

# SUBLIME LEARNING

**Deborah Bloch, Neil Davidson, Vlad Dimitrov and Adam Hulbert**

University of San Francisco and University of Western Sydney

**Abstract:** Can spirituality become leading motivational force for the processes of learning? This paper answers to this question by introducing a whole new branch of humanist research we call *Sublime Learning* - learning to live in harmony with the dynamics of *The Universal* – the energies and forces, whose ceaseless interplay sustains the continuum and integrity of the existential wholeness. Sublime learning is seen as *learning how to transform knowledge into wisdom*. Unlike knowledge, wisdom thrives on the synergy of the mortal triad *body-mind-heart* with the timeless tandem *soul-spirit*, where the latter is central for our existence. Wisdom weaves together the logic of mind and the passion of heart with the longings of soul and the might of spirit, and thus helps us move beyond the physical limitations of our bodies. Five necessary conditions facilitating Sublime Learning, together with a specially designed methodology for its practical application and four real-life examples are described and discussed in details.

## INTRODUCTION

Sublime learning is learning to live in harmony with the dynamics of *The Universal* – the energies and forces, whose ceaseless interplay sustains the continuum and integrity of the existential wholeness. Every human being is an embodiment of these energies and forces; they manifest their limitless potentials through each of us. While endowed with ability to be conscious about ourselves, we can be aware of them working inside us and supporting our physical activities, as well as the emergence and interaction of our emotions and feelings, thoughts and ideas, spiritual beliefs, dreams and aspirations. Once aware of them, we are able to learn how to harness and ride their inexhaustible power so as to use it for the growth of our consciousness.

The dimensions of human life reflect and express the dimensions of existence. As far as the existence is timeless: it has always been, *is*, and will always be, human life must also have timeless dimensions - dimensions that do not perish at the physical end of one's life; we refer to them as *aeonic* dimensions (from the Greek word *aionios* meaning “eternal”).

For the great thinkers in Ancient Greece, like Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, as well as for many other thinkers who lived at different places in the ancient world, it was clear: if one cannot reveal anything in life that is beyond death, such life seems futile. All the lifelong efforts, which one earnestly applies to learn and grow in intelligence seem completely senseless, if death is empowered to destroy instantly and forever the fruits of these efforts. Nature has endowed the human beings with *self-consciousness* – a sublime capacity to be aware of the unfolding of their lives, to be able to explore the dynamics – the energies, forces, changes and transformations, which drives this unfolding, to recognize, control and apply the gigantic self-sustaining power of these dynamics; it is hard to believe that such a unique capacity, created through millions of year of evolution, can be annihilated with the disintegration of the material composition of the body.

The ancient thinkers were convinced: the human beings are exponents of something greater, something that expands beyond physical plane of existence. But they understood also that the emergence of genuine insights about aeonic dimensions of life needs preparation demanding persistent efforts on behalf of the individual; it is the individual alone who is responsible for his or her own life – for exploring, understanding and managing its unfolding. Nobody can live or understand another's life.

The thinkers of the Ancient Greece considered human soul and spirit as the bearers of aeonic dimensions of life. Plato's conviction on spiritual nature of soul and its immortality was as unshaken as Socrates's. The soul, according to Plato, has three projections: the rational, which resides in the head; the irascible (the seat of courage), which resides in the heart; and the appetitive (the seat of desire), which resides in the abdomen. Socrates considered human soul as possessed of latent knowledge, which could be brought out and elucidated by a special kind of inquiry that Socrates called maieutic (from the Greek word *maieuticus* meaning “midwifery”) – an inquiry into the depths of one's innermost nature. His appeal “Know Thyself!” was (and is) a behest for those who strive to grasp the enigmas of life. For Aristotle, the soul was thought to be the essence of the whole living body; without soul the body is only potentiality, and it is the soul that activates this potentiality.

Sublime learning is coherent with the legacy of the ancient thinkers: *it is only through learning about ourselves that we can develop awareness about the aeonic essence of our lives*. We are the bearers of this essence; it constantly expresses through the events of our own experiences. In parallel with the sharpening of our ability to:

- see what unites the experiential events,
- recognize similar or repetitive patterns in their unfolding, and
- discover the rhythm in which the discovered patterns emerge, dissolve and re-appear,

we move towards understanding the aeonic *essence* hidden beyond the outward manifestation of life, the aeonic *source* that energizes the life dynamics, and the aeonic *centre* that each life trajectory is connected with.

In his book “Creative mediation”, Govinda says: “what we call eternal is not an infinite duration of time (which is mere a thought-construction unrelated to any experience) but the experience of timelessness” (Govinda, 1976). Sublime learning is learning to experience timelessness, to fill in our minds and hearts with the soulful ‘oceanic’ feeling of being at-one with the self-propelling dynamics of existence, at-one with everything that *is*. Such deep experience of timelessness may happen only when one succeeds in dissolving the boundaries between oneself (where the ego is the boss) and the universe, when one stops to see oneself as a mere mortal entity disconnected from the aeonic existential rhythm, but a ‘fractal’ of the whole, in other words: to experience oneself as one actually *is*: aeonic microcosm of the all-embracing existential infinitum of *The Universal*.

Similarly to Plato’s projections of human soul, the aeonic dimensions have three projections on the physical body: mental (in the head), emotional (in the heart) and physical (in the gut). What unites them and keeps them working or, as Aristotle said, “activates their potentials” is the soul; what can connect them with the aeonic essence of *The Universal* is the spirit. In the framework of sublime learning, the words “soul” and “spirit” are beyond definition; they are used to denote something essential in us, something central for our humanness, something vital for energizing our life journey, despite the knowledge that at the last stop of this journey the death will swallow all the three physical projections of the aeonic essence of life. Sublime learning liberates us from the fear of death, as it illuminates ways to connect ourselves with something which is beyond death.

Sublime learning can be seen as learning to transform knowledge into wisdom. We acquire and generate knowledge through our minds, but minds are not enough to lead us on the way to wisdom. Mind can be easily trapped in dogmas and prejudices, distracted by transient desires, entrained into realization of selfish goals, manipulated and brainwashed by those who possess economic and political power in society. It is the human mind that is embodied in today’s advanced technologies for mass destruction, for killing one another in never-ending wars and bloodsheds. The capacity of mind to

rationalize, however developed it might appear, cannot help us deal with the ecological and social crises of our days – crises, which according to some researchers, irreversibly point towards self-destruction of humanity.

Unlike knowledge, wisdom thrives on the synergy of the mortal triad body-mind-heart with the aeonic tandem soul-spirit, where the latter (no matter that it lacks explanation of the scientific experts) is central for our existence. In Hindu scriptures the thinker refers to the soul-spirit tandem as "the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the unknown knower, *The Eternal* in which life is woven and which is woven in it". Wisdom weaves together in the living body of the individual the logic of mind and the passion of heart with the longings of soul and the might of spirit, and thus helps him or her move beyond the physical limitations of the body.

## **LEARNING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS**

In today's society, learning is primarily directed towards acquisition of various kinds of expert knowledge aimed at decision-making and solving problems. This type of learning is centred in mind (conceptual knowledge) and body (practical skill), and crucially depends on the development of the learners' ability to think in a rational way, to analyse and synthesise, to extract and study cause-and-effect relationships, to generate hypotheses and test them experimentally, to draw out logical conclusions and master skills for performing certain actions.

The processes of design, implementation, development and innovation of artificial systems, ever-increasing in number and diversity, require a great deal of expert knowledge and therefore the educators in society keep busy packing and spreading it. The deeper we immerse ourselves in this type of knowledge, the narrower becomes the niche for researching ourselves, the less able we are to hear and understand the subtle voice of our inner nature and distinguish it from the roaring noises coming from outside. The majority of people have lost their ability to decipher the messages, which the everyday events of their experiences convey to their hearts and souls, or the symbols of *The Universal*, described and interpreted in the sacred books of the ancient thinkers.

### *Example 1*

In the local Australian newspaper "Penrith Press" from 27.04.2004, we read that "a national report recently tabled by Macquarie Federal Liberal MP K. Bartlett includes 41 recommendations on how young people could be better prepared at school for their chosen job". *Learning to Work* is a program

conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, chaired by Mr Bartlett." The article attempts to convince the readers that learning for work "must be a mandatory part of the core curriculum" in all the schools. The system of education in society does not want to teach students how to live in a wholesome - healthy and self-fulfilling – way; *The System* does not teach students how to experience the joy of being alive, how to live in harmony with nature and with one another, how to grow in wisdom and spirit. Can one imagine schools where the young people are introduced to sublime learning? Or there would not be teachers for such schools, because the teachers in *The System* were also taught only how to work and not how to live.

### *Example 2*

The prevailing attitude of today's society to human health is mechanistic: if you do not feel healthy, go to the doctors and they will 'solve the problems' of your health and 'fix' it. Society continues to spread this delusion, as there are strong economic forces behind it: the multinational pharmaceutical corporations make unbelievable amounts of money by offering people 'tools' to solve their health problems. Unfortunately, health is not a machine to be fixed; it is a holistic expression of one's life with many dimensions: individual and social, physical and emotional, mental and spiritual. Without developing our inherent natural ability for self-healing, no medicine can fix our health. The more intensively we use medical drugs, the more addicted we become to them. The more addicted to drugs we become, the more serious their hard-to-predict side effects on our organisms. The worst is the numbing effect that any 'curative' chemical substance exerts on our self-healing potential; eventually, the use of drugs irreversibly destroys this potential. Society appears to need experts for manufacturing and prescribing medical drugs in the similar way as it needs experts for computers, robots, military and cosmic technologies, genetic engineering, extraction of natural resources, business, communication, etc.

When experts and authorities interpret our reality for us, it becomes easy for people to "bury their navigational equipment that allows them to move authentically through life" (Somerville, 2004).

*Society needs experts but not people of wisdom.* As seen from the history of the humankind, if some individuals wholeheartedly persist in pursuing wisdom and truth, society condemns them to the stake, crucifies them, stabs them in the back or guns them down. The enlightened people are seen as a threat for the elite possessing and exercising the power in The Establishment (*The System*). It has been always much easier for the elite to deal with experts in narrowly fragmented fields of knowledge (to reward them generously, if they serve *The System* and punish them severely, if they resist to do this) or

with herds of economically enslaved, stressed, frightened, sick, addicted, or simply ignorant people than with those who have a broad and deep understanding of reality and endeavour to see the truth, to reveal the acts of manipulation and social injustice, to rely upon the power of their own will, intuition and spirit.

As long as the process of education in society is under the surveillance of *The System*, it resembles a *scientifically informed brainwash*, which instead of stimulating humans' urge to wisdom, teaches them how to better fit into the requirements of *The System*, to follow its rules and remain mesmerized by all kinds of meaningless images and dreams for consumption-centred happiness.

Learners, who blindly follow the instructions of *The System* and contribute in its perpetuating and reinforcing, can never become wise.

**Without being aware of and protecting oneself from the destructive and delusive influences of society, one cannot trigger transformation of knowledge into wisdom.**

Sublime learning requires from us vigilance both to be in society and yet not to belong to it:

- to be in society in order to learn how to help those who suffer from ignorance, delusion, social injustice and suppression, how to express compassion, gratitude and unconditional love, how to act so as to sustain the life and harmony in nature;
- not to belong to society when it tries to involve us in manipulation and delusion, consumption and meaningless entertainment, mediocrity and pursuit of transient "socially awarded" achievements, which either evaporate immediately when we die or are used by the social elite for strengthening its suppressive power.

When being aware and protecting ourselves from the destructive and delusive influence of society, we gradually grasp the impotence of society to acquire and radiate wisdom. At the same time, by creating obstacles for the individual to comprehend *The Universal*, society provides perfect opportunities for sublime learning to those who can see and realize these opportunities: it is in society where the strength of one's individual mind and will is constantly tested, and where the genuineness of one's compassion and tolerance, empathy and love, honesty and courage undergoes its ultimate ordeal (Dimitrov, 2003; p. 182).

## LEARNING ABOUT *THE UNIVERSAL*

*The Universal* is the macrocosm of *The Individual* and refers to the all-embracing existential infinitum. Being without boundaries in space and time, it includes all that exists in the universe at all the levels (scales) of its manifestation – from quarks to galaxies. At any level, *The Universal* exercises its self-organizing – self-creative, self-sustaining and self-destructive dynamics repeated in endless rhythmic patterns of emergence, unfolding (blossoming), enfolding and implosion. In the wholeness of the existential dynamics, where everything moves – arises, sustains, disappears and re-emerge, must be a centre - an *essence* that holds all the dynamics in an unbreakable unity (Bohm, 2002). As the existential dynamics have always been, are, and will always be, their uniting centre or essence is *aeonic* - non-temporal, permanent, eternal.

However uncertain the human knowledge about the nature of the all-pervading existential continuum, today's science assumes that the wholeness of the universe, at its macro level, represents a gigantic galactic spiral – a kind of multidimensional whirlpool (vortex). One can imagine the infinity of the existential continuum consisting of countless number of galactic spirals; the centre of each spiral mirrors and relates to the centre of a larger one, in a similar way as the centre of our solar system mirrors and relates to the centre of our galaxy, and the centre of our galaxy - to the centre of a larger 'mega-galaxy', and so on *ad infinitum*.

The human embryo also develops as a kind of living spiral centred in the navel through which the umbilical cord passes to connect the embryo with the organism of the mother. In this sense, our bodies represent symbols - iconographic miniatures - of *The Universal*. The circulation of blood in the human body sustained by the rhythm of heart symbolizes the circulation of the planets and galaxies sustained by the rhythm of their energizing sources. In the ancient Chinese books of wisdom, human hair symbolizes the stars in the sky, the eyes symbolize the sun, and the spine symbolizes the axes supporting the motion of the planets and the cosmos.

In the same way as the whirlpools in the water and the tornadoes in the atmosphere are sustained by self-created forces emerging at the centre of their swirling dynamics, the existential spiral of *The Universal* is sustained by the self-created forces at the centre of its vortical dynamics. One can recognise the work of these forces in the blossom of a flower and in the waves of the ocean, in the pulsation of a simple cell and in the beats of our hearts, in the rhythm of our breathing and in the rhythm of the cycles of the solar activity.

According to Govinda, “it is not important whether we are finite or infinite, mortal or immortal, but whether we consciously identify ourselves with the infinite and imperishable or with the finite, transient and ephemeral” (Govinda, 1976). Human body, ego and mind are finite – the body disintegrates and together with it the ego and mind cease to exist.

Is it not wiser then to consciously identify ourselves with the aeonic source (centre, engine) of the self-sustained energies and forces, which keep the integrity of the existential wholeness, rather than with our bodies, egos and minds?

This is not an impossible task. As we already mentioned in the Introduction, each human being *is* already connected with *The Universal*: human dynamics form a specific level in the vortical dynamic structure of the existential wholeness. The challenge is to be consciously aware of this connection and make it work in the span of one’s physical life.

**Without being aware of and consciously centring one’s life trajectory in aeonic source of the existential wholeness, one cannot trigger transformation of knowledge into wisdom.**

To centre one’s life in the ever-operating engine of *The Universal* means to constantly explore the aeonic dimensions of existence as manifested in one’s own experience of life.

## **NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR SUBLIME LEARNING**

The ‘energy level’ of our inner potentials, expressed through the level of development of our awareness (consciousness, vigilance, sensitivity) must be high enough in order to make sublime learning possible. How can we heighten the level of our awareness and thus saturate our inner potentials with creative energy?

The ancient techniques of concentration and meditation significantly contribute to this endeavour. When learnt under guidance of advanced masters and practised persistently, these techniques result in emergence of inspiring creative insights and help practitioners experience their connectedness with the inexhaustible life-sustaining source of creative energy of *The Universal*.



**(1) Practising the techniques of concentration and meditation is the first necessary condition for sublime learning.**

Sublime learning differs from conventional understandings of knowledge, as it involves our entire being; when we ‘implode’ into concentration and mediation, we open ourselves for the energy sustaining the existential wholeness to flow between *The Individual* and *The Universal* and keep them in one integrated self.

Energy is not created or destroyed; nevertheless there are obstacles to the continued flow and renewal of energy for the use of sublime learning. It is through the instrument of will used in the process of concentration upon our inner dynamics that the blockages to energy can be removed and transformative learning can occur. Energy is experiential, and to follow ‘*know thyself*’ of Socrates is to pay attention to the way that thoughts and actions encourage or dissipate its flow. Knowledge can teach us about energy, but it is the knowing of ourselves which comes from cultivating the experience of energy in the process of meditation that allows us to generate, conserve and expend it.

When patterns formed by habit replace the vitality of integrated experience, energy is directed toward the strengthening of these patterns instead of generating the implosive force of ‘requisite vorticity’ which connects *The Individual* to *The Universal* (Dimitrov 2003). Through the processes of concentration and meditation, we can identify when we are within habits which do not promote holistic involvement of our being, and to break from them or engage with them wholly so that to encourage and sustain the flow of energy between *The Individual* and *The Universal*.

As we pointed out in the Introduction, knowledge is always under control of mind, and mind is susceptible to delusion, manipulation and brainwashing. Mind is overcome by the illusion of identification with the *ego*, as the primary goal of mind is to protect the individual’s ego and satisfy its appetite for recognition and power, as well as for experiencing comfort and pleasures. Mind looks at reality through the lens how to better serve the ego and to respond to its constantly emerging desires and ambitions. The deeper one’s mind immerses in egoism, the lesser one’s ability to see and experience reality in its vibrant wholeness.

When aware of the traps of the ego and determined to avoid them, one is on the way to destroy the dominant power of the ego over mind (Brunton, 1989). This leads to a release of significant amount of

energy which, when embodied in altruistic actions of the individuals, stimulates their growth in wisdom.

**(2) Liberating mind from the dominant power of the ego is the second necessary condition for sublime learning.**

With a deeper understanding of ourselves, the motivating factor for our reactions to the injustice, oppression and exploitation in society are no more hatred and vengeance, but pursuit of truth and equity, as well as readiness to help those who suffer from the social injustice.

The changes we create in our inner dynamics are able to trigger changes in our environment. A heart full of love evokes love in the hearts of the others; a mind full of good will brings forth constructive changes in the life of community; a soul full of inspiration radiates inspiration the souls of others. We can bring peace and harmony in the world around only if we have them in ourselves. The opposite is also true - a stressful and tensed personality emanates stress and tension; an ignorant mind cannot help those who seek understanding and wisdom

Love expressed genuinely and illuminated by the spirit of a loving and caring person creates miracles: flows of energy, for the nature of which the science has no explanation, generously pour in the heart of this person and re-vitalize her or his body, mind and soul. In one of his wonderful poems devoted to love, Rumi wrote: "Love is the energizing elixir of the universe, the cause and effect of all harmonies" (quoted from <http://www.dailycelebrations.com/072201.htm>).

When the thoughts and feelings are saturated with genuine unconditional love – the kind of love that the creative forces of nature exercise towards all what they bring into life, - the mind is free from the selfish grasp of the ego, and the destructive and delusive influences of society cannot enter one's heart to suffocate the waves of inspiration it radiates.

The ecstatic experience of one-ness with the creative power of nature, which love evokes, can be compared with the bliss experienced in a state of deep meditation.

**(3) Genuinely experienced unconditional love is the third necessary condition for sublime learning.**

Love illuminated by genuine spiritual aspirations and faith is not only the most powerful catalyst for sublime learning, but it has the power to reveal to an immersed-in-love heart the light radiating from the aeonic dimensions of human life.

Although invisible, the forces of human spirit sustain the integrity of the body, inject inspiration in the thoughts and feelings, keep us connected with the rhythm of the universe through the pulsations of every single cell, fill our lives with mysterious coincidences (synchronicities) and happenings, design our dreams when we sleep and create unique phenomena in our experience which science of today is helpless to explain.

Human hearts and souls are open to feel and experience the limitless power of the spirit. The way to nurture it is through spiritual practices free from pre-imposed religious dogmas.

**(4) Nurturing the spirit is the fourth necessary condition for sublime learning.**

## **FACTORS FACILITATING SUBLIME LEARNING**

### **Strengthening Physical Body**

Our body is inextricably connected to the physical manifestation of *The Universal* through sunlight, water, air and nutrition. Being a centre of the solar system, sun is the physical embodiment of the aeonic centre of existence for our planet. Without sun, physical life on Earth is impossible. For many spiritual practitioners the 'dialogues with sun' are imbedded in their daily life.

While physical connection with *The Universal* is easily seen, it is often overlooked so that the way we breathe, what and how we eat and how we live are often inherited unthinkingly or learned only once, rather than explored through our lifelong learning as aspects of our involvement in dynamic interactions. When these sources of energy are consumed unthinkingly or as though they were separate to the ecology which produces them and the thoughts and emotions which comprise our self, only a small amount of energy can be gleaned from consumption. We are then forced to consume more, expending more effort and energy in the process. The transformative power of energy is not inherent in objects, but is produced from our harmonious relationships. The greater our sense of

harmony within ourselves and with the ecologies we are a part of, the more energy that is available to us, and the less we need to consume.

### **Removing Blockages of the Habitual**

The mind is a powerful instrument for learning. With it we can gather knowledge from recent and ancient sources and our experiences. The mind uses this information and its faculty of imagination to try to build a coherent and consistent picture of the world so that we can operate in it with some degree of effectiveness. However, when energy remains in the mind and is unable to flow through to wider ecologies, it is put to use emphasising habitual connections and patterns of thinking, strengthening the ego and obsessively building stories and scenarios which emphasise separation and stifle creativity. To remove these blockages, we need stop using energy to maintain these patterns, directing it instead to a concentrated centre, allowing the turbulence of undirected thoughts and desires to self-organise into emergent insights. As these patterns of thought are often so habitual that they have passed into our subconscious, we can often only redirect the flow of energy by first paying attention to the unconscious as it manifests in our dreams, our seemingly irrational habits and our reflexive responses to experiences. This allows us to bring these into conscious contemplation where can let go of them and free the energy which sustains them.

### **Motivation**

The striving toward self-organisation is a natural and fundamental aspect of human experience. What we experience as laziness is the dissipation of energy through conflicting desires. When we avoid using our will to direct it, creative energy will be used for producing or maintaining ego-centred or delusional dynamics (Dimitrov 2000). Motivation for sublime learning is increased when we concentrate on identifying and resonating with the source of energy, rather than the conflicting desires which attract it. As the resonance with the universal and the individual increases through directed action, increased energy is available for the creative realisation of the integrated self.

Often we are aware the way conflicting desires have developed into patterns, yet find ourselves struggling to change them. To do so requires will and faith, which are central to developing of our intuition. Will is generated when we act according to that which our learning has shown facilitates the flow of energy. By acting immediately to remove blockages, the uniqueness of our individual involvement with the universe is able to creatively unfold. Faith is generated when we experience the

miracle of emergence of an intuitive insight, wherein the small amount of energy we have, if we expend it wisely and according to our will, is able to grow and expand through being used. The emergence of an intuitive insight is always possible while we remain alive, as it is intrinsic to life that energy is always present.

It is a common situation that those who have the most invested in the structures of a particular society also have an interest in individuals within that society having and expending only as much energy as is needed to maintain its status quo. The promotion of consumptive lifestyles attempts to direct not only the flow of money, but also the flow of energy. Energy is spent in increasingly long hours of work, drained in passive entertainment, used up through sanctioned or strategically overlooked binges or constantly reduced to appetites through advertising. In this way energy contributes to the expansion of society, without contributing to the unfolding of individual potential. When exploring the ways energy moves within our lived experience and rather than allowing it to dissipate ineffectually, we can use it for transformation.

### *Example 3*

A stimulus for the writing of this paper arose from an emotive sharing by Davidson with Dimitrov, shortly after the Third International Soul in Education Conference in Australia in September 2003. The conference venue was located south of Byron Bay, between the Pacific Ocean beach front and Lake Ainsworth immediately inland – a most beautiful and idyllic place bathed in spiritual energy. The sharing related to a powerfully sublime cumulative energy surge experienced by Davidson, during the six days at the Lake Ainsworth venue, climaxing “with a vortex of creative whirlpools in the closing mandala”. The experience will be shared in the context of the sublime learning conditions and factors outlined earlier in the paper, with the abbreviation ND signifying the author Davidson. The interconnectedness between all of the layers and their cumulative build up were felt to be highly significant.

**Concentration and Meditation:** ND had experienced a range of concentration and meditative techniques. Many opportunities were provided during the conference to partake in both formal and informal meditations. Immediately after twenty-minute plenary sessions, by the lake, by the ocean, during live sacred and healing music, at early morning sessions in the tepee, with the sound of the surf rolling up from the beach, and at times of personal choosing. ND engaged in all these opportunities which created a holistic environment for connecting with *The Universal*.

**Ego Control:** This area had been one of continued interest for ND. The development of the ability to be the ‘observer’ of oneself has been important in controlling ego. The insights gained from

Tolle (2000) regarding the power of living in the now, have been most powerful. During the conference ND had been mostly able to move from one moment to the next.

**Unconditional Love:** The amazing energy of the fellow participants from many parts of the world, and their commitment to the spirit of learning, created a most supportive, constant and nourishing emotional climate at the conference. The energy of unconditional love was very powerful for ND. It was a feeling that continually grew from day to day, through emotional interactions with a range of people, particularly with my indigenous brothers and sisters from the Sioux nation, Australia and New Zealand. The feminine spirit proved to be in the ascendancy during the conference.

**Nurturing Spirit:** The very potent connection to *The Universal* at the place was a combination triggered by sacred music and dance, ceremony and ritual, personal connection to an international mix of soulful special people, engaging short plenary sessions, experiential workshops, whales surfacing in the ocean in view from the conference verandah, stunning sunsets, fond memories from earlier visits to the place, and the spiritual feel of the place.

**Strengthening Physical Body:** During almost every moment of the conference, ND was experiencing a consuming sense of harmony within and with the natural ocean and lake environment ecologies of the place. Full body massages in the tepee at midday, lost in the sounds of the surf nearby, combined to release abundant energy through sensitive touch and connection to one's body.

**Breaking Habits:** A full openness to the flow of one day's moments to the next, in a novel and nourishing environment, released an abundance of energy, rather than having some habitual patterns of thought intrude, and sap potential energy.

**Motivation:** As indicated earlier in this paper, the moments of sublime joy experienced by ND at the conference were the miracle of the emergence and creative unfolding of intuitive insights related to the expansive universal spirit.

The following poem by ND is a response to this time in 2003, and is dedicated to the 'love and light' of the late Dawn Emelie Griggs, Director of the Conference and founder of Spirit of Learning Inc, NSW.

### *Moments of Sublime Joy*

*Pierced by a thousand spears,  
Caressed ever so beautifully by human love,  
Sensuous drips of cosmic honey  
Radiate through me, with me, out of me.*

*A new and chaotic vortex sucks me  
Towards a new sublime stillness.  
But there is dissonance in my heart  
Immortality!*

*The starry skies and roaring surf,  
On Oscar and Marigold's song I leave my body,  
The sharp and dangerous edge of fear and love,  
My joyous dance with kindred souls.  
Deep connection with indigenous brothers and sisters,  
  
The piercing cries of the young ones,  
Bathed in golden love, teach and touch us.  
I give my all til I am empty and still,  
And give thanks prostrate on mother earth  
For this once in a lifetime moment in time.*

*Craving for more of that deep, eye sparkling love  
Torn apart from my cosmic lovers  
My dear and dearest sisters and brothers  
A global vision is calling me beyond.  
  
As I bathe naked in the profound, sparkling energy  
of your eyes  
Singing inside with the call of the flute  
Calling me  
Calling me  
Thank you my love, my loves, my soulful lovers,  
my light, my dreams, my epiphany!*

## **BOOTSTRAPPING EFFECT OF SUBLIME LEARNING**

When learning to understand an unknown object (a phenomenon, a process, an experiential event), we try to move beyond the fuzziness (uncertainty, vagueness, ignorance) of what we know (or do not know) about this object using the findings of other researchers and our own exploration.

If we explore ourselves, we rely on our own knowledge about ourselves to move beyond the fuzziness imbedded in this knowledge. And there is no other way to move beyond the fuzziness, except by using our own knowledge, that is, the knowledge characterized by the same degree of fuzziness. So *the process of understanding ourselves, which is at the core of sublime learning, is a process of realisation of a self-referential procedure* - a 'bootstrapping' of fuzziness, that is, pulling of fuzziness from one's knowledge by its own bootstraps and moving from one level of one's understanding and knowing to another level (presumably, higher than the level from where the fuzziness moves). The challenge is to create conditions, which facilitate this bootstrapping.

The ability of learners to create conditions for fuzziness 'to pull itself by its own bootstraps' mirrors the degree up to which they have succeeded in subliming their knowledge into wisdom. The higher this degree, that is, the deeper and broader one's understanding (knowing, experiencing, thinking, feeling) the more 'energetic', active and flexible is the fuzziness and it is easier for the learner to make it move and change - shrink or expand, accelerate or slow, 'harden' or 'soften', transform and

transcend (Dimitrov and Hodge, 2002). By exploring the fuzziness - its sources, causes and factors affecting its resilience, one is able to find out how to activate its bootstrapping.

When we say that fuzziness of our knowledge has moved to another level, this means that our understanding has moved to another level also, and what seemed fuzzy and incomprehensible for us at the level, from where fuzziness has pulled itself, has become clear and comprehensible. Of course, this does not mean that there is no more fuzziness, that we have won the battle with it and succeeded in extinguishing it once and for all from our consciousness. Fuzziness is still 'alive' at each new level of our understanding: full of vigour and potential to become denser or expand wider. One can call the new level 'higher' or 'deeper', it does not matter; what matters is that in the process of learning one's understanding has become deeper, that the limitations imposed by fuzziness at one stage of the process of learning have been transcended. The learner will soon encounter the limitations that another kind of fuzziness imposes. These limitations challenge us to persist in our learning: to continue exploring fuzziness further and testing the degree of development of our wisdom, while trying to make fuzziness 'bootstrap' again.

## **METHODOLOGY FOR APPLYING SUBLIME LEARNING**

The more the learners know about themselves, the greater the chance for them to trigger sublimation of knowledge into wisdom. As we mentioned in the previous sections, the emphasis of sublime learning is on exploring ourselves.

Human nature is full of enigmas and paradoxes. Therefore the knowledge, which we have about ourselves, is fuzzy (uncertain, unknown, vague). Sublime learning does not try to eliminate the fuzziness from it. To eliminate fuzziness would be equivalent not only to stop learning but also to distort our ability to perceive, experience, think, feel, understand, know, aspire, dream and act, as the uncertainty is inseparable from each and all of these vital processes for human existence.

Through sublime learning we try to create (seed, facilitate) conditions for fuzziness to pull itself from our knowledge about specific aspects of our nature and thus to facilitate, energize, strengthen, broaden and deepen our understanding of these aspects.

Below is a heuristic methodology for creating such conditions. It contains three main phases.



## **First Phase: Preparation**

This phase includes application of technique(s) for honing individual awareness of the learner through exerting *volitional* efforts, that is, efforts supported by the power of one's mind and will, for an overall strengthening of individual capacity for perception, experiencing, sensing, thinking, intuiting, knowing. Example of such kind of techniques are the techniques of relaxation and concentration, combined with practices oriented towards triggering sublimation of knowledge into wisdom:

- being aware of and protecting ourselves from the destructive and delusive influences of *The Social on The Individual*
- keeping consciously connected with the inexhaustible source of the life-sustaining forces of *The Universal*
- mastering the techniques of concentration and meditation
- minimizing the power of the selfish ego over mind
- experience and realization of unconditional love
- nurturing the spirit.

## **Second Phase: Exploration**

This phase pursues a careful exploration of the sources, nature, dynamics, causes and effects of fuzziness imbedded in learners' understanding (experiencing, thinking, feeling, knowing) of various aspects of their nature. It includes two stages.

(1) *Identification* of what appears fuzzy (uncertain) to the learners in the exploration of certain aspects of their nature. This is also a stage of inquiring into the research findings of other authors who have explored similar aspects, as well as studying the ancient wisdom.

(2) *Concentration*: applying volitional efforts for focusing and channelling individual awareness on what has been identified as fuzzy. This is a process of self-finding (self-discovery). The learner goes deeper into various experiences related to the studied aspects and interprets (makes meanings) of these experiences.

## **Third Phase: Transformation**

During this phase the learner tries to create conditions facilitating the bootstrapping of fuzziness and withdrawing its limitations from learner's capacity to understand (think, feel, experience, know) the studied aspects of one's own nature. It includes three stages.

(1) *Meditation*: exerting holistic, body-mind-soul 'efforts', which are *non-volitional* (not controlled by one's mind or will) but rather *meditative* ('let-it-go') experiences of calmness, peace and integrity, which bring forth inner clarity in the learner's knowledge. It is in the light of this clarity where the fuzziness related to the studied aspects of the learner's nature 'burns-out', dissolves, becomes transcended.

(2) *Mental Verification*: This phase deals with the question: *Is the identified fuzziness transcended (dissolved)?* If the answer is "no", the methodology is applied again from the beginning with a special reinforcement of the preparatory phase and also of the stage (2.2). If the answer is "yes", one can move to the next stage.

(3) *Contemplation*: This phase deals with the following questions: *What has become clear for the learner as a result of transcending the fuzziness? Did a new meaning emerge, a new insight? What kinds of thoughts, behaviours and actions did the achieved clearness evoke (stimulate, impede, sustain, lead to)?*

It is important to underline that when applying the described methodology, the learner does not fight with fuzziness in order to eliminate or reduce it, but rather *interacts* with it. The phases 1 and 2 help learners initiate creative 'whirlpools' in the space of their thinking, feeling and experiencing. In the process of sharpening their awareness (stage 2.2), while integrating the experiential streams of their own explorations with the knowledge and experiences of the other explorers, the learner tries to centre the created whirlpools. The phase 3 is where the forces emerging out the whirlpools become so intensive that the learner is able to capture some subtle and yet perceivable signals announcing emergence of creative insights or new discoveries.

The above methodology bridges sublime learning with the research findings of *fuzziology*: the study of fuzziness of human knowing (Dimitrov and Hodge, 2002).

#### *Example 4*

Our knowledge about the phenomenon of death is saturated with fuzziness (uncertainty, ignorance). Let us apply the above methodology for expanding our understanding of this phenomenon. The first stage of the *Phase of Exploration* reveals that the source of fuzziness in our knowledge of death is in the lack of our own experience of this phenomenon. What intensifies this fuzziness, what makes it dense and depressive is our fear that the death will put an end of our individualities, of our egos with all their achievements, acquisitions, aspirations and dreams. In the second stage of the *Phase of Exploration* we concentrate on different views about death and how do they affect the fuzziness of our knowledge. We read and contemplate on what the ancient thinkers said about death (particularly, in the Ancient Egypt and Tibet), what has been written about death by researchers involved in diverse scientific and religious inquiries. We explore different ideas articulated by people involved in various spiritual practices and particularly by indigenous people. We read what different philosophers and mystics share about death, consciousness, existence, spirituality, immortality. We remember novels, poems and essays, as well as movies, plays, pictures, orchestral compositions and songs - all related to human death or immortality. The *Phase of Transformation* is where we meditate and contemplate on what we have read and heard, on our own experience with people who died in our presence. The thoughts and feelings emerging out of the processes of meditation and contemplation offer insights from within the dynamics of fuzziness of our own ideas and emotions related to death. They help us clarify that it is the separate individual ego that fears mostly from the approaching death. If there were not a separate ego, there wouldn't be reasons for fear: why should we think that the death is a fearful experience when we never had it? It is obvious that one cannot do anything in order to save the material substance of the body (there is absolutely no fuzziness about this!), but maybe one can succeed in dissolving the individual ego before the moment of death. We meditate and contemplate also on those conditions of life, which could help us dissolve the power of the individual ego over mind. What kind of behaviour, what kind of mental, emotional and spiritual efforts are required from us in order to transcend the limits of the separate individual consciousness and unite with the source of forces sustaining the eternity of the existential wholeness? In the same way as our planet Gaya is a living organism, the whole universe also breathes and evolves. Is not the consciousness that each of us is endowed with through the evolutionary impetus of the universe created and sustained by the energies and forces responsible for the timeless integrity of the existential wholeness? Of course, it is! Can we expand our consciousness and become at-one with the existential wholeness? Then there would be no separate individual ego and therefore there would be nobody to die. Of course, we can, because we *are* the existential wholeness and embody in us its transformative power. Both the life and death are manifestations of this eternal power. As long as it exists (and it never ceases to exist), we

exist also. The mental verification of this kind of insights places the second necessary condition (for transforming knowledge into wisdom) in a much broader context: how to liberate our entire consciousness from the power of the ego. At the final stage of the Third Phase we emphasize again the crucial importance of meditation as leverage for advancing on the road to wisdom.

## **THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER**

Throughout this paper we have said that sublime learning can come only through self-understanding and self-exploration. What then is the role of the teacher? Is there no place for guides or sages to help those who are beginners on the path of transformation or those who, having begun their transformative journeys, feel stuck?

The path to sublime learning is a hero's or heroine's journey. It is neither easy nor smooth. This is the same spiritual quest whose story has been told countless times. It is the story of the quest for the Holy Grail, for the lost temple, for the truth behind the hidden door. These are the stories, or myths, of the countries of the world and they provide models for teachers. The seeker, alone on the path, stumbles through puddles, trips on rocks, scales peaks, and descends into valleys. However, every once in a while, often just when needed, a teacher appears. The teacher does not display any of the markings of rank – no academic garb, no state-sponsored certificates, no honorifics. The teacher often appears humble – a simple woodsman, even an ugly one – an aged crone. And the teacher does not give clear, specific direction, but guides the seekers towards their right paths – their transformations – by indirection, by listening, by support.

### **Characteristics of the Teacher**

There are three essential characteristics of the teacher for sublime learning. The first is the ability to see the individual and holistic nature of each student. The second is the ability to hold each student in unconditional positive regard. And the third is the ability to know the student so that true communication can occur.

The teacher must be able to enter into the learning experience of the student. He or she can only do that by experiencing each student as a unique and complete individual. Martin Buber (1970) has described this as the *I-Thou* relationship. In the *I-Thou* relationship, the teacher does not see the student as a member of a class or group. The teacher appreciates the student as an individual just as

one appreciates the beauty of a tree in the full bloom of summer or the bareness of winter without classifying it by its Latin genus and species. Similarly, the teacher appreciates the student as a complete human being just as one does not appreciate the full beauty of a tree by examining its leaves. Yeats (1928/1962) asked: "O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer, Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?" The clear answer is that the tree is all of these and more than these. Similarly, the teacher cannot ask: O student, are you the heart, the mind, or the spirit?

The second characteristic of the teacher of sublime learning is the ability to hold the student in unconditional positive regard. This term comes from the work of Carl Rogers (1951) who developed an approach to psychotherapy based on his view of human nature and the role of therapy. He believed that people, like all living beings, instinctively seek that which they naturally value. Among these, he included positive regard, a term that included love, attention, and affection. From the positive regard of others, humans develop positive self-regard which is essential for each person's natural flowering or self-actualization. However, Rogers believed, society has created situations, situations that people mirror and imitate, in which positive regard is only delivered on condition. This condition can vary from behaving in a particular way to one's family members or friends to the highest achievement. This conditional regard from others sets up an internal state of conditional self-worth. Instead of loving ourselves, we measure ourselves with regard to others or to external benchmarks. In this state, the student cannot move into the transformations of sublime learning. What Rogers required of a counsellor—and these are the sole requirements—was the ability to be genuine or honest with a client; the ability to feel what the client feels, and the ability to experience unconditional positive regard towards the client. Therefore, we can say that one of the three characteristics of the teacher is the ability to hold the student in unconditional positive regard.

The third characteristic of the teacher is the ability and willingness to know the student, to listen and hear the student, to be able to speak to the student's heart.. The contemporary teacher of Kabbalah, Rabbi Ginsburgh (2003), in a series of lessons on "A Kabbalistic Approach to Spiritual Growth" described the characteristics of the teacher. He wrote that the educator must get to know the "innermost potentialities" of each student as well as the "circumstances of their lives. "Knowing" creates a unification between the "knower" and the "known." This truth is understood from the statement in the Book of Genesis: "And Adam *knew* Eve." (This means that they were united on every possible level until they became "as one flesh.")' To do this, the teacher must use, not only all of his sense, but his inner eye and inner ear. The reason for getting to know the student so well is to increase the effectiveness of communication. 'He who aspires to become a more effective teacher must learn to observe himself as he speaks, monitoring his communication both for style and content in order to

aim for the hearts of his students. In a teacher-student relationship, poor communication always signals a lack of concern on the part of the educator' (Ginsburgh, 2003).

### **What the Teacher Can Do**

There are three ways the teacher can help the student. The first is to be supportive. The second is to recognize the potential difficulty of moving in directions that seem counter to earlier learning. And the third is to be a model.

The teacher, then, is a guide, a support for the student moving toward sublime learning. The teacher is interested only in the student's movement toward more self-understanding and greater connection to the wholeness of the spirit within and the dynamics that spirit reflects in the world. Rogers (1951) saw therapy not as reconstructive but as supportive. Just as a parent supports the first tentative steps of a child or the child's efforts at speech, the teacher supports the learner's movement toward self-knowledge. Neither of these efforts can be taught through words; they can only be encouraged in the learner. In supporting the student, unconditional positive regard means that there is no judgment as to speed or steadiness of aspiration or achievement.

At times, the individual moving towards sublime learning may feel out of step with the world. Through reflection and support, the teacher can encourage the learner to proceed even when the ideas and dynamics that emerge seem different from those the learner has been conditioned to accept. Indeed, sublime learning consists of throwing off most of the conditioning with which we have been burdened. We are conditioned to compete, to achieve, and to seek love that is a reward for our achievements. Giving up these ideas is not an easy task since they are reinforced virtually every waking moment. Moving from simply having "waking moments" to "moments of awareness" is difficult. Krishnamurti (1992) wrote of the teacher: 'His sole concern is "helping" the student to understand the conditioning influences about him and within himself, so that he can face intelligently without fear, the complex process of living, and an add more problems to the already existing mess" (p. 28).

Finally, the teacher can model sublime learning in two ways. The first is to be aware of the temptations of ego in teaching. The temptations of teachers to see themselves as experts and to revel in this expertise has been known throughout the ages. Centuries ago, Lao Tsu wrote in the *Tao*, " The sage has no mind of his own. He is aware of the needs of others.... The sage is shy and humble – to the world he seems confusing. Others look to him and listen.' (Lao Tsu, 1989). And more recently,

Ginsburgh (2003), speaking from a different time and tradition, wrote: 'To the extent that the teacher is preoccupied with his role of putting out information, of dazzling his students with his superior knowledge, of hearing himself talk, to that extent his teaching becomes an egotistical indulgence rather than an act of giving.' The second way in which the teacher can model sublime learning is by remaining aware, by continuing to identify her or his own areas of fuzziness, by a continual process of self-discovery, by practising meditation, mental verification, and contemplation and by openness in doing this. Thus the students see the struggle is not theirs alone.

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

Howells (2003:6) reports: "Recent teacher education policy and contemporary theory emphasizes a shift away from a total focus on mastery of a specific discipline towards also attending to life-long learning, critical self-reflection, awareness of cultural differences, and on-going personal development. Indeed employment contexts across the board clearly require a broader base of skills in graduates. A recent higher education policy document, prepared by the Hon. Dr David Kemp, the previous Federal Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, entitled Higher Education: Report for the 1999 to 2001 Triennium, endorses a wide range of generic skills in a list of "attributes of graduates". These include: "sense of self", "social and environmental responsibility", "personal responsibility for value judgments and ethical behaviour towards others", "openness to new ideas and unconditional critiques of received wisdom", and "agents of positive change".

Howells sees holistic education and experiential learning as being most suited to this focus, but believes it is hard to break traditional paradigms.

Howell's thesis (2003:6) theorises:"the nature of "innermost attitude" and discusses its place in university curricula. Examples are offered of how particular aspects of innermost attitude, such as gratitude, giving, humility, wonder and interconnectedness have contributed to more satisfying learning outcomes and enhanced higher order thinking skills when applied to the academic learning process".

Howells (2003) offers the following possible ways forward for teacher education: "The theoretical and pedagogical insights offered in my research could add to the research base that focuses on change and innovation in teacher education, particularly that which focuses on greater development of the inner life of the teacher. A case study could be initiated

which investigates the effect of teachers' attention to innermost attitude and in particular the effect of practising gratitude. The approach of A State of Preparedness could be adapted to teacher education and in-service education. It could be offered both in the form of workshops and a full academic subject".

Davidson (2003) proposes the following strategic directions for the future of teacher education:

- Enrich teacher education through the application of ecological, complexity, post-modern and lifelong learning perspectives as a basis for developing trans-disciplinary approaches.
- Establish opportunities to nourish the soul of teacher educators and their students. "The teacher's soul must be nourished if the student's soul is to develop" (Miller, 2000;10), eg: Incorporate opportunities for contemplation and meditation in undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education degrees.
- Offer teacher education lecturers development opportunities in the areas of interpersonal communication and self realization, and soulful education & classrooms (Miller, 2000).
- Support students and staff in moving from deceptive simplicity to confusing complexity.... to profound simplicity (Hill, 2002).
- Pursue a teacher education approach in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that facilitates not only curriculum related mastery, but equally nourishes the inner or sacred lives of pre and in-service teachers, thereby enhancing the conditions and opportunities for sublime learning..

"The loss of our sense of place in the cosmos and the corresponding loss of ritual concerning our participation in the great mystery of life are significant. The inability to express our sense of ecstasy and gratitude for the gift of life constitutes a loss of meaning about our vocation and place in the larger life processes. We live in an incredible time in earth history and we must capture the sense of our purpose through celebrating the fullness of our existence in both time and space. Celebration is an essential part of the ritual of existence. For creatures of the millennium, we must remind ourselves that we are about a great work. It is a joy to be part of this grandeur." (O'Sullivan, 1999: 28).

## REFERENCES

Brunton, P. (1989) *The Notebook of Paul Brunton*, NY: Larson Publications

Bohm, D. (2002) *Wholeness and Implicate Order*, London: Routledge



Buber, M. (1970). *I and thou: A New Translation with a Prologue and Notes by W. Kaufmann*. NY: Scribner.

Cole, R.. 1999. *Mission of Love: A physician's personal journey towards a life beyond*, Melbourne: Lothian Books

Cole, R.. 2001. *Healing Heart and Soul*, Melbourne: Lothian Books. South Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Davidson, N. 2003 Faith, Feeling & Identity in *Teacher Education: an Australian story*. Paper presented at the Tenth Annual International Conference on "Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child", 26-28 June 2003, University of Surrey, Roehampton, UK

Dimitrov, V. 2002 Introduction to Fuzziology, in *Fuzzy Logic: A Framework for the New Millennium* (eds. Dimitrov, V. and Korotkich, V.), NY: Physica Verlag

Dimitrov, V. 2003 *A New Kind of Social Science: Study of Self-organization of Human Dynamics*, Morrisville: Lulu Press

Dimitrov, V. and Hodge, B. 2002 *Social Fuzziology: Study of Fuzziness of Social Complexity*, NY: Springer

Eckhart, T. 2000 *The Power of Now*. Sydney: Hodder.

Ginsburgh, Y. 2003 *Internet papers* (Retrieved February 17, 2004 from <http://www.inner.org/archives/arch63.htm>)

Hill, S. 2001 Handout: *Evidence of our behavioural and Health Potential. Peckham Experiment, U.K., 1926-1950*. University of Western Sydney, School of Social Ecology & Lifelong Learning.

Hill, S., Wilson, S. and Watson K. 2003 Learning Ecology and Transformative Change in *Tertiary Education: Stories from Australia*. Paper for University of Western Sydney, School of Social Ecology & Lifelong Learning.

Howells, K. 2003 *Attending to the Inner Dimension in Teacher Education: An Integrated Approach*. Paper presented to UWS College of Arts, Education and Social Sciences.

Jung, C. 1970 *Civilization in Transition* (The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, vol. 10) Princeton University Press

Krishnamurti, J. 1992 *On Right Livelihood*. San Francisco, CA: Harper. (Original work published 1967 in *Commentaries in Living Second Series, Chapter 17*)

Lao Tzu, 1989 *Tao Te Ching* (Feng, G.-F and English, J. trans.), NY: Vintage Books

Miller, Jack. 2000. *Education and the Soul*, SUNY Press: Albany, New York.

O'Sullivan, E. (ed.) 1999 *Transformative Learning: Educational Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. London: Zed Books.

Somerville, R. 2004 Yoga – An Orientation, *NOVA Magazine*, NSW, vol. 10. No12, February 2004 (<http://www.novazine.com.au/>)

Rogers, C. R. 1951 *Client-centered Therapy: Its current practice, implications, and theory*. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin

Yeats, W. B. 1962 Among school children. In L. Untermeyer (Ed.), *Modern British Poetry*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace. (Original work published 1928).