

Journey inward and the search for "truth"

To write this chapter of VISION WORKS was the emotionally most difficult decision. What happened during the five to six years after 1989 described in this chapter is relevant for the whole story. What happened, provided the needed inner support to continue making an effort in the world. Therefore that chapter is needed to tell the full true story. One truth on the way to finding "the truth" also helps to make the affirmative decision to write this chapter. Much of what happened "inside" cannot be described in words anyway. So, why worry too much about writing what cannot be explained?

My own realization about the difficulty to write about inner movements is widely shared in the writing of people who otherwise have no problem to publish their own personal views. One example of such a deep writer is Ken Wilber, whose "integral map" is very useful to bring some order into thinking. In my view, Ken Wilber is certainly not shy in his many writings. I, however, feel that we share the view that inner experience can only be experienced. I discovered Ken Wilber's writings – like other deep books – only after having had my own "special experiences".

Somewhere I had read a description of such experience which resonated with me and remained in my mind: What I eventually can describe, is the shadow of a deep experience, not the experience itself. Therefore, I can limit myself here to some essential reporting of what became truly relevant for the messages of this book.

From questioning reality to questioning myself

The process of healing work is in itself a learning process. From irrational emotional reaction while being confronted with situations, which are hard to bear (like people suffering) to trying "to do it right" is also a self-discovery path. When being first confronted with misery (like in 1980 in the Mission Globale in Haiti), I did not question my own motivation. I did not use my rational mind at all. At first, well-meaning, though very imperfect action was at least partly a way to appease my own feelings. The personal process to realize that – if I really wanted to help (not yet to "heal-solve") – I might as well first learn to do it right in practice, was only a first step. Humbly stepping back from "knowing best, what to do" was the next necessary initial learning step on a long path to finding "the truth".

Wise people tend to give advice to someone (like me), who got caught into emotional reactive helping action that one has to develop one's own mind and soul first, before venturing into imposing any actions on others. If this advice is not only a verbal defense mechanism to avoid the emotional need to become active, it is certainly valuable. I, however, tend to believe that learning "to do it right" in concrete outward action is a parallel process to finding the "truth".

This "truth", I believe, cannot be found rationally. This "truth" is embedded in mystery. In my opinion, "truth" can only be experienced. Insights, better: "in-sights", are for me gifts from a dimension which has no name – or many names. In our western culture, we call it GOD. In my inner experience, this view of the divine is too separate from me, from us. My personal experience indicates that the "truth" (you may also call it "light" or "divine energy") comes, is there, when I open up to receive it, when I pray for it, when my soul longs for it.

For me, "truth" also provides answers for the meaning of life, for the "why?" of all existence. There may be good reasons to first dig into one's own soul – in the desert or in some cave. That would mean to follow Christ's or Buddha's initial search through self-isolation or self-starvation. Isolation and starvation were, however, not tempting to me. I always liked – and still like a good life with wine, music, female company, and active recreation. I was, however, touched on my own search for "truth" by being active in the world with slowly opening eyes. One such "touching" event was a meeting with a Catholic monk, who spiritually bridges East and West, David Steindl-Rast, originally from Austria.

I first met Brother David when I was trying out Zen meditation in Tassajara, a Buddhist center in Big Sur, California, USA. He impressed me in his gentle cross-cultural attempt to find a solution for global unity in diversity, as I saw it. Zen sitting was not my way to meditate, it was simply too painful for my back, but brother David was a role model for me in his serious bridge-building attempt. Shortly after getting to know him in Tassajara, I met him again in the Esalen Institute in Big Sur on the famous highway no. 1 along the Pacific coast of the United States.

Esalen (the name of the former Indian tribe in this area) is a magnificent place, high above the Pacific ocean, with hot springs and an ongoing program of holistic spiritual body and mind workshops – a good place for inner learning and deep relaxation. Here I asked Brother David about his bridge-building way to bring together the spiritual views of the East and the West. I specifically asked him about the difference of prayers in those two cultures. His answer was an unexpected confirmation of what I had been feeling without reflecting about it. He said: "The West, predominantly Christianity, prays with words, the East in silence." But there is a third way, he added. It is "praying by way of doing".

Praying had become a subject of concern shortly after my fiftieth birthday, after 30 years of total abstinence from any religion. During my 10 years in Salem castle, a traditional German country school, interrupted by one year in Phillips Academy Andover, Massachusetts, USA, religion was still "alive" and nicely undogmatic. In Salem, we all prayed together every morning. I participated without being deeply touched. It was peaceful though.

As maturing male adults in a strict boarding school, we were slowly waking up to our time's realities. Those were political realities and more profound realizations of our horrid German past, but there were also personal emotional problems of becoming young adults. Salem was a mixed school. Girls were "untouchable". Sex was no subject. Most of us were very innocent. Even dancing, my early hobby, was rarely allowed in Salem school. Holding hands with my dream girl was my fantasy.

In short, I had other preoccupations than religion. I am not even sure, whether I was ever baptized after being born in New York, USA. In boarding school nobody bothered, whether I was baptized. Only now, at the age of 71, I am asking myself this question. I was, however, formally "received in the arms of the protestant church", as they say in Germany, at some confirmation celebration during that earlier period in school. Those religious formalities never touched my heart – but Pastor Otto did.

It was in the Junior house of Salem castle, in the summer residence of the former abbey of Salem, "*Schloss Kirchberg*", where our most gentle Lutheran Pastor Otto was not only our pastor, but simply someone to love and trust. His slogan in life: "DENNOCH" became my life's motto, too – reinforcing itself in later years and receiving additional "sense" on the Island of La Tortue in Haiti: It was the French version of DENNOCH: "*Quand-même*",

which I found there. The original French version, without any indication of who originally was the author, is reproduced in the last part of the previous main chapter of this book. Here, I am trying an English translation in using "even though" and "anyway", whatever feels better:

EVEN THOUGH / ANYWAY

*People are unreasonable, illogical and egocentric.
Love them, even though!*

*You are doing it right (good),
you will be accused to extract advantages from this.
Do it right (good) even though!*

*If you are successful,
you will attract wrong friends and real enemies.
Be successful anyway!*

*Honesty and openness make you vulnerable.
Be open and honest anyway!*

*The most remarkable people with the largest viewpoints
may well be subdued by the most mediocre narrow-minded people.
Have an open-minded view anyway!*

*People are interested in the suppressed,
but they arrange themselves on the side of the winners.
Fight for the oppressed anyway!*

*What took you years to construct, can be destroyed in a day.
Build even though!*

*People may really need help, but they can assault you, when you help them.
Help them even though!*

*Give your best and people will thank you by kicking you.
Give your best anyway!*

Having a problem with this translation, to remain true to the feeling in the words, I still prefer my DENNOCH. It carries emotional power – and constructive anger, which (I feel) gets somewhat lost in the English terms "even though" and "anyway".

One other, deeper influence in my belief system during my school time was a visit in my last year before "Abitur" (high school diploma plus two years) in Salem by the retired founder of Salem school (and also of Gordonstoun in Scotland), Kurt Hahn. He was the former assistant of the last German Chancellor under the German Emperor. As a Jew he had to flee Germany during the Nazi time. His lesson was unusual – compared to what we were normally supposed to learn. It concerned life itself.

Kurt Hahn, in my view a truly wise man, referred to the values and pathways to walk in life: *"Always remain open for all learning – but once you have discovered something or a path to be 'right', do pursue the right way even alone and against the prevailing currents."* This did fit my DENNOCH and remained firmly anchored in my belief system.

Apart from those few deeper imprints and a few other good memories during the later years in Salem and during my one year as a guest student in the US partner school of Salem, Phillips Academy, I was relieved to finally leave school and start to discover "real life". This discovery turned around a lot of subjects that were very different from religion. It was a truly lustful discovery time, which I certainly do not regret. It is possibly no coincidence that one passion, which developed during those years, dancing, finally even made sense in helping to "heal" my later life.

Back to prayer:

During my school days in Salem, it may not have been very deep when I prayed, but at least I did participate along with my various schoolmates from different denominations (not only Christians). After school and a wild intermediate year as a (very uncommitted) volunteer in a bank in Geneva, I went to university in Munich, Germany. There, I once went to church on a Sunday to remember some peaceful feelings from my schooldays. But I found this very disappointing. Dogmatic preaching and collecting money for various purposes, which meant nothing to me, made me totally turn away from church – for over 30 years. I never went back to churches – except out of cultural interest when traveling in the world.

There was, however, something I never could explain: When passing a strong Christian symbol, a cross on a road side for example, I regularly had a mild mystic experience. It was and still is happening sometimes that something gently shakes my body when I notice that symbol. I still wonder what could create such bodily feeling, which is very certainly not provoked or created consciously. It became, however, consciously noticed by time, which does not help to explain it.

It was in October of 1988 that all of a sudden something broke open. I suddenly felt a need to pray. It was during a very deep meditation exercise, where I was taken by two lady friends who were more woken-up than me in that kind of exercise. It was new and very moving.

For the first time in my life I had a deep experience of unconditional LOVE – a divine LOVE – impossible to describe. I asked for help and someone did help me to pray, what Christians learn as the "Lord's Prayer". I had even forgotten the words. This need to connect with the divine continued during two more comparable deep meditation sessions. Here the subjects were *"Demut"* (humbleness) and a profound, unspecific gratitude to creation.

This phase resulted in a mental search and in praying questions about our reason of being here on earth, about my sense of being here. I suppose that this is a very normal human question to ask, but it took me over 50 years to get there. There were no immediate answers. But then something significant happened in a totally unexpected moment.

For many years, I could not speak about what had happened and I did not dare writing about it either. This changed only after another "incident" several years later. But this is a different story. I will later grapple with the other, the "unblocking" incident in this book. So, what happened initially?

The key message

It happened on 28 March 1989 in an insignificant hotel halfway from the south of France to my German home in Düsseldorf. In the very early morning (roughly after 3 a.m.) I woke up, realizing still half asleep, but very clearly that I had just started to have a dream, which was not like a normal dream. It was the answer to my basic inner question from some time before during last year: WHY are we, why am I here in this world?

It may sound strange and it certainly felt strange then – but I know in all certainty that this was more than a dream. Maybe I should be more humble and consider this only to be a firm belief. My feeling, however, refuses to accept that reduction to a mere belief. For me, what happened is simply a piece of the "truth", which I was longing for. For the first time in now almost exactly 52 years after my birth in this unexpected moment in an insignificant hotel, I was receiving an answer to my basic question, why am I living here now, what is my purpose, what is our purpose as human beings. In my quest, the personal and general aspects were inseparable.

I was not used to write down dreams, although I did have occasionally rather creative dreams which could be turned into fascinating film stories. Here and now in March 1989, I somehow realized that this was not a normal dream, it had a different quality. I knew that I had to write it down, in order not to lose it again. Luckily (still half asleep) I found a piece of paper and a pen and copied down, what I had been told. It was clearly a guiding message. Not the last one, but the very first one and in amazing clarity. It was in my mother tongue, but there was a specific meaning to the words beyond the German words themselves:

Das Ganze muss durch Lernen wachsen. – "The whole (all) must grow through learning". "Das Ganze" was truly ALL, the whole, from the smallest to the universal whole. "Wachsen", "growing" had a more qualitative than quantitative character. – It continued:

Dabei hilft Liebe. – "Thereby Love helps". – And the message went on with a sentence which clearly influenced my life:

Ich muss dazu tun, was ich kann. – "I must contribute, what I can". "Muss" – "must" sounds hard in a loving message. It was, however, clearly meant in a gentle way. It was not like an order, but like a reflection of my own inner disposition towards action. In the sense of active engagement, I (only) must do as much as I can. In further deep reflection about that little word "must" I realized that this divine source was not separate from me. It was also in me, it must be ONE with all. Some later messages and one very special moment of "in-sight" also could only be understood in this way. One later very touching moment even created a direct confirmation of the ONE-ness of ALL.

The first message further continued in providing answers which cannot be considered guiding like the first lines, but which helped me to get a glimpse of what might be called "the cosmic structure". The whole message and especially the added answers were very new to my rational conception. That helped me to accept that the whole message was not originating in my own brain. My skepticism towards phenomena, which I could not "understand", helped me to listen carefully to "messages" from there on and to only trust them, when they were really loving. Less loving thoughts also crossed my mind in this spiritually turbulent time – but they were easy to recognize as such.

In the following years it happened several times that I was given short "in-sights" in my relation to the divine. They were strong helping messages to let me form a belief system which gave me a "direct access" to that source of ALL, which allowed me to include existing religions and at the same time led me to refuse to accept their dogmatic aspects. I am deeply grateful for this period, which also reinforced my holistic conception of that ALL, which has no limits. In that process of finding my inner way, I also felt strongly motivated to continue my "normal" life in the framework of "what I can". After the rediscovery of prayer in the year before, silent praying concentrated more and more on occasionally thanking that unlimited loving power for answering my questions, but also simply saying "thank you" in an unspecific way.

One short message was a particularly unexpected and relevant one about a subject which troubled my mind in the years before and even more so after the initial guiding incident, the prevailing evil in the world.

In a hotel in Paris, while visiting our artists' color customers, deep in the night of 18 November 1990, this same inner voice unexpectedly and directly contradicted a view which I had developed in my work especially in Haiti. Becoming more and more conscious about misery and evil in the world, I was getting angry. Although I had very limited power to act out this angry attitude, it had become anchored in my mind: Evil must be fought!

To my surprise, the short message was clearly different: *Das Böse ist nicht zu bekämpfen. Das Böse ist zu heilen.* "Evil is not to be fought. Evil is to be healed". This may not be new to some gentle wise people. It, however, directly contradicted my own grown view. This new in-sight needed first to be digested. I still find it very difficult to act accordingly. But I am grateful for the message.

As shortly indicated above, it needed some years and "another incident" until I dared to speak or write about all this. Speaking is still difficult. Only the first line of the very first message ("The whole – all – must grow through learning") has in the meantime become a publicly declared guiding sentence, which I use without any hesitation (even on top of one of my circular models of reality) after what happened about 5 years later on 9 March 1994.

The liberating message

Exploring various pathways to find more answers in my search for the "truth" and after several other significant answers in equally unexpected situations, I participated in a holotropic breathing seminar with about 300 (!) other searchers, led by Stan Grof, in Switzerland. We "worked" in pairs. Since I went to the seminar alone, I was lucky to find a gentle person to be my breathing partner. One of the pair is stretching out on a mattress and is heavily breathing in following guiding instructions by Stan Grof. The other person of the pair is only paying attention that the one doing the breathing does not hurt himself. There is no other intervention by the watching partner.

It was a deep experience. I, however, did not expect any direct answer to my questions in an "induced" situation, since all "messages" which I had received since the first one in March 1989 were coming without any kind of supporting activity. Real messages were always true gifts from this unspeakable other dimension, which is connected to the "truth". I realize it as LOVE – or "divine energy". It seems to be connected to light (– and to some form of consciousness ?). Being basically awake, but somehow shifting to an inward-looking form of consciousness, I did not expect too much to happen.

Then, all of a sudden, I visualized a bright light triangle, pointing upwards. Shortly later, a second bright triangle overlaid the first one – but pointing downwards. Formally it was the shape of the Jewish Star of David where two triangles are forming one harmonious form. This, of course, I knew – but that was not what appeared in front of my inner eye. "My" symbol was clearly composed out of two independent triangles of light. They even differed in brightness. The upward pointing symbol was stronger than the one pointing down.

Even though I was partly in a different state of consciousness, my mind was clear enough not to know or being able to understand, what "my" symbol was meaning, what it was possibly telling me. Then it dawned in my mind that this double light symbol was "something" which I was not expected to know. I took it as a sign that it did not originate in my own mind. Deep in my other consciousness I then saw a few (I do not recall how many) figures appearing. They had no shape, they were just light, moving very gently and in a loving way. Without using any words (unlike in my special dream messages), one of these beings of light created an unspoken, but doubtless message in my mind: Time is now "ripe" (as I understood it) to not keep my guiding messages anymore only to myself. Time – or I (which was not clear) – would now be ready to open up and share my guiding messages. It was not specific, what that being of light asked me to do, it was like a permission, a setting me free in this respect.

My reaction – as I clearly remember – was not at all clear. I still had to digest this totally different message. The question, whether I would have the courage to follow this permission (or was it even an advice?), remains. I will probably never be emotionally capable of sharing all the various answers, which I had received in those five years. Luckily, I do not even feel that I need to share all my personal answers. Words would not be able to describe "it" anyway. For this book I had, however, decided to do my best to at least write about those essential guiding messages.

The other short "in-sights", which clarify my relationship with this unspeakable divine ALL, are mostly very personal. I do believe, however, that the gifts, the moments of "in-sight", which have been given to me, are given to all who pray in whatever way, who seriously ask for such answers. I feel that I have received the gift of some "truth" – "my truth"? – "*absolute truth*"? This thought continues to be troubling.

Feeling that I have received gifts of "my truth" makes me wonder: Why should I have received a different "truth"? One, which is different from anybody else's "truth"? On the other hand, the thought to maybe having received some "*absolute truth*" conflicts with the felt need to remain humble. Therefore, this question remains an open question – maybe until further "in-sights"?

I want to encourage all serious "seekers of the truth" to walk that path themselves. As much as I am convinced that visions have a chance to work, if seriously pursued, comparable guiding answers will be given to those, who are serious in their search. We always have the freedom to act according to what we are being told. That special guidance never gives orders (although I had a problem with the "must" in my first guiding message). We are, however, shown ways to decide – in combination with that other divine gift, which we humans have received: our rational mind.

What I also feel deeply is that the right guiding messages are loving. If they are not, they do not come from the same source. The danger of being misled can be avoided in my experience, if we only accept loving messages. This in itself was the content of an answer to one of my questions. This LOVE can be trusted.

Besides continuing my "regular" diverse activities in business and in the field of human development in Haiti, the roughly five to six years following the initial incident, which produced the first guiding message, were filled with "deep digging" into soul matters. All I had been reading and writing before, dealt mostly with marketing and management matters, later with politics and human development. I am even grateful to not have been exposed to spiritual subjects, before being "touched" in my soul. In the early years, I used to consider myself to be almost a professional skeptic and I did not want to be influenced in my inner views by other people's discoveries. The search for "truth" to me was more authentic, if it was not disturbed by too many preconceptions through reading relevant books.

It was only after receiving moments of "in-sights" that my habitual skepticism motivated me to verify, what other searchers had discovered. It became a new discovery trip through spiritual literature of all kinds. It finally reinforced my view that my "duty" lay in the field of doing and not so much in the field of pure reflection.

Since the beginning of this new life, I wished to be involved somewhat more in communities, where I was not isolated in my inner search and findings. Somehow "community" seems to be part of an inner path. A conventional church did not satisfy this need. Churches, like any other sacred temple of other religions, were most suited for my inner feelings, when they were empty. They have a strange inner vibration and transmit this vibration to me, if I allow myself to be exposed to it quietly. I became more and more suspicious of anything written by human beings, even the bible.

To try to overcome this inner "reserve" at least partially, I discovered one ecumenical Christian institution, which helped to bridge my inner "reserve" towards institutionalized religion. It was TAIZÉ, the foundation of the Swiss Frère Roger near Cluny in France. The vicinity of this medieval high center of powerful dogmatic Christianity with all its former splendor made the contrast to the positive simplicity of TAIZÉ even more obvious. Since those early "discovery years" of the soul after my fifty-second birthday, one week in TAIZÉ had become a yearly retreat. In the huge simple church hall of TAIZÉ, meditative periods frequently led to strong inner movements and to some of the very personal "in-sights". Towards the end of those special five to six years in my life, I also received one message repeatedly, which is even funny and I therefore want to mention it here:

Receiving gifts of "in-sights" became so heartwarming and uplifting that I developed a desire to receive more. It almost developed to be an addiction. However, my inner voice then told me repeatedly: ***Stop asking. You know your way now. You know what to do. Just do it.***
– I consider this now to be a great and motivating response, for which I am grateful. It also allows me to smile about and self excuse my waves of greed.