the promised land is within us and them, able to be constructed and lived.

More likely it is that we are already in it. More likely it is that both reports of the scouts were truth. We are truly grasshoppers seeing giants, and we are truly Caleb and Joshua seeing freedom and possibility. But we are also having our severe doubts.

Perhaps it is that the promised land is not the "Garden" of no toil and no struggle, and therefore, no appreciation, gratitude, peace, and accomplishment. Could it be that the disobedient act, the freeing act of coming to know both good

and evil and our subsequent forced exit from the "Garden" was in truth our entrance into the promised land. And that land is always the passioned search -- sometimes with others, sometimes within ourselves for truth -- for another way of being and knowing. Was it not Joan's student who got under her skin who now encourages her search? Was it not Sam's failure to win a superior rating as it was Bernie's silent four that prompted their new searches and new struggles for truth. And did not God harden the heart of Pharaoh making the Exodus possible?

Writing of that search, Palmer (1990) tells us:

> Truth is an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline. Good teaching, whatever its form, will help more and more people to learn to speak and listen in the community of truth, to understand that truth is not in the conclusions so much as in the process of conversation itself, that if you want to be in truth you must be in conversation. (p. 12)

What the scouts clearly tell us is that classrooms, conversations, and school communities which construct love hasten our search and make the finding of truth seem a bit easier. But they also tell us that the absence of love and doubt, our disobedience, eternal struggle, pain, discomfort, and conflict are also essential to our quest. They become our "endless seeds of discontent" (Heschel, 1965, p. 86) pushing us forward. Perhaps the promised land <u>is</u> our quest

itself. As the kingdom of heaven has been said to be within us, so too is the promised land.

Perhaps it is that the only way out of the promised land is to stop and let go of our quest, to let go of doubt and the passioned search, to stop the conversation. Perhaps the only way out is to retreat to infancy and Egypt, to certainty or cynicism. As the wisdom of the A.A. program perplexingly proclaims, "You are exactly where you need to be, everyone is right on schedule." When one is in deep pain that is a very difficult belief to hold. To believe that, one must have faith. To believe that, one must also be humble. For it is faith which makes us secure enough to set a course and move forward toward our vision with a limited view of what lies ahead. And it is humility which helps us be open to those signs in our journey that indicate that this is not the place nor the time to stop.

Could it be that the journey toward justice which never ends and the search for truth which is never over are indeed the promised land?

> And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sent us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. . . . And Caleb stilled the people before Moses and said let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to possess it. . . . But the men that went up with him said . . . it is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; . . . and there we saw giants . . . and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. (Numbers 13:27,30-33)

CHAPTER IV

GENESIS: CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE AND KNOWING OF GOOD AND EVIL, NOW WHAT?

> The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living thing. . . .
> The Lord God said, "It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him." . . . but for Adam no fitting helper was found.
> So the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon man; and while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. Then the man said,
> "This one at last
> Is bone of my bones
> And flesh of my flesh.
> This one shall be called Woman,
> For from man was she taken." (Genesis 2:18,20-23)

In The Beginning...

At first his hair was short-cropped and clean shaven along both sides; the top was almost fluorescent green. He seemed immediately vulnerable to me, frail and tentative. I expected to see him moving towards the edges of our group but he engaged in the first class of the semester. His opposite-hand drawing of his partner during our getting-acquainted time was light-years ahead of the work of everyone else in class.

Gradually, over the next several weeks, however, he seemed to progressively slip away. There were two late

papers and two no-shows on days of significant interactions in class. I know of the act of avoidance from my own history, avoidance when hurt seemed imminent, or when hurt was upon me and hiding away seemed the only safe course.

Carl -- might he be a metaphor for the separation and alienation present in all of us -- reminded me of damaged and pained children. Those children are often unable to ask directly for what they need, often unwilling to tolerate the uncertain struggle of building intimacy. Frequently they are unable and unwilling to risk more disappointment, and frightened from previous injuries, they use -- like we all use -- whatever defenses seem to give some means of protection, if not from the present pain at least from the potential of more pain.

Heschel (1965) has written that "The fear of living arises most commonly out of experiences of failure or insult, of having gone astray or having been rebuffed . . . in the encounter with other human beings . . ." (p. 96). I know about old hurts and insults still enforcing their parameters on me from my earlier years. I know about old wounds calling out feelings and thoughts even when the present moment doesn't really necessitate them. I wondered about Carl's hurts and his "encounter with other human beings." What did he, like me, bring with him from earlier years which clouded and partially formed his seeing of today as just more of yesterday? As difficult as it is to see the present without

our memories of the past, so is it equally difficult to know whether our seeing of others and our judgments reflect primarily our old encounters or are true apprehensions of the person present to us. In their potential those judgments are almost always both.

Genesis, the Bible's beginning narration of relationships between God and humankind as well as between humans themselves, is played out again and again in the beginning of our teaching each semester and in the daily living of lives within our classrooms. As teachers we may create those conditions which best help our students to find and make relationships. We may encourage them to make "fitting helpers" of themselves and for themselves, or we may not. Such is the freedom granted to our humanity; such is our responsibility.

Like the search and struggle for the promised land, the Genesis story contains a promise and a seeming certainty. The promise is that our world has been created in an orderly fashion by a loving God who holds humankind precious. The promise is that if we live God's law we will have God's protection and blessing. If we do not, the promise is that we will have disaster. It is a simple formula. Obedience brings the good life.

Is It Really Very Good?

Is it then that our measure of what is the good life is confused, or is the formula bunk? Long before these times people have asked "Why do the righteous suffer and why do the evil prosper"? To save the formula from such penetrating attacks and to help us with our disbelief, Isaiah answers:

> For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Apparently there is the appearance of prospering and there is God's prospering. Does the formula explain Auschwitz? Are the salvationists right? Must one wait for another world where the righteous do prosper and the evil do suffer? Is it necessary that the evil suffer? Is there indeed, an order to all of this?

We ask for clarity and a bit of certainty. We are thrust into choice and possibility. We ask for freedom. We are given demands, consequences, and responsibility. We wish for protection and are given temptation. Is it such a struggle to know God's will and surrender our own? Is hearing and obeying so very difficult? Apparently it is. How else to explain the world's injustice on such a massive scale and to such a pervasive and penetrating depth. How

else to explain the ambiguity and the confusion. How else to explain all the harming and all our turning away.

Truly, it is not very complex. We need but wait and the still small voice of God can be heard. Can we be still and hear the word of God? Can we wait? The wait can seem very long, and the voice barely audible. Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Oscar Romero, to count only a few, can tell us that. Would the six million who were murdered at Auschwitz tell us to wait? Would they speak to us of God's justice? If it is true that the poor will always be with us, is it also true that evil shall always be with us as well?

The Genesis story separates evil from the inherent nature of the world and places it directly into humankind's choice making. Is evil not listening? Is evil hearing and disobeying? Is evil mistaking the voice that we hear? Is it thinking of some other image in which we have been formed? Is evil inherent in us?

We are not made in the image of little children. We are not made totally dependent, physically unable, intellectually inept. But somehow we seem to be made deaf, or partially so. Or is it that we are asleep, or perhaps turned facing the wrong direction, upwind from the smell of children dying from disease and starvation? The world's clatter and the noise of our own anxious hearts overcome the whisper which is God's voice. We reach out for things instead of each other. We

frantically claw emptiness when what we deeply desire is connectedness.

There is something to be said for those who embrace the removed clock-maker theory of God's relationship to the world. "Here is the world. Make it what you wish." But Genesis tells us otherwise. Genesis says that God is involved in our history making. How then does one explain all the pain? Is it deserved, is it part of the affliction necessary for our redemption? Is it simply the correction and redirection of our errors and ways? Six million errors? Is this the world of suffering Isaiah meant when he said, "When the Lord smites a people, He is both smiting and healing" (Isaiah 19:22)? Were six million needed to heal the rest of us? Do any of us feel healed? Are more millions necessary?

Dewey (1916) had a persistent hopefulness in humankind's evolution. I wonder toward what we are evolving? Are we more loving, more just? There is room for despair here. At the worst there is room for cynicism; at best should not one hold some persistent doubt? Heschel (1962) wrote that "when the hardness is complete, it becomes despair. Out of despair prayer bursts forth" (p. 192). Out of despair people also lose hope, like the father of one of my patients (when I was a therapist some years ago) who put a gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger! Does faith demand the abeyance of our

memory and our reason? Is faith believing in spite of memory and reason? Heschel (1965) suggests:

> This may be the vocation of man: to say "Amen" to being and to the author of being: to live in defiance of absurdity, not withstanding futility and defeat; to attain faith in God in spite of God. (p. 78)

Childhood in the "Garden" is protected and certain. Freedom is tightly maintained, and crossing the street against God's will without looking both ways can make for instant disaster. It can also make for exhilarating trespass. Outside of the "Garden," it is a very different story. There is little protection. There is too much freedom. There is continual trespass, and it is very often not at all exhilarating.

Years ago I skidded while speeding along a rainy road; the car -- a convertible -- rolled over and over down a steep embankment and landed on its top. The car was demolished; I had a bump on my head and a bruised shoulder! Last year carjackers in Washington D.C. threw a baby out of its mother's car and sped away dragging the mother caught in the door for several miles. She died. They lived. The baby lived. The newspaper said the child was unharmed!

Wait for God's word? God will protect us? Made in God's image? There is order in the world. We are precious? "Say Amen . . . and attain faith in God in spite of God?" Had the mother sinned? Had the baby?

Lynch them, burn them, torture them, ignore the starving, enslave them, rubber bullets, real bullets. Jews, Arabs, Blacks, Indians, Chinese, Moslems, Hindus, Japanese, Croations . . . No wonder faith is required, no wonder "faith does not come all at once . . . or once and for all" (Heschel, 1966, p. 64). "If we are not deaf we hear the cries of the oppressed," wrote Camara (1988, p. 16). Is God deaf? Can we find six million stories of hope, faith, and deserving prosperity for the righteous in this world? Could God not find ten righteous people in Sodom? Does righteous mean be perfect?

The priest on Sunday read of God's blessing of Abram, who because of his faith and obedience would be made a great nation. The priest did not mention that Abram's obedience means a willingness to kill his own son. Then the priest hung this question for us in the air. He asked, "Are you blessed?"

He waited while we considered that, and then he asked the next question. "When was the last time you felt God's touch?" And I felt a shudder.

Damn it, God, <u>do</u> something! We need more than the possibility that we may bring you into the world. We need some reason that explains all this. It is too much responsibility: this being brother and sister to each other. It goes too slowly. The freedom is too uncertain and the

promise doesn't seem to work. Just tell us what to do! Speak! Act!

and God said, "I have."

Palmer (1990) has written:

> Our underlying fear of the stranger and aliens has led our churches to domesticate God . . . gone is the strangeness of God, the wild and alien quality of holiness. In its place is an image of God who is like a kind and comfortable old friend, a God who comforts and consoles . . . but in no way challenges or stretches our lives. Among Christians this tendency to domesticate the Deity has sometimes involved replacing God with Jesus, a Jesus so sentimentalized and even sanitized that he loses all the outrageous qualities of the Jesus of history. (p. 158)

Perhaps, as Palmer suggests, it is not that God no longer speaks and acts, but rather that He does not conform to the picture we have been given and to which we mistakenly cling. And if that is so, would it not also be true that we cannot conform to the freedom and responsibility that we have been given. We are unable to live in God's image because we have formed and maintain the wrong image.

Made In His Image

> And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female, He created them. (Genesis 1:26-27)

Inherent in our teaching acts is the opportunity to act in God's image. What does it mean to be made in God's image? Surely it is not to be omniscient, nor omnipotent, but rather

it is to strive to be God's acting in history, to be God's creative force for justice and mercy, and for caring in the world. Our freedom allows for our search for reconciliation and acts of care for our brothers and sisters. Our freedom also allows for the avoidance and defenses we employ to guard ourselves as we ignore the needs of others, as we are careless.

Is the image of God in which we are fashioned, the freedom for which we are responsible like God's freedom? Is it that we too may create life? Is it that we may destroy life as well? Has God made a terrible mistake?

As teachers, we are free to do other than act in God's image, to bring God into the world, to seek for reconciliation. And being human we frequently do. As John Dewey (1904/1964) reminds us:

> The most important thing for the teacher to consider as regards his relations to his pupils, is the attitudes and habits which his own mode of being, saying and doing are fostering or discouraging in them. (p. 326)

This writing argues that we must create community in our classroom, and that despite the uncertainty, the confusion, and rightfully grave difficulty with holding and maintaining our faith, it is only through community that we can make justice. It is only in community that we may love one another. It is through community that faith can be restored, even temporarily. And it is only our membership in community

which tempers our individuality with a concern for others. It is in community that we may weather those times when faith is hard to come by. Others can remind us, as all the A.A. and Al-Anon groups do, that there is indeed reason to hope, reason to have faith.

If we do not make community, if we do not encourage our students to love one another and to reach out and help, if we do not show our own helplessness openly, if we do not struggle to express our particular truths passionately, if we do not do these things than what is it we do do? Is the coming together, the speaking truly, the listening humbly, the holding judgment in reserve, the taking a strong stand against evil, is all that to be left to chance? Are those to be the accidents and incidentals of our curriculum? Are those the expendables of our cultural transmission to our children? Is there some learning more basic, more necessary for us to live with each other?

Is the truth which we seek to know an abstraction out there somewhere, some perfect form awaiting its revelation to the few properly instructed and properly endowed with the right stuff to hear the right truth? Or do we make, discover, come to the truth in our midst? Do we struggle in our relationships inside our classrooms for truths inside us?

Hey! Teacher! What is it that you might truly teach that you are not truly living? What is it your students

might learn in your classroom that is not experienced by them? Are we practicing what we teach?

Where and when is it that they shall come to know themselves and each other better? Next year? In someone else's class, some other relationship, with some other teacher? Of what import are the topics and plans of your semester? Is that knowing any more essential than the end of the year public school tests? Is it remembered any longer? Is listening to one's insides and the insides of their classmates less crucial than combinations of rate, distance and speed, or critical analysis of economic systems? What do we build as teachers if we do not build a community of love? What is it we mean to encourage if we do not encourage their strength to find and say what they think? If it is not closeness, intimacy, and honesty we show and call for from ourselves and from them, what is it that we call out?

Hey! Teacher! What do you wish them to have of you when they have moved on? When you are no longer, what is it you hope to leave of yourself? What nations are you building? If made in God's image, what blessing do you make for your students?

Think! When you teach, do they come together? Do you encourage their relationships with one another? Do you want them to care for each other? Is justice making, compassion, and responsibility something that is to go on elsewhere? What do your tactics teach?

Is your emphasis on careful analysis, ground-destroying questions which create upheaval, which bring clarity to cloudy misinformation? What shall we make of all our wonderful competencies, our fine logic and problem-solving abilities? In whose interests will the skills be employed? Is it next year we remember to teach tenderness? Must they first construct a bomb capable of killing hundreds of thousands and then afterward say, that they were "without special competence on the moral question" (Oppenheimer in Kozol, 1980, p. viii)?

Where is the place in our lessons for deep to call to deep? Where is the place in the class for you and them to feel unable, like Jeremiah, to resist God's call: "his word in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones (Jeremiah 20:9)?

You! Teacher. Bright, thoughtful, articulate, well-read, wonderfully written. What is happening between your students? Is your class another mirroring of the world as usual? Have you given another vision and failed to live it? Is God brought into your classroom, into the living of your teaching life with your students?

Hey! Teacher! "Where art Thou?"

It Is Not Good For Man To Be Alone

We were seven weeks along in our semester. Carl's hair was now shaved off completely, and he seemed even more silent

during class. There had been other lates, other no-shows. I was increasingly concerned and uncertain about how I was to be with him. How was I to encourage his staying with us and not fleeing even further? I was unsure whether to tell him what I wondered about, what I thought I saw. Part of me wanted to "get tough" and "make demands" on him. But I did not want to drive him even further away. For me it was the problem in loving and in making demands. It was the being made in God's image problem. It was that erroneous view of the image of all acceptance and no demandingness. A loving demandingness was not part of my growing-up years. It was also not part of the teacher training conveyed in my teacher preparation program. Despite not knowing how, I asked Carl to stay after class one day so that we might talk.

> We sat in the room facing one another. I began by saying that I was concerned with his missing class, getting things in late, and was wondering if something was going on. Smiling tightly, he talked of always having trouble with deadlines, oversleeping, not hearing the alarm, regularly falling behind. He said, "I guess you'll just have to penalize me like other teachers do."
>
> Then I asked directly, "Are you feeling afraid?" Carl shuddered, and quite suddenly, the smile broke, tears filled his eyes and spilled down his face. I waited.
>
> He spoke of "losing it," of feeling "out of control," of maybe "quitting and coming back next semester" when somehow "things would be different." Directly again, I asked, "How much drinking and drugging are you doing." And amazingly he told me it was "most every weekend." Weekends for Carl often began on Wednesday night.
>
> "When was the last time you have gone a weekend without using anything," I asked? He looked down, then at me, took a breath and said, "I can't remember."

> We talked some about my own narrow escape from addiction during my thirties, about family and friends of mine who are addicted. In the end we made a pact. He would try to go this weekend without using, see what happened, and we would talk about it. I would find a friend's number, a member of A.A., and have him call Carl if that was O.K. A bit tentatively, Carl said it was.

I wonder if many of us have had models of a loving demandingness from which we may learn. And even if we have, I wonder if we must still strive to create our own personal model fashioned from the experience of our own loneliness, a model forged from the pain of our own experience of separation, separation glimpsed long enough, admitted to strongly enough for us to recognize that we must have and make for ourselves something other. Must our knowing how to be loving and demanding in the classroom come only after our own failed attempts to be what teaching is supposed to be, what living is supposed to be? Does the loving and being in God's image for teachers come only after the notion that all the rest of it is for nothing if it is not done in love, and love means sometimes we must make strong demands?

Even after we have learned how, it does not come and stay for all time. It must be created over and over again. The loving and demanding that we must be <u>is</u> the "created in God's image" which Genesis tells us that we are. There can be no freedom without constraint. There can be no intimacy without honesty. And as Carl clearly shows us, there can be no trust without risking. We are also told, disturbingly so,

that "there is no redemption without affliction" (Heschel, 1962, p. 88). Just as the desert must precede Canaan, so too does pain often precede changing the direction of our journey.

In My Beginning. . .

> In the beginning was chaos. In the beginning for me was terror, was abandonment. For seven years, there was every week, week after week, year after year, the Police Boys' Club Band. My parents said, some 30 years later, "You were too sensitive, it was to toughen you up for the real world."
>
> From 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm each Monday it was Colonel Brussiloff conducting, Colonel Brussiloff terrorizing. It was Jerry Levine, terrified, as full of fear as a 7-year-old child could be and still remain present.
>
> Each week, as the days got closer to Monday my fear and anxiety would build. And then it was Monday again, and I was in the room with 100 or so other young people. There were parents sitting in the back. They did not help me. No one helped me. I was alone, more alone than I have ever been. I wonder if dying is like that.
>
> Baritone players sat in the middle of the band only 20 feet from him. Each week it was what mistaken notes will I play? Will he hear them, and what raging, cutting, humiliating remarks would he hurl at me? And would the other band members laugh at his jokes? "Levine, your tone is like a fart in a well" he mocked once. "Latrine," he would scream at me, making a pun on the pronunciation of my name, "get it right, god damn it!" They always laughed.
>
> And no parents stood up for me. No one said to him, "stop it, you are striking at this child's soul." And I would cry. Trying not to let the others see my "weakness," I held my hand over my eyes so they might not see my pain, my intense humiliation and shame. I had absolutely no place to hide, or person to turn to. He cut deeply into me. When I could stand it no longer, I went into shock. Still present, still trying to play, still crying for all those seven years, but in shock. The snarls, the enraged and terrifying looks, the

> gravely voice: I could not escape. Even today, 46 years since it began, they are inside me.
>
> For seven years, week after week, I existed through that. I do not know how many times I actually cried. I am not sure I have ever stopped.

What can take the place in a young child of innocence, trust, and reliance on the goodness and care of others? Is that the time when faith becomes forever a question? What takes the place of openness to the world and a child's light playfulness? Is that where one learns to worry? What comes from repeated public humiliation, repeated terror, and almost unrelenting anxiety? Is that when perfectionism is learned? Where does a 7-year-old hide his soul from that sort of assault, ongoing shame and ineradicable sense of abandonment? Where does one go to escape from such pervasive inadequacy and powerlessness? Is that when one learns compulsiveness? When the outside is of such pain there is no place to go but inside. And when the inside hurts as much as the outside there is no place at all that brings safety, rest, or a moment of peace. There is only the abandonment of oneself.

Over the course of years, with the strong, persistent love and acceptance from others, we can begin to reconstruct ourselves. We create what we are out of what has happened to us. Gradually, slowly, we can construct some goodness, some trust, and faith. Although my history led to perfectionism, hypervigilance and hypersensitivity, it also led to the resolve never to inflict such pain and such humiliation, nor

to allow for such loneliness if I can prevent it. Out of such isolation and distance come the yearning for connection and the desire for community. The innateness of that human need is intensified by the facts of my early years. Pain from those other years has led to my passion for being in community. Out of evil good can come, but it is always uncertain, tinged with the old fear of rejection and loneliness. There is always the fear that humiliation and shame will come again, that my hidden cry will come again. And sometimes it does.

Part of the A.A. promise is that eventually "you will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it" (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976, p. 83). That part of my past is a vividly etched reminder of what I do not wish to be. Nor, so it seems, can I forget it. I do not ever wish to be Colonel Brussiloff, nor the abandoned and desolate child. Nothing in my life is more clear. The oversensitivity helps me read the pain in Carl's life and the lives of others far faster than I otherwise might. The overvigilance helps me see goings-on between people that might otherwise be missed. That sense from my past of utter abandonment and loss of safety helps me feel it when others experience it. That history increases my determination to construct safety and connectedness in my own classroom. The mistaken notes I played and the terrible consequences dealt me make it far easier for me to accept the mistakes others make. The memory

of his rage checks my own angry responses. And having my own deep pain makes me certain that most others have had, and do have theirs as well.

I am convinced most of us have been partially exiled, or have chosen that place out of necessity. I am convinced that in the depths of ourselves it is deep reconciliation we seek above all else. Reading these words, you must decide if that is true for you as well.

There is a hindering side from such a history, however. Living becomes a matter of overcoming the shock and once-needed self-protection. Feelings are not always readily available to me, and depression is a place I often go when things do not work out as well as I had hoped they might. Crying, having been coupled to public shame, is now often delayed or abated completely, even when I wish that I could cry. Anger is forever contaminated by the rage I saw and the hurt I felt from it. My anger is too often intellectualized or otherwise buried in physical reaction, and the anger of others is easily misread or overly emphasized.

Likewise, the authority of others and my own authority frequently cause an ongoing confusion. The perfectionism I developed (in an effort to avoid those mistakes because they led to such pain) makes for wonderful accomplishment. It also makes my self-acceptance forever difficult. Above all, making communion with others is always conflicted because of the crushing facts of my previous vulnerability and the

contamination of my trust and faith. The loss of self-consciousness which makes being with others joyous and peaceful is hard to come by, but when it does, especially in teaching, it is precious.

The Waters Are Receding

Here are the words of Martin Buber (1919/1957) instructing us, passionately challenging us to breach our protected, lonely separations and come out of ourselves to create life, to make community. Stop hiding, he tells us. Give life to your life. Join with others.

> Make the crowd no longer a crowd!
> Out of forlorn and impotent men, out of men who have attacked one another through forlornness and impotence, the shapeless thing has come into being - deliver man from it, shape the shapeless to community! Break the withholding, throw yourselves into the surging waves, reach for and grasp hands, lift, help, lead, authenticate spirit and alliance in the trial of the abyss, make the crowd no longer a crowd! . . . What may ascend out of the flood will be decided by whether you throw yourselves into it as seeds of true community. (p. 111)

Forming community in the classroom is my way of trying to be in God's image. It is the community which carries forward into the world God's word that "It is not good for man to be alone." Community making in the classroom can become a way of decreasing humankind's loneliness and separation, of reconciling and healing the separations. Like the teachers in my interviews, it is community making that

for me is most comfortable, most rewarding, most necessary. It is not a return to the idyllic "Garden" that I wish for. Here in the real world of our living difficulties, the world of necessary and "unnecessary suffering" (Purpel, 1969, p. 2), here is the place and need for our being creative and living our lives in God's image. In the "Garden," before our separations, our creativeness was unnecessary. So too was our courage.

Courage is necessary because becoming community in a classroom is always uncertain, unfinished work. Such work is always done against the grain of the culture. Attempts at too much closeness too soon cause students to pull back, frightened and overwhelmed. They are unaccustomed to intimacy. If all is simple acceptance without the challenge of intellectual rigor, they can become romantically sentimental and uncritical of the issues and each other's ideas. Too little closeness and too much analysis and it is school as usual: "faces across the room," as one of my students recently put it (Norris, personal communication, November 5, 1992).

An aesthetic balance is necessary, which invites our closing the gap between ourselves and others, between our self-knowing and our expression of self. Students need time to become accustomed to greater self-disclosure as well as the intense critique. During my years as a psycho-therapist a long term patient of mine once wisely cautioned me that "in

all things one must watch their timing." I have not forgotten that very sage advice. It was her father who felt such despair and with a gun took his own life. He took much of her's as well.

A portion of the problem in making community is how to invite all the opinions and ideas and the plurality of standpoints while not pretending that all have equal merit; that anything one believes and that all manner of expression are acceptable. In the classroom we need to not only find our own voice and speak it, but we must also allow or come to accept the challenge to it. Our freedom to express, to explore, and to challenge cannot degenerate into a tolerant "anything goes." This mixture requires balance and remains often an uncertainty until after the fact of our being together. This is a part of the praxis of our teaching practice.

Boundaries, and "proper authority" (Greene, 1988, p. x) are acts of love, which in turn allow for the experience and the knowing of those issues of our focus, whether ourselves or others. Boundaries and proper authority prevent the occurrence of insult and rebuffs which Heschel (1965) cautions us about, and which call out our old self-protecting postures. Boundaries and proper authority help return to us our trust and experience of ourselves without the threat of loss of love or esteem which has sometimes been forcefully taken from us. In that loss, we also lose our ability to

value and decide what it is that we actually do favor, what we want or wonder about. Boundaries make possible our own unique answers, our own important questions. They give us permission and place to come to know even the most painful things of the world and the facts of our self-denials. Boundaries and a proper authority open us to the evil in the world and in ourselves, because they make our finding of truth possible. And in the finding of truth we can then make good in the world.

It is impossible to set those boundaries, to redefine them as experience teaches they ought to be without a strong practice of humility and faith. It is equally difficult to exercise that proper authority without humility. One must be careful of oppressing others in the name of one's limited access to truth. Humility helps me be open to other possibilities, and faith allows me to make a decision knowing there will always be more information that can be gained. Short of the community setting its own limits and exercising its own authority, it is my responsibility for the time being to act lovingly in their behalf. There are no guarantees that I will always be just and merciful. In fact, there is far more certainty that I will err. At this stage of my developing humanity, it is the course I have chosen. Other possibilities may come later. There is room and hope for growth.

The Man Has Become As One Of Us, Knowing Good And Evil. . .

In Buber's (1968) analysis of the Genesis story, he said, "knowledge of good and evil means nothing else than cognizance of the opposites . . . fortune and misfortune, order and disorder" (p. 45). Knowing in this sense is then a fuller opening to that reality of possibilities. But such knowing grows from the experience of our living, including as it must our disobedience. A commentary on Genesis explains:

> "Knowing" in the Bible is not essentially an intellectual activity, not simply the objective contemplation of reality. Rather, it is experiential, emotional, and above all relational . . . it is best to understand "knowledge of good and bad" as the capacity to make independent judgments concerning human welfare. (Sarna & Potak, 1989, pp. 19,31)

Disobedience is essential to our development, to our breaking the chains of our childhood. Maturity comes to us, unfortunately, as we give pain to those we love and those who have sheltered us as well as to those that we shelter. Maturity comes as we feel the consequences and weight of the pain in our relationships and determine for ourselves when we must accept the direction of others and when we must chart our own course despite the pain and hurt that accompanies such acts. The pain we give to others is often necessary for our growth as well as theirs. As a student it is often hard for me to remember that. As a teacher, with my particular history, it is even harder. Bly (1990) has written, "A child

will not become an adult until it breaks the addiction to harmony" (p. 177). And Heschel (1962) wrote:

> It is for us to decide whether freedom is self-assertion or response to a demand; whether the ultimate situation is conflict or concern. (p. xv)

He has also written that "we are always faced with the choice of listening to either God or the snake" (1965, p. 102). Just as for man and woman in the "Garden," it is not always quite so clear as to which voice we might be hearing, and even when it is clear, we still must resist temptation. It is, however, our ability to listen and thus to choose from among the opposing voices that demonstrates the freedom granted to us. With that freedom comes our responsibility for the consequences of our acts. Acceptance of both the freedom and the responsibility teaches us, guides us, and creates our growth. Denial of either means we are constructing for ourselves a "system of hideouts" (Buber, 1950, p. 12). In that denial, we pretend we are not responsible. We pretend we are not free. With such pretense growth is impossible. With such pretense we can only continue to make evil in the world.

How does one come to know what is the right path in the midst of a world which encourages and sets for us a course which is exclusionary, isolating, and distrustful of our own deepest wants and intuitions? How does one come to know the just and loving way? Buber (1950) wrote:

> Adam faces the Voice, perceives his enmeshment, and avows: "I hid myself"; this is the beginning of man's way. The decisive heart-searching is the beginning of the way in man's life; it is, again and again the beginning of a human way. (p. 13)

Experience -- the living of our lives, feeling what is the result of our acts, reflecting and learning from our history -- is essential. It is not accidental that Buber (1950) tells us "it is again and again the beginning of the human way." There is no end to it. The search is always necessary. We must always choose.

A paradox of our being in the world seems to demonstrate that it is sometimes in our disobedience and our disunity that change, sometimes good change, comes into world. That perhaps is the strange and painful gift of the "snake." For as long as we refrained from our knowing of opposites, from eating of the "tree of knowledge," from the exercise of our disobedience, we were innocent and thus neither free nor responsible. Self-assertion or response to a demand must be weighed.

Self-assertion can indeed be our response to the demand of God's voice, just as sometimes our response to demand may be the ignoring of that voice. Discernment is essential. Decisive heart-searching must obtain, so too must our willingness to face the consequences and learn from them. Learning is most often a matter of being humble, of openness to what is new, challenging, and uncertain. Humility

requires our courage. So too does our faith. The world seems to teach little of either. But if one listens, faith and humility are the teachings of life. Certainly they are required if one is to hear God's voice.

He Created Them Male And Female He Created Them

Phoebe sat across from me at breakfast (as she does every morning) while I thought and wrote about Carl. When I stopped for a moment, she looked at me and said, "You seem like you're going to cry." I was unaware of that, as sometimes I am. As I spoke to her about Carl's fearfulness, her recognition of my pending tears -- her love -- helped to erase the disintegrated seeing I had been constructing. As my tears came, my knowing of who Carl was, who I was came. Here was me again. It was always me again, damaged, afraid to be hurt, protecting my vulnerability as Carl was protecting his vulnerability. Here was separation and distance again, and here was Phoebe loving me. Our community was decreasing the distance and making my true knowing of both Carl and me more possible.

Here then is our "original sin," our "fall." It is our separateness from the other, and thus from ourselves and thus from our God. Separation becomes our lack of hospitality to the stranger and then to ourselves. It cannot be that we do not love another while still caring for ourselves and pretending to love God. As Soelle (1984) has written, "One

cannot love children by choosing to love some children, while denying others" (p. 59). In separation we create distance from experience; as our experience is diminished, relationship is attenuated, and knowing is blocked. As I came to know me and my feelings, so I came to know Carl and our relatedness. As I come to know Carl, I come to know me better. I must be in the world, knowing the world in order to know me. And conversely, I cannot know the world without knowing myself. There is no starting point; there is only relation.

God joins. Schools, as they usually exist, do not. Schools are not designed and constructed to heal the breach in our mutual identities, to construct communities where we are in love. Schools do not say that "the essence of education is that it ought to be religious" (Whitehead, 1959, p. 23). So there is little or no truth finding possible in most of those places we call school. Schools do not repeat nor enact God's words of Genesis that "It is not good for man to be alone." Schools say, "Do your own work!"

The unity that was intended becomes exceptional. In all those other unexceptional moments we are avoiding God's question to Adam and Eve of "Where art thou?" Our shame comes not from our nakedness, but from our failure to be in love and to obey God's command to be in community with one another. Here again are the words Martin Buber (1959) has

left for us to encourage our finding the way, and to teach us that it cannot be walked alone.

> To it you shall go forth - go forth and not withhold yourself. You shall help. Each man you meet needs help, each needs your help. That is the thousandfold happening of each moment, that the need of help and the capacity to help make way for one another so that each not only does not know about the other but does not even know about himself. It is the nature of man to leave equally unnoticed the innermost need and the innermost gift of his own soul, although at times, too, a deep hour reminds him of them. You shall awaken in the other the need of help, in yourself the capacity to help. Even when you yourself are in need - and you are - you can help others and, in so doing, help yourself. (p. 110)

Heart-searching

And now here are the words which my student Carl wrote in his final paper of our term. It would seem he has had that "deep hour." He begins by writing about his autobiography.

> Out of all the activities of the semester I would say that writing my autobiography was the most difficult. . . . Writing it made me discover that being that open about myself made me really uncomfortable. I didn't want them (his classmates) to know what was in that paper. That's the real reason why I didn't come to class. Everything I wrote was true . . . but I left out quite a bit; things I'm not quite ready to say out loud to myself yet. That paper and the way that class was conducted on certain days made me feel all too revealed. I know now that I am actually a more private person than I realized. . . . In recent months I have become somewhat of a recluse.
>
> But you, Mr. Levine, kind of broke my facade for a moment. You made me really trust you . . . I couldn't hold my emotions in for one second longer on that day I literally burst into tears right before you. You made

> me feel okay for letting it go, and especially letting it go right in front of you. You made me realize that I had the makings of a real problem, and gave me time to nip it before it bloomed.

In this description Carl is telling us about his self-discovery through his encounter with me and with the class. He openly confesses his fear and avoidance. It is the expression of a universal humanity. It is the beginning of new trust. It is decisive heart-searching which returns him to the way. Like Adam he is saying, "I hid." It is a turning.

Now he shifts to his larger view of the class and what he sees going on there. There is mystery and puzzlement here; the mark of humility and the sign that new truth is coming to be known.

> We as a class not only laughed together, but on the last day we cried together. Yes, even me, Carl, college sophomore, cried as I walked back to my room that day. Now when a whole class cries together and it's not because of bad test scores, it really makes you wonder what went on in that class. I'm still trying to figure out exactly what it was that made this class have such a deep impression on me.

Then in words direct and clear, he integrates his experience and what he has come to realize about his classmates, about himself, and the potential of teaching. He is beginning to know that teaching is a way of being with others, of making real, of concretizing what we believe and

hold to be our truths. He is beginning to know that teaching can bring new truth to our lives.

> I see a lot more to work with when I think about teaching. . . . I see an opportunity to experience humanity. I see an opportunity to experiment. I see a way for my ideas to become more than ideas.
>
> Another thing this class did for me was to make me change the way that I looked at people in general. When I first came to class I thought that everyone in there was just too normal and that I was the only freak in the whole class. . . . I was worried about this because I rarely talk to people who aren't freaks because I have nothing in common with them and they rarely understand me.

In the language of this writing, Carl is telling us of seeing the strangers, of being separated, of the alienation which he and others -- despite their similar dress and ways -- come to have with one another, are taught to have with one another. Then, like Tara, Sally, and Joan (students from another class), Carl begins to see and act differently. He begins to heal the breach, to affect a reconciliation. Carl has been involved with the creation of community. He has been engaged in being in God's image. He makes the strangers, both within and without, welcome.

> As class went on, I found that I was not as alone as I thought I was. There were other freaks in class too; they just didn't look like they were. And as class went on I also found that I was not as much of a freak as I thought I was. My classmates in general turned out to be a lot cooler than I'd thought they'd be. And now that I look at the class I see only people, each with his or her own trials and tribulations (some more than others), each just trying to get by, each only human, and that includes me.

Of The Dust Of The Ground

Fifteen years ago I stood in a high school guidance office in rural New Hampshire and met the eyes of my dear colleague, Louise, as she ushered one of our sad and damaged waifs into her office. Later we spoke about the pain and damage we saw in the children. We said to each other that the very best we could do in the face of all that some of those children confronted was to love them when we were with them. Sometimes our loving meant calling the sheriff because of the abusing adults with whom they lived. Sometimes it simply meant only listening to the hurt and pain that they would have to live through. Always it was an invitation -- as best we could make it and accept it -- to find a few moments for our common humanity to exist with them. It was the chance to be in community. We do not always make or accept that invitation. Being made from dust, we cannot.

It Is Always, "In The Beginning. . . "

Each of us must battle with our own Colonel Brussiloffs, those real and present or the strong memories of the past which contaminate our living. We must continually make our Exodus and remember always that we have been slaves in Egypt. Each of us must wander in the desert in hope of finding the promised land, despite our times of little or no faith. Each

of us must come to know good and evil through the pain and sorrow, and the love and acceptance we are given and which we give to others. And each of us may come to find God in those moments of truly being with others, and profoundly sense God's absence when we are not.

My Exodus is to stay present in the world, to take my hands from my eyes, to let my tears show to others: to come out from my hideouts. Those tears are my humanity. They are my truth. My desert wandering and search for the promised land is the struggle to come again and again to faith and acceptance, to believe that we can make community, to accept that "life is good in spite of its evil and that it is evil in spite of good" (Niebuhr, in Heschel, 1966, p. 130). Once I can more easily and more often do that, perhaps my laughter will follow. Perhaps.

I image the real tears and the real laughter of my students and me in my classroom: open and connected, without fear, in spite of our fear. I image confessions of our ignorance, uncertainty, hesitations, and shortcomings. I image love: real love between us, not held selectively for a small select handful, not made scarce so that we must compete for it, not contingent on agreement or performance, but in spite of our disagreement, and lack of performance. I image the passion of strong beliefs and equally strong and passionate challenges to belief.

Mystery

Heschel (1965) has written that "behind all the mystery there is meaning" (p. 77). I believe that behind the meaning there is always more mystery. Mystery is that despite the harm done to each of us and despite our brokenness, we are able to reach again for the hands of others so that they may give us help. Somehow, we come to trust again. Mystery is that despite all the rebuffs and rejections, we still can willingly extend ourselves to others in helping ways. Somehow, we come again to faith. Mystery is that despite our coming to know that life is very good, we forget and lose the way, and then we find it again.

Annie Dillard (1982) has written that "our complex and inexplicable caring for one another, and for our life together . . . is given. It is not learned" (pp. 94-95). That caring is the spirit of us, the unquenchable spirit of our humanity. That is the gift of our being made in God's image. That is "the breath of life" blown into us by God. That is the ultimate mystery, the wonder of our being in the world. We are in-spirited with God's spirit. All of us are God's people!

> But this is the covenant which
> I will make with the house of Israel
> after those days says the Lord:
> I will put my law within them,
> And I will write it in their hearts;
> And I will be their God,
> And they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

As teachers, we must remember and we must know that there is no child in our classroom who does not need the hands of their classmates. As teachers, we must remember and we must know that there is no child in our classroom who cannot learn again to extend themselves and help, who cannot learn again to reach out for help. Community is the place where we come to overcome, to heal ourselves and our hesitancies, to touch and be touched, to come out of ourselves.

Community is where we can take down our hands from our eyes and touch them to the heart of another. It is where others may touch our hearts. Community is the place of remembering, of coming to know who we are, for what we have been made, and for answering the deepest call of the spirit within us. When we teachers do that making of community, we are doing God's work in the world. When we do that we are being in God's image.

It is a profound mystery that God has made us His hands in the world. It is mystery that God reaches to us and calls to us for help in making His world. It is mystery that God does so in spite of our repeated failure to respond. It is His invitation, His need for us. God has faith in us! The evil humanity creates in the world is God's call to us to create good. It is our opportunity. As teachers, it is our holy responsibility to answer the call. To say, "Here I am."

The voice said, Cry. And he said,
What shall I cry? All flesh is grass,
and all the goodliness thereof
is as the flower of the field:
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth;
because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it:
surely the people is grass.
The grass withereth, the flower fadeth:
but the word of our God shall stand for ever.
(Isaiah 40:6-8).

And we ask, "But what is His word, and what shall I do?"

And the voice answers:

With what shall I come before the Lord,
And bow myself before the God on high?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
With calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
With ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my first born for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has showed you, O man, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, and to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:6-8)

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