

Authentic Educational Reform: Listening for the Wholeness of the Live Encounter

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[T]he transformation of teaching must begin in the transformed heart of the teacher. Only in the heart searched and transformed by truth will new teaching techniques and strategies for institutional change find sure grounding. (Palmer, 1993, p.107)

Most of us would agree that there was once a time in our lives, perhaps in childhood, when the world spoke as if overflowing with the splendor and intrigue of novelty and fascination. The four-year old wonders, “If the clouds are so light, then how can they hold the rain?” The beauty of such questioning speaks to the attentive and curious attunement of the child to the magnificent mystery that is naturally speaking at every turn of his or her head. However, as the norms, values, and expectations of social conditioning begin to invade the child’s mind, this wondrous sensing of the world begins to diminish. For many of us, the complications of everyday life gradually dim the splendor that was once so viscerally felt. The excessive reliance on conceptuality and the need to live according to what is empirically verifiable take precedence as the sensing of the indescribable marveling in childhood fades into the background, still speaking but falling mostly upon deaf or unattuned ears.

Of course, we all still have glimpses of the tremendous wonder that once radiated in the world around us, but, in general, the glimpses quickly pass as the over reliance on the conceptual attitude—and its inherent splitting between the person as subject and the world as object—once again asserts its dominion over us. Inevitable in this scenario is that this reductive mindset that educators hold outside of school inevitably

filters into the mindset that we carry to our schooling practices and our attempts at reforming these practices.

However, what if we educators were to recondition ourselves to reawaken that sense of awe and wonder? Our views and attitudes might begin to challenge and deconstruct the fabrications that reduce the teacher's purposes, roles, and responsibilities to merely an enactment of someone else's curriculum, a curriculum that does not speak back to us or interact in and through the unique expression of our being. We might become a bit more suspicious of classifications that so easily and pervasively reduce the child's infinite beauty to the mere ability to comply with predetermined standards of factual recitation and skill demonstration. The ends of our work may become less clear, and yet, through the ambiguity, space for genuine exploration and creativity may open in which the interconnection of teacher, student, and curriculum becomes a living and breathing reality. Perspectives could broaden. The truth of somewhat mundane educational phrases such as "teaching for diversity," "working for social justice," and "constructing knowledge" would become the meaningful embodiment of an ongoing deliberation that strives to deepen the realization of interconnection among the teacher, student, and curriculum. In turn, the ethical responsibility and moral character of education as a genuine conduit for compassionate and meaningful change may take hold in the visions and purposes of many educators. The integrity of teaching as a vocational calling would strengthen in its vitality as a palpable manifestation in the teacher's heart.

And yet, only by creating space between us and the conceptual clutter that controls our minds and fills our days with endless distractions can we begin to reacquaint ourselves with the pure innocence from childhood. As the opening quote asserts, "the transformation of teaching must begin in the transformed heart of the teacher" (Palmer, 1993, p.107). It must begin with the internal awakening of the teachers themselves. Furthermore, the transformation must come from the heart that is attuned to a different way of listening—an authentic way of listening—to the way in which the world speaks. Authentic here means a deeply felt sense of oneself as distinct in human form and yet deeply connected to all others and the world through an underlying wholeness. Belief in the "in here" of self as teacher, for example, and the "out there" of students and the world of curriculum always have been the imagined reality of the conceptual mind's misperception of how things really are: interdependent and therefore insubstantial and empty of a separate, isolated existence. Thich Thien-An (1975) provides an analogy:

If in a dark room a stick of burning incense is twirled very rapidly, a circle of light is seen. But as soon as the incense stops moving, the

circle disappears. Though the circle was visible and everybody saw it as such, it was actually an illusion created by the mind. Since it has no [reified] existence, the circle even when present and visible is empty [of an independently fixed and separate existence]. (p.84)

Authenticity pierces the illusion that we are merely separate and independent of each other. Instead, authenticity intuitively senses the intersection in which we are both form and formlessness. There is no reification in the sense of an independently fixed existence. There is no nihilism in the sense of denying that we exist, because we do: I am me, and you are you. Thus, authenticity intuits the space “in between” form and formlessness. Imagine, for example, walking through a dark, thickly wooded forest only to suddenly find oneself standing in a lighted clearing of trees. The dark forest still surrounds the clearing, just as the mystery of death (formlessness) surrounds the illumination of life (the world of beings). Like two sides of the same coin, authenticity senses oneself and all others as neither one side nor the other but as both sides of the coin by nature, and therefore as distinct in form yet deeply connected in formlessness.

Only authentic listening from the heart, that is, from the deepest intuitive place within oneself, can lead to authentic reforms in education. Therefore, authentic educational reform demands authentic listening, and only when the educator is underway on a path of authentic listening can the journey of authentic reform begin.

Although my exploration goes beyond education’s perceived definition of truth, i.e., that which is empirically verifiable, my intention is not, however, in any way, to diminish the importance of empirical truth. Rather, I propose that to temporize at this definition of truth is inauthentic. Therefore, my primary intention is to suggest that the essential work of educational reform is to explore the balance between truth as empirically verifiable and truth as the unceasing mystery, awe, and wonder of life itself. Furthermore, my purpose is not to offer the “how to” of educational reform. To be clear, improvements in educational policies and structures—such as work-embedded professional development, growth-oriented supervision, and comprehensive induction—are unequivocally important, but authenticity does not find its decisive measure within them. Nor is my intent to reach a prescribed destination, achieve a predetermined objective, or propose additional tasks. Nor do I seek to question what counts as empirically valid knowledge in educational reform.

Rather, I appeal to educators, policy makers, and others to transform the boundaries about how we think about reform. This appeal will ask the educator to enter into an open dialogue with authenticity, with the

possibility that we are at once distinct yet indivisible, separate yet inseparable. Such dialogue calls for a temporary suspension of preconceptions about what educational reform looks like. Furthermore, such dialogue invites reflection on the quality of presence that authenticity demands, and offers opportunity to ponder how authenticity may already exist in one's *being* as an educator, but may perhaps be overshadowed by an institutional reliance on empirically verifiable truth. In short, I wish to invite the educator to deliberate on the quality of presence of one's being that, in the world of education, is often muffled by the unceasing demand for empirical certainty and relentless doing.

I examine Taoist sage Chuang Tzu's *The Woodcarver* (Merton, 1969), a poem that metaphorically represents the path to, and fruition of, the transformed heart. As a metaphor, this poem offers an example for dramatically reshaping how we as educators think about educational reform. In my analysis, I focus on Khing, the woodcarver, to explore a way of authentic being in the world, which is to say, a way of embodying in thought, speech, and action the intersection of form and formlessness, of distinctness yet oneness. Just as in education there is the relationship among teacher, student, and curriculum, in this poem there is the relationship among Khing, the tree, and the bell stand. I invite the reader to imagine oneself as Khing, the authentic teacher, who cuts through the illusion of separateness and recognizes the deep underlying connection with all others and the world. One can imagine the student as the tree. Of course, the student and the tree are very different kinds of beings. However, some acceptable parallels can be made. For example, just as Khing's curriculum (the bell stand) would not happen without the tree, the school curriculum would not happen without the student. In addition, to the awakened listener, the tree has its own unique rhythm of complexity in the ebb and flow of its living process; the student does, as well. Khing, as the teacher who is listening authentically, responds to the unique complexity of his student, the tree; so does the teacher who is listening authentically to the child. Thus, I ask the reader to suspend the seemingly specious parallel and to entertain it for reflective purposes throughout the forthcoming sections.

Furthermore, I draw from Twentieth Century philosopher Martin Heidegger's concepts of truth—in particular, his concepts of language, thought, worlding, and mortality—to inform the explanations and deliberations. For clarity, one should understand that there are two sets of metaphors happening in the forthcoming analyses: the metaphors in Chuang Tzu's poem and the metaphors in Heidegger's philosophy. Together, they form a figurative basis from which I pose reflections for the educator to support one's self-inquiry into authentic listening. In

the last section, I posit Khing's bell stand as an example of the ultimate authentic work, which is like a window through which the truth of our deeply connected, interdependent nature may shine. By doing so, this section culminates the previous analyses while directing one's gaze ahead to the ongoing work of nurturing one's path of authentic listening as the most crucial reform strategy.

The Woodcarver

Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand
Of precious wood. When it was finished,
All who saw it were astounded. They said it must be
The work of spirits.
The Prince of Lu said to the master carver:
"What is your secret?"

Khing replied: "I am only a workman:
I have no secret. There is only this:
When I began to think about the work you commanded
I guarded my spirit, did not expend it
On trifles, that were not to the point.
I fasted in order to set
My heart at rest.
After three days fasting,
I had forgotten gain and success.
After five days
I had forgotten praise or criticism.
After seven days
I had forgotten my body
With all its limbs.

"By this time all thought of your Highness
And of the court had faded away.
All that might distract me from the work/ Had vanished.
I was collected in the single thought/ Of the bell stand.

"Then I went to the forest
To see the trees in their own natural state.
When the right tree appeared before my eyes,
The bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt.
All I had to do was to put forth my hand
and begin.

"If I had not met this particular tree
There would have been/ No bell stand at all.

"What happened?
My own collected thought

Encountered the hidden potential in the wood;
From this live encounter came the work
Which you ascribe to the spirits.”

The Command of the Live Encounter

The first step in this metaphorical journey is to entertain the notion that the live encounter authentically speaks, which is to say that the live encounter is the “zero point” from which the dimensions of form and formlessness intersect. Khing recognizes this truth. For example, upon viewing the bell stand, the Prince asks, “What is your secret?” Khing explains: “I have no secret. There is only this: When I began to think about the work you commanded/ I guarded my spirit [against] trifles that were not to the point.” Knowing that authentic work cannot be commanded by or derived from the authority of the Prince, Khing guards his spirit against such trifles. The authentic work comes from a different kind of command, one that abides deeply within the human heart and at the same time transcends any directive by human will or control. Near the end, Khing explains:

What happened?
My own collected thought
Encountered the hidden potential in the wood;
From this live encounter came the work
Which you attribute to the spirits.

Khing is cognizant that the authentic work of the bell stand can only come from the directive of the live encounter, not from the Prince of Lu’s command. Otherwise, he would not have known to guard himself against such “trifles” and distractions. Implicit in Khing’s awareness is that the command does not speak in terms of human concepts. Concepts are abstractions of lived experience. Concepts derive from direct experiences with the world, and reside in the subjectivity of the person, which has pre-conceptual (i.e., primordial) roots. The pre-conceptual basis of existence is prior to all separation between the subject and object. Therefore, implied in the direct, non-conceptual experience of the world, which is always happening in one’s living process, is simultaneity or wholeness. As Heidegger (1962) writes: “[A] ‘commercium’ of the subject with a world does not get created for the first time by [conceptual] knowing, nor does it arise from some way in which the world acts upon a subject. Knowing is a mode of [the person] founded upon Being-in-the-world” (p.90). For example, Khing says:

When the right tree appeared before my eyes,
The bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt.

All I had to do was to put forth my hand
and begin.

Simultaneity or wholeness occurred among Khing's thought, the right tree, and the appearance of the bell stand. One could say that Khing, like the artist, is creatively inspired. The directive for this inspiration originates within the hidden potential of life's pre-conceptual wholeness. Khing wisely knows that to actualize this hidden potential, certain listening conditions must be in place. For example, he fasts to clear all distractions from the work. (I examine fasting in a later section.) The clearing of distractions leads to an important outcome. He says: "I fasted in order to set/ My heart at rest." The "in order to" indicates that Khing knows that the authentic work depends on his heart's being at rest. Thus, the restful heart is an essential listening condition. The restful heart has an implication for Khing's process. He explains:

By this time all thought of your Highness
And of the court had faded away.
All that might distract me from the work
Had vanished.
I was collected in the single thought
Of the bell stand.

The heart at rest collects Khing into the single thought of the bell stand. Khing knows that there is an essential relationship between the restful heart and the single thought. By understanding this relationship, one gains a sense of what the live encounter says when speaking, as well as how this speaking occurs. Heidegger's concepts of language, thought, and worlding help to clarify this relationship.

The Metaphors of Language and Thought

The live encounter uses language to speak the authentic command, which calls from "the between" of oneself as distinct in form and yet deeply connected to all others and the world. Heidegger (1971a) writes that "[l]anguage speaks" (p.189), which seems strange, since in everyday understanding, one knows that humans speak language. Ordinarily, for example, one has a thought and then utters that thought into vocal expression. However, through this phrasing, Heidegger implicitly undermines the everyday understanding by indicating language as pre-conceptual. One can imagine language in the sense of John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God" (1978, p.890). This pre-conceptual basis of language concurs with the earlier analysis of Khing's spontaneously and simultaneously seeing the right tree and

the appearance of the bell stand. The wholeness of that live encounter is not based on an abstract concept but rather on a direct, pre-conceptual experience and realization of the purity of that experience, uncluttered by conceptual representations.

For Heidegger, the kind of thought that hears language in this pre-conceptual sense must, not surprisingly, also be pre-conceptual. He clarifies this pre-conceptual relationship in the translation of a saying by the early-Greek thinker, Parmenides. Heidegger (1968) attempts to think the words “to state” and “to think” in their original early-Greek meaning.¹ He writes that “to state” is “a laying,” “the letting-lie-before-us.” In other words, language speaks the truth that all that is—including all the raw materials that provide the foundation from which humans can construct their lives—lies there already before us as something given without condition. The content that is spoken in language is a metaphor that represents the gift of life and all that can sustain life. Correspondingly, “to think” is the “taking-to-heart” of what is spoken when language speaks. One can think of “heart” as a kind of deeply intuitive sensing. For example, one wakes up in the morning and senses the day as a precious and wondrous gift, and with such sensing, may approach the day as an opportunity to give thanks for the gift. On the other hand, one wakes up in the morning and senses yet another day, with countless projects to do, tasks to check-off on one’s “to do” list, and/or numerous and varied expectations or demands to meet. Both examples involve the heart’s sensing of what is always being spoken: the gift of life. Yet the first example is a more authentic sensing than the second. The first example allows the spontaneous quality and therefore the wholeness of the present moment to be recognized, while the second fractures the present moment, often unconsciously and habitually imposing conditioned attitudes from the past, thus dividing one’s sense of self from realizing the always available wholeness.

When one is sensing authentically, one is thinking most properly. Thinking most properly is not thinking about any particular thing, i.e., it is pre-conceptual awareness. Take, for example, the parent cradling the baby in pure acceptance, melting away all preconceived conditions or conceptions for the moment. Thinking most properly, the parent’s open heart senses the precious and unique gift that is present in the baby’s being; in turn, the parent experiences an indescribable and spontaneous feeling of thanks for this gift of the baby’s existence. In the poem, imagine if Khing depended on pre-conceived notions to discover the right tree. Rigid adherence to mental representations would have constricted his sensing capacity. Because the live encounter itself is pre-conceptual, he must be able to suspend the conceptual attitude in order to appreci-

ate each tree's inherently unique rhythm and movement. Khing says: "I went to the forest/ To see the trees in their own natural state." He knows that language metaphorically speaks through the natural text of each unique tree, and that his sensitivity to this speaking influences his ability to hear the directive to find the right tree. Like the parent, he cradles the trees in pure acceptance of their natural state, letting each tree lie before him in the integrity of its own authentic voice without imposing preconceived conditions or concepts, which would deaden his innermost sensing capacity.

For the Educator's Reflection

The sense of teaching as the response to one's vocational calling may resonate for many educators.² We teach because we want to "make a difference," or so the commonly heard saying goes. What type of difference are we ready to make, however, especially if the difference holds sway under the compelling authority of administrative arrangements? Currently, the external command to teach—like that coming from the Prince of Lu—takes its directive from federal and state reforms on standardizing curriculum goals and learning outcomes. However, one's decision to teach most likely does not originate from this command but rather comes from a different source: the wholeness that lies deep within the potential of every teacher's life circumstances and conditions.

I maintain that the calling to teach occurs through many little and probably subtle moments throughout one's life, moments in which the wholeness of life is speaking to us. Even the epiphany that teaching is what one is meant to do has its trajectory in countless previous moments that have been inconspicuously directing oneself to the profession. If asked, many people may even say that they "just knew" that teaching was their calling. The decision was already made through sensing the subtlety of these countless previous moments, which, for many teachers, merge in the expression, "I want to teach because I simply love children." Furthermore, the quality of these many small moments often has an implicit sense of inter-connection and a tacit desire to transcend oneself and to form a deepening relationship with one's humanity. But the cognizance of these momentary connections often quickly becomes cluttered and easily dispersed by the busyness and complication of everyday life, along with the lack of institutional support to nurture growing awareness and reflection about these subtle moments. Inquiry into such moments is simply not encouraged in the milieu of schooling and of society in general.

On the other hand, what if teachers were encouraged to explore the seemingly mundane expression "the calling to teach" as it relates

to themselves as people with unique lives, and to how they define their purpose as teachers, their work with students, and their approach to the curriculum? For example, how might one's sensing of the vocational calling still be happening in the innumerable and seemingly routine yet potentially profound interactions that one is having daily with the students? This kind of ongoing affirmative inquiry, if encouraged, can awaken the heart and open one's sensing to the rich, dynamic, and unpredictable potential that is speaking in one's teaching life, although perhaps covered by burnout and the deflation of heartfelt aspirations, or cluttered by empirical over-reliance. It can be a crucial antidote to overcoming burnout, to imagining unforeseen possibilities, and to sustaining a deep curve of profound learning across the career span.

The Metaphor of Worlding

Once again, what is spoken in language is the metaphor for the gifts of life and the raw materials that provide the foundation from which humans and other beings can nurture and grow. The sensing of these unconditional gifts means thinking in a pre-conceptual sense. The heart, whether soft or hard, but usually moving along the continuum of the two, always is in a state of authentic or inauthentic sensing, which is to say, perceiving or misperceiving the way things really are: distinct but indivisible. I believe that the latter tends to be the case for most of us since education and most institutions do not adequately embrace the practice of nurturing what goes beyond empirically verifiable truth. To deepen one's appreciation of the live encounter's command, however, the analysis must balance what language says with how language speaks. The "how" is the next step in this metaphorical journey. Khing says:

I fasted in order to set
My heart at rest....

By this time all thought of your Highness
And of the court had faded away.
All that might distract me from the work
Had vanished.
I was collected in the single thought
Of the bell stand.

The "in order to" indicates that Khing knows that the heart's being at rest is necessary to hear the command of the live encounter and to accomplish the authentic work, which as I discuss in the final section is like a window through which the truth of our deeply connected, interdependent nature may shine. Moreover, when Khing's heart is at rest,

he is collected in the single thought of the bell stand. The temporal cue, “By this time,” indicates this point. Thus, implied is that the heart at rest is what gathers Khing into the single thought. Just as the heart and thinking are intimately connected—i.e., thinking as the heart’s sensing prior to concepts—the restfulness of the heart and the singleness of the thought are intimately joined, as well. There is an intimacy between these two: restfulness and single-ness. More specifically, since the kind of thought that is under investigation is pre-conceptual, the implication is that single-ness is not the particular singularity of a subject toward an object. Rather, it is the wholeness that deeply interpenetrates the existential basis of the subject and object. Therefore, in this case, I use wholeness instead of single-ness. In addition, Heidegger’s concept of worlding helps to clarify the connection between restfulness and wholeness. He poses a metaphor of restfulness—which he relates with stillness—and, by doing so, conceptualizes “rest” and “stillness” differently from everyday understanding. Heidegger (1971a) writes:

[R]est has its being in the fact that it stills. As the stilling of stillness, rest conceived strictly, is always more in motion than all motion and always more restlessly active than any agitation. (p.204)

Rest, which Heidegger implies is essentially the “stilling of stillness,” is metaphorical for the worlding of the world, that is to say, for the movement of the whole of existence. Rest, understood in this way, is the figurative speaking of language as it clears an opening for life to occur. The speaking that opens the world for existence is outside three dimensional space and time, and therefore is beyond the capacity of empirical knowledge and reasoning. In turn, one may ponder why bother speculating if the movement of the world’s wholeness cannot be empirically validated. Take for example, however, a comparable parallel: the speed of light, which is a concept that may be tangentially familiar to many of us. Remarkably, the speed of light is no speed at all, but rather is the movement of the whole. Quantum physicist David Bohm (as cited in Weber, 1986) elucidates this notion:

All matter is a condensation of light into patterns moving back and forth at average speeds, which are less than the speed of light.... As you move faster and faster according to relativity your time rates slow down and the distance gets smaller, so as you approach very high speeds your own internal time and distance become less, and therefore, if you were at the speed of light you could reach from one end of the universe to the other without changing your age at all. (p.45)

It may not be a coincidence that Heidegger often uses the term “light” in his later writings to discuss the truth of the world’s wholeness. For

example, Heidegger (1971b) explains that the unified giving-receiving movement of the world's fourfold (mortals, divinities, earth, and sky) "[lightens] into the radiance of their simple oneness" (p.178). Similarly, it may not be so coincidental that mystical traditions often speak of sensing profound stillness and light simultaneously. For example, Buddhist philosophy proposes "clear light" as the most subtle illumination of the truth of conscious knowing (e.g., H. H. Dalai Lama, 2005, pp. 124-125; Sogyal Rinpoche, 1993, pp.259-286). The main point, however, is that the movement of the whole is an essential movement that transcends three-dimensional logic, and one should not discount this movement simply because it transcends empirical validation. In the poem, Khing's awareness must be still, i.e., his heart at rest, to sense this movement of the wholeness, which is the figurative speaking of language. Perhaps cultivating one's attunement to the "unempirical" wholeness is most important, since we know what kind of outcome it can generate. As the poem indicates, for example:

All who saw [the bell stand] were astounded. They said it must be
The work of spirits.
The Prince of Lu said to the master carver:
"What is your secret?"

For the Educator's Reflection

Fragmenting school curriculum into bits and pieces of orderly information sustains administrative efficiency but deadens the teacher's focus on listening to the potential inter-connectedness among oneself, students, and the world of subject matter that comprise the school curriculum. The result can be unquestioning adherence to "doing one's job" rather than thoughtful investigation into the wholeness of life that, from all angles, envelops the hidden potential of the teacher, students, and curriculum.

Finding inspiration in Khing—who "encountered the hidden potential in the wood"—one can try the following inquiry with the tree in one's backyard or on one's walking path. Say, for example, that one is standing over against the large oak tree, as the subject over against the object. One appears separate from the tree. Obviously, there is truth in this appearance. However, is separation the innermost truth of this experience? For example, when it is raining, is the water that nourishes the tree of a different water source from the water that comprises the human body? Furthermore, can the tree or the human live without air? We both need air to live. Is the air supply somehow divided into tree air and human air, or is it in the same essential wholeness that clears the way for life and that sustains each being? Warmth of the sun, and just the right amount, renders us each to our survival. The tree and the

human are thus dependent on the same heat source. How about the root of the tree? Firmly planted in the earth. Is this a different earth from the one that grounds people's livelihood? Of course not.

What if we as educators were to explore such investigations in order to take-to-heart the sensing of our inter-connection? Through the gateway of the heart, would we open our sights more devotedly to the world, as if entrusting ourselves to an old, beloved friend? Would we deepen genuine respect and care for students, curriculum, and ourselves because we heeded this connecting bond? Can we consider the school curriculum as part of our preparation to listen authentically ... preparation to be ready ... readiness to listen ... to hear the song of a different melody, and so, to respond differently to ourselves as educators, to the students, and to the curriculum?

Mortality: Khing's Entry into the Live Encounter

Fasting is Khing's self-chosen contemplative practice, which guards his spirit against "trifles that were not to the point." Literally, fasting is a means of spiritual purification through not eating. Mystical traditions have used this practice for centuries. However, fasting also has a metaphorical meaning. Take, for example, Jesus in the desert (Luke 4:1-13) (1978, p.868), which is a parable with which many of us are familiar. To begin, Jesus assumed human form, which means that, as human, he struggled with—and through his fasting, purified himself of—the everyday human concerns with which we are all familiar: e.g., gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and criticism, fame and shame.³ In addition, I believe that Jesus' confrontation with the devil is symbolic of the mental conflicts that, as we all might confirm, arise because of the temptations of the human concerns. Furthermore, I believe that the desert is symbolic for the barren and desolate place within one's innermost truth, a place that is untainted by one's striving to assuage the mundane concerns, and thus a place that prepares one—even if for a short moment—to sense the wholeness of the live encounter. This metaphorical meaning of fasting is of particular significance in the following analysis. Khing says:

I fasted in order to set
My heart at rest.
After three days fasting,
I had forgotten gain and success.
After five days
I had forgotten praise or criticism.
After seven days
I had forgotten my body
With all its limbs.

Khing's fasting is a three-fold process. First, he says that, "after three days of fasting, I had forgotten gain and success." He is establishing a freeing relationship with these external and often materialistic distractions. Such distractions can only keep him from directly realizing the live encounter, and from listening to the command to do authentic work. Second, he says that "[a]fter five days/ I had forgotten praise or criticism." Khing is loosening the bond of internal distractions, such as consuming himself with worries about how the Prince or the people will judge him. The live encounter comes from spaciousness that is deeper than the limits of the attitude in which evaluation, praise, and criticism reside. Fasting enables him to cut-through these distractions. Third, Khing says, "After seven days/ I had forgotten my body/ With all its limbs." He is not denying the fact that he has a body; otherwise he could not go to the forest to see the trees. Instead, he forgets his body only to the extent that it can distract him. His body can distract him only as long as he clings to it as if it were something that is intrinsically self-subsisting and separate, which, in turn, leads to the preoccupation with the mundane concerns (e.g., attachment to pleasure and avoidance of pain).⁴

Through fasting, Khing renounces all distractions to the authentic work, and, in turn, can create with purity and honesty. He fasts to remember who he truly is. The words—"had forgotten"—at each stage of the fasting process indicate his renunciation of the delusion of separateness, a renunciation that prepares him to receive the directive of the live encounter. By cultivating forgetfulness of the everyday human concerns, he is simultaneously cultivating the memory of his true nature. On authentic memory, Heidegger (1968) writes:

Originally, 'memory' means as much as devotion: a constant concentrated abiding with something—not just something that has passed, but in the same way with what is present and what may come. What is past, present, and to come appear in...oneness. (p.140)

Memory, in its truest sense, means "re-membering" oneself from the illusion of separateness to the truth of wholeness. Implicit in this deeply intuiting memory is the renunciation of one's conceptuality, including one's concept of self, in order to sense the wholeness, like the cloud that does not cling to its cloud-form but realizes its essential communion with the sky. For humans, this pre-conceptual memory comes by directly realizing that one is mortal. Why must one realize one's mortality? Heidegger's concept on mortality provides insight. Mortals die. "To die means to be capable of death as death" (Heidegger, 1971b, p.176). But animals die, as well. Heidegger writes, however, that "[t]he animal perishes. It has death neither ahead of itself nor behind it" (p.176).

Implicit is that mortals can reflect on their finite nature. Mortals have the capacity to realize their unconditional welcome on earth as humans, and their temporary stay in human form. This realization penetrates the plurality of human differences as we perceive them and enables one to see how mortality entrusts us all as equally human by nature. One must recognize, however, the distinction between having the potential to realize one's mortal nature and actualizing the realization. By fasting, Khing intentionally prepares himself to realize his mortality. Likewise, all contemplative paths that lead to authentic listening—i.e., to the felt sense of ourselves as distinct but indivisible—must involve renunciation of the everyday human concerns, which obstruct the hidden wholeness that speaks through the live encounter. In turn, one may cultivate the genuine memory of one's essential connectedness as mortal.

For the Educator's Reflection

To uncover the authenticity of one's teacher self, one can seek opportunities in everyday classroom life to practice de-constructing the temptation of the mundane concerns. For example, does the compliment from the parent or the principal trigger the subtle tendency toward self-inflation, a tendency that waters the seeds of attachment to praise and aversion to criticism. Khing, in his humility, refuses to self-glorify, despite temptations from the people (“...it must be the work of spirits”), and the Prince (“What is your secret?”). Khing's response is, “I am only a workman: I have no secret.” (I address this exchange in depth in the next section.) Furthermore, one might find inspiration in Khing's courage and integrity for speaking the truth, despite probably knowing that he could face criticism from the people, as well as shame and possibly bodily threat for insulting the Prince. He says directly to the Prince, for example:

By this time all thought of your Highness
And of the court had faded away.
All that might distract me from the work
Had vanished.

I do not suggest that Khing foolishly insults the Prince. To the contrary, through his wisdom, and as the awakened listener, Khing is most likely speaking what he senses the Prince is ready to hear. Otherwise, why would he bother with such a needless risk? In that regard, Khing is probably assuming a reasonable gamble. Perhaps, as one broadens the landscape of one's inner awareness, one might uncover unforeseen depths of courage and integrity for speaking one's truth as an educator. With that courage and integrity, a deep wisdom may reveal how to communicate one's truth in ways that might soften the hard shell of

schooling practices that distract the teacher's mind from doing the work of true educational transformation.

Love: Khing's Response to the Live Encounter

I close my analysis by addressing the following questions: what is the command that is given to Khing, and that he willingly receives as he stands opposite the tree in the wholeness of the live encounter? How is he then able to respond by crafting a bell stand that the Prince and people exclaim "[m]ust be the work of spirits"? Lastly, why is his response to the authentic command of the work an authentic response, i.e., a response that honors our deepest truth as being profoundly connected? The poem begins:

Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand
Of precious wood. When it was finished,
All who saw it were astounded. They said it must be
The work of spirits.
The Prince of Lu said to the master carver:
"What is your secret?"
Khing replied: "I am only a workman:
I have no secret."

The first line observes that, "Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand/ Of *precious* wood" (italics added). Why is the wood *precious*? What is its preciousness? To whom is the wood precious, and why? As I indicated earlier, Khing takes-to-heart what is spoken when language speaks as the command of the live encounter: that all that is—including human life—is first given unconditionally yet for a finite time (i.e., all beings are vulnerable because they are inevitably limited). Only in this way can Khing commence with his work as the master woodcarver and, in turn, construct the bell stand. In his realization, Khing is able to appreciate his unconditional welcome and temporary stay as a mortal who is abiding in the world with things. Things like the tree must have their own welcome and stay in the world, as well, which make them, as with Khing, equally vulnerable in their limitedness and equally precious in their unconditional welcome (although trees, unlike humans, cannot reflect on this truth).

In his deep knowing, Khing finds his proper place as the master woodcarver: not because the Prince endows him with the title. Certainly not because he has the capacity, if he chooses, to dominate the tree, as if by nature it were his to dominate. And, not because he has much experience and well-developed techniques. Rather, he finds his proper place because he enters into an essential relatedness with the tree, standing opposite

the tree and allowing it to speak in its own vulnerable and precious nature, which Khing knows is never his to possess. As he says, "I went to the forest/ To see the trees in *their own* natural state" (italics added). Upon such seeing, how does the image of the bell stand come to Khing?

If one recalls, Khing went to the forest once he "was collected in the single thought/ *Of the bell stand*" (italics added). He continues: "When the right tree appeared before my eyes/ The bell stand appeared in it clearly beyond doubt." The image of the bell stand is *not* in his mind as a mental representation, because Khing knows that concepts and images in this sense will only distract him from the live encounter. One may recall that he fasted to avoid any and all distractions. But how could the right tree and the image of the bell stand appear if he is not thinking of them in the sense of conceptual imagery? Heidegger (1968) gives a description of the handicraft of a cabinetmaker, which I adapt because it is especially fitting in response to this question:

If he is to be a true [woodcarver], he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood—to wood as it enters into [the human's] dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork. (pp.14-15)

In other words, the hidden wholeness of life speaks the command through the live encounter in which Khing and the tree enter into an essential relatedness. Only in Khing's "constant concentrated abiding" (Heidegger, 1968, p.140) with the tree in the preciousness and vulnerability of the live encounter does the command give him the genuine image of the bell stand, and so command all of his skills, techniques, and knowledge into an authentic work that illuminates our deeply connected nature. As he says, "All I had to do was to put forth my hand/ And begin."

Upon accomplishing the work, the poem says that "[a]ll who saw it were astounded. They said it must be/ The work of spirits." The Prince and the people want to attribute the work to some magical or abstract power outside of them. Khing responds: "I am only a workman/ I have no secret." What is going on, then? By touching his mortal nature, he knowingly abides in the essential community of the metaphorical worlding of the world's wholeness. Therefore, he suggests that he is no one special, since every human, as a mortal, is entrusted by the wholeness to be able to realize this given nature, as well. There is no magical or abstract secret. Rather, Khing perceptively realizes what is always already closest to him and to every human: our mortal nature. Furthermore, to be able to take-to-heart this mortal nature is to "give thanks"⁵ for what

has been given and received as a natural gift: life itself. To give thanks is essentially to give back a resounding response that is genuine, honest, and humble. But what is the essential quality from which genuineness, honesty, and humility arise in one's response?

In a later essay, Heidegger (1971c) references lines from Hölderlin's poetry: "Always, love! The earth/ moves and heaven holds" (p.221). And, "... [a]s long as Kindness/ The Pure, still stays with [the human] heart" (p.226). Love is the essential truth of the command that is spoken in the wholeness of the live encounter. When one hears this essential command, one can only respond in kindness by giving back that which one knows has been received: "love!"⁶ Thus, Khing creates the authentic work not because he is someone special but because he, like every human being, has the capacity (and he knew it!) to listen to what the command of life's hidden wholeness has always already been saying in what is spoken—"love!"—and to respond in kindness through his handiwork.

Conclusion: The Authentic Assessment

Khing is the master woodcarver, a true craftsman. Many of us have heard the expression, "the craft of teaching." However, the divine bell stand that is, in part, the outcome of Khing's deep listening is more like art than craft, or perhaps through his craft as a woodcarver, he is expressing art. Through the craft of teaching, one can express art as Khing did, as well. The bell stand is the ultimate authentic assessment, not because of the accolades Khing receives, but for how the work so mysteriously speaks to the Prince and the people. Yet, the splendor of the work speaks because of a unique communion between Khing, the teacher, and his student, the tree. Their abiding communion became the conduit through which the curriculum of the bell stand could speak with the voice of awe and wonder in a way that has never been uttered in the world in exactly the same way. Still, for Khing, the teacher, it is through the intention to deeply connect with his work, and through the deliberate practice to listen for the wholeness of the world from which true creativity speaks, that the directive of the live encounter could be heard. Indeed, he is not the sole participant in authentic work, because such work must abide within a space that penetrates deeper than the appearance and assumption of an isolated, independent existent being. Nonetheless, he is certainly a critical co-participant.

In the standards movement of recent decades, the all-eggs-in-one-basket assessment approach (i.e., state testing) and the intensive product-oriented focus on teachers presenting and students consuming platters of predetermined knowledge are particularly dangerous practices. The

reason is that attention to the essential “other side” of knowing is largely, if not completely, disregarded. Thus, the potential of teaching as great art most likely cannot occur. Yet, the authentic artist, like Khing, does not fully trust the seeming separateness of this human form. Rather, the artist balances this truth with the listening that senses the much fuller hidden reality of deep connection with one’s essential humanity and the world in general. When the artist is authentic, that is to say deeply attuned to one’s connectivity with all others and the world, the outcome of the work is authentic. Sogyal Rinpoche (1993) compellingly writes:

[T]he great work of art [is] like a moon shining in the night sky; it illuminates the world, yet its light is not its own but borrowed from the hidden sun of the [wholeness]. . . . [The realization of art’s sacred purpose gives] people a vision of their place in the universe, and restores to them, endlessly afresh, the value and meaning of life, and its infinite possibilities. (pp.351-352)

Can we educators see ourselves as artists who craft educational spaces that welcome students into respectful and caring relationships with oneself, each other, and the curriculum? Can we plant, nurture, and water the seeds of critical inquiry in children that will allow their innately curious and wondrous attitude toward the world to continue to brighten, rather than to dim? Can we ourselves cultivate the path of self-investigation, perhaps with Khing as our role model, and deepen our sensing of the hidden potential—and the true source of creativity—that is always speaking within the fullness of our everyday lived experiences? I conclude with a seed of contemplation from a brief vignette of Pablo Picasso and an admirer (source unknown). I extend this vignette to offer a reflective seed that, if watered, may widen the landscape of possibilities on how one approaches one’s teacher self as a learner, one’s students as guides along the listening path, and the curriculum as the living and breathing embodiment of deep educational change that arises from “the transformation of teaching [which has begun] in the transformed heart of the teacher” (Palmer, 1993, p.107).

Have you heard the story of the woman who approached Picasso during one of his last exhibitions? She said, ‘Maestro, your paintings are very beautiful, but tell me, couldn’t a child paint the same way you do?’ Picasso responded, ‘Si, you are absolutely right. The only difference is that it took me ninety years to paint like a child.’ [*If Picasso were to continue, he might say*] ‘Only the innocence of childhood—which, I now know, has never left me—could create such beauty. To find this long forsaken part of me, though, meant that I also had to take up company with the right teacher. Unfortunately, it took me this long to unlearn much of what I learned in my adulthood in order to find this person.’

He would take a contemplative pause, and continue, 'For you see, what I wish to have known earlier but have since discovered is that to acquire the simplicity, openness, and purity that lies within this very beautiful painting is, nevertheless, always clearly abundantly available through the pure teachings of the child.'

Likewise, only when the educator is underway on a path of authentic listening, i.e., a path that cuts through the reified perception of self as merely separate, can one discover the simplicity, openness, and purity that lie within the hidden wholeness of the live encounter among the teacher, students, and curriculum. Only then can the journey of authentic reform begin.

Notes

¹ See Heidegger (1968), Part II, Lecture VIII for an explicit discussion of the translation of these two terms.

² See, for example, Albert (2000), "The call to teach: Spirituality and intellectual life."

³ I take the human concerns from Buddhist theory (e.g., see Chogyi Nyima Rinpoche, 2002, p. 148). They are usually called the mundane or worldly concerns, but for clarity, I call them the everyday human concerns.

⁴ Attachment and aversion to the mundane concerns—and their roots in the mistaken belief of an intrinsically subsisting self—come from Buddhist philosophy. For a more detailed explanation, see H. H. the Dalai Lama's *Essence of the Heart Sutra* (2005), pp. 87-97; *The Meaning of Life: Buddhist Perspectives on Cause and Effect* (2000), pp. 43-47; and *Ethics for the New Millennium* (1999), pp. 35-48.

⁵ See Heidegger (1968), Lecture III, pp. 138-147.

⁶ One could imagine a parallel with the Christian understanding of love as *agape*: "a Greek word meaning love which is purely other-directed, love which seeks no return, which does not want anything back . . . , 'pure self-gift'" (Himes, 1995, p. 10).

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