

# Into the Wild

## Crisis & opportunity on the edge of time

By Huw Wyn

At the beginning of this 21<sup>st</sup> century, we live at a critical time in our story of humankind. The credit crisis is the word on so many lips, yet in many ways the current crisis is only a reflection of a much more profound crisis, one that will touch every aspect of our lives.

The mass species extinction that is happening in many of the hidden parts of our world, climate change and the long term consequences of shifting weather patterns, the vast poverty that effects people on a daily basis, terrorism, wars and the wholesale destruction of the wild abundant forests are part of the bigger picture we all have to face.

This moment however is also a profound opportunity for all of us to look at what legacy we will leave for our great grandchildren. If we look at the great stories and myths from across the world, we can see that the hero or heroine must undertake a journey, which always includes many challenges along the way. It is no different for each one of us. Our personal journey is intrinsically linked to the bigger story: how we face our own personal challenges allows us an opportunity to find the hidden gifts we carry that, just maybe, will offer us a chance to

deal with our current earthly crises.

The work we do, whether with clients on a one-to-one basis, with groups, through workshops or in whatever way our particular offering unfolds, will also effect the whole in ways we can never even know.

As this wild and ancient story winds its way across the edge of time, the definition and scope of therapy will also have to change to meet the particular needs of the current moment. I sometimes wonder if even the name 'Psychotherapy' is appropriate for what is being offered as the scope of our awareness grows. Like any label, it will inevitably hold certain flavours and judgements to people, and so we start to have new names such as eco-psychology. However, for many young people, for example, the idea of a shrink or therapist is not so appealing - it can hold an old fashioned, analytical image, not one that many young people may be

attracted to. Yet the new generation are the key to our future.

### **Beyond therapy?**

So my question is how we move beyond therapy and the labels that may be attached to that form. To do this I, at least, ask myself: what is being offered; what is the true goal of what is being offered; how far do we dare to open our mind to the potential of this human existence?

Having studied in the core process model, as well as Tibetan medicine, and having worked with many indigenous elders from Tibet and around the world, I am often drawn to the roots of healing and see how it has organically transformed to the needs of the moment. I am also open to the possibility that the work we all do is about awakening to our true potential as human beings.

As the American cosmologist Brian Swimme eloquently points out, we are at the cutting edge of a 2 billion year evolutionary movement. We are what the universe has created in order to understand itself. With this profound understanding we can see that we are not separate from this story - we *are* the unfolding story.

This reminds me of a story told by the great Mayan Poet/Shaman Martin Pretchel. Every night the people would gather in the old Mayan house: old people packed to the rafters, young children, aunts, uncles, dogs and cats, all sitting around the fire to



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hear the stories, surrounded with many delicious smells of the exquisite foods, drink and the smoke from the incense rising through the air. Each night Martin would try his very best to stay up and hear the end of the story, but no matter how much Guatemalan coffee he drank, or how hard he tried he would always fall asleep. One day he turned round to his 93 year old teacher, Nicolas Chivauli, and said, 'Grandfather, why do I never get to hear the end of the story?' His teacher turned around to him and said, 'You fool, there is no end to the story, we are the story.' And suddenly he understood.

In the same way it is like this for us: we are the ever unfolding story of this universal song, our life is the words and notes that help to make up this ancient bewildering poem. When we start to see ourselves as part of this mysterious never-ending expression, our personal story becomes an intrinsic part of the whole.

The Tzutkil Mayans also call us human beings 'the great forgetful ones', as we always seem to forget where we came from. The

great mystery of where we originally come from is like the Zen koan, 'What was your face like before you were born?'

There are so many ways that we can remember who we truly are, and for me Psychotherapy, or the work we offer, is an opportunity to see that original face in the present moment. The work allows us to reconnect with the ever present moment of our life right here, right now. It allows us to open beyond the boundaries of who I think I am and to see that I am not my thoughts, I am not just my body, there is a vast and ever present awareness that lies at the very core of being.

The question is: how do I come back to this place; how do I have confidence in knowing who I truly am; and how do I live this in every moment of my life? This is for me the greatest challenge, to trust that deep within we have the answers to these questions. A good healer or therapist will act as a mirror, through their awareness, to help point the way back to that place we can call a true home; our original face.

In the Dzogchen (great perfection) teachings of Tibet, the vital point is to recognise our true nature; to see what lies at the very source of who we are. Of course what I am pointing to here is possibly the ultimate goal in healing, at least from a spiritual perspective. And for many this might seem like a long journey, a distant land that someday we may arrive at, a promised land.

Our practice is having to work with very bones of the self, so mere glimpses of our true nature are even made possible. Yet surely it is our task to recognise our true potential as often as we can, finding resources that allow us to bring the full healing benefit of awareness into our work as much as possible. The more aligned to our presence and natural awareness we are, the deeper and more profound the holding space is for healing to occur.

For me this is one of the most beautiful aspects of our work. As we are inspired and called upon to become more and more aware, we are then healing our selves as we offer a space of healing for clients. If we look at the very word resource we can look at its deeper meaning, to literally re-source, to come back home, to our source.

I believe that every client we work with has the potential to become more aware of their own true nature. No matter how badly we have been wounded, no matter what we might have done in our lives, there is always at least a brief opportunity to get a glimpse of our being.

The story of Milarepa is a great example of this, and that's probably why it is one of the most popular stories of Ancient Tibet. Although he killed a whole family through jealousy as an act of revenge, he managed to realign his body and mind towards realising his own true nature and dedicating his life to benefit all beings. The story illustrates that even after committing the most hideous of acts, our true nature

has never been stained by our thoughts or actions. Just like clouds may cover the clear blue sky, our obscurations may temporarily hide our true potential. But just like the sky, our true nature is always here with us. We just need to find the right resources to bring us back home.

Don't you know that all appearances are the nature of your mind?

Don't you know that the nature of your mind is awakening?

Don't you know that the awakening is the ultimate body?

Don't you know that the ultimate body is the ultimate nature?

Don't you know that you are never separate from the source?

Jetsun Milarepa, The great  
Yogi of Tibet.

### **Into the wild**

As therapists much of our work takes place in the space of a room. Much healing work can take place in this safe space, but of course it always has limits. For me part of the task of our work may be to move beyond the boundaries of the room and go into the wild, into true nature itself.

One of the greatest resources we have is the natural world, the healing power of the land. Land is, and has been since beginningless time, a medicine for our soul, a place where we can reconnect with the five elements

that make up the essence of who we are.

In Tibetan medicine, it is the balance of the five elements that allows us to have an integrated and truly holistic healing. In this ancient system of healing the healer will use a whole range of resources to help the client realign with their sense of health. This can include diet, exercise, herbal medicines, teas and plants, sound through mantra and music, relaxation and reduction of stress through meditation, clarity and awareness through imagination exercises and visual meditations, as well as a profound and deep sense of compassion and listening to the client.

Another important understanding for the Tibetan doctor, is that the client and healer are not separate but have come together to learn from each other in the greater picture of healing.

When we lose touch with these elements, the natural cycles of life, the changing seasons and our relationship with a sense of place in the world, it is no wonder we lose touch with our true nature. So how do we become reconnected with our ancient home, the very ground that supports our human body?

### **Land as Medicine**

In her wonderful book *Wild*, Jay Griffiths tells of how, all around the world, elders are seeing that we have become dangerous to ourselves. Young people are becoming violently out of control, living in a wasteland of the mind.

And all these wise elders pointed to one solution: The Land.

Violence and depression come from being outside nature, from not having the clarity of mind that the vastness of the sky provides, from losing touch with the grounded quality of the earth, and from not spending time with the wild emotions of the rivers and oceans.

Nature is both wild and kind. It is the natural world that provides all our resources to survive, yet when we lose touch with that natural rhythm, we find ourselves in a crisis, and we lose touch with our source. Our current environmental crisis is a perfect mirror, reflecting how we have often lost touch with our most primal resource. To spend time with our true home allows a deep healing to take place.

You go back to the land to be yourself, says one of the elders, all human mind is free and wild and we need wild land to remember who we are. To spend time sitting out by a fire under the summer stars, or to sit and see both the sunrise and sunset in one day, these are the most natural aspects of life, but rarely do we give ourselves time to listen, to really see, to remember who we truly are.

The work we offer must also allow us to reconnect with that wild soul that is in its essence free and vast. By spending time with the five elements, we slowly come back to ourselves and resource, deeply recharging our lives with awareness and passionate action as we realise we are an intrinsic part of the

whole and our life is a gift to share with others.

Although much of the work we do takes place in the therapy room, it of course ripples into all areas of our life. For me part of my own offering is to find ways of expanding the boundaries of healing to include community, creativity, an embodied connection with the natural world, and deep enquiry into the nature of being.

### **Wild Heart**

One expression of this is called the Wild Heart gathering, which is an event that I have co founded to help people reconnect with the great resource of the natural world.

This moves beyond the therapy room by inviting people to take part in a joint process of healing through ceremony, education, creative expression and sharing. In a way we are all 'in therapy'. As I'm sure you are already aware, the word derives from the Latin meaning 'healing'.

So what are we trying to heal?

I believe that ultimately we are all trying - even if we don't realize it - to reconnect with our true nature and through that to feel whole; to find a sense of belonging in the world. So we invite passionate and inspiring people to come and offer what they have learnt in life for the benefit of the whole. For me this is a true expression of the humanistic view, an opportunity to share beyond the confines of sectarianism. It does not matter which school of thought you align yourself, here is an opportunity

to go beyond the boundaries of one's current understanding and grow and learn with each other.

So we have a wide range of opportunities to broaden our understanding with teachers, leaders and novices offering a wide range of perspectives, which allows a truly integral understanding of the world. Through this enquiry we can go beyond any limited definition of therapy or healing, to realize that we each have something unique to offer and we encourage and inspire each other to share and learn from each other's vision.

Ceremony and ritual can be an important part of this process. Again to quote Martin Pretchel, 'the reason we do ceremony is to remember who we are'. For hundreds of years indigenous people have created numerous intricate and beautiful ways (granted some brutal) to reconnect with a sense of place and belonging in the world. Through the wild heart we are trying to learn from the wisdom and mistakes of our past, through stories and the delicate webs of culture, as well as create new and beautiful ways we can reconnect with each other and our sense of place.

The Tzut'ikil Mayans have an interesting world view in this respect. In order for the world to survive and to support the vast abundant and intricate beauty of the natural world, we have to learn to give back, not just consume. The way we can do this is through creating beautiful ceremony as an expression of our longing, of

remembering - literally coming back together. We can do this through language, expression, music, art, dance, in so many ways we try to create something that expresses our heartfelt gratitude to the world. The Mayans see the earth and nature as a living goddess and every living thing holds parts of the very bones of that mysterious living presence. In this way everything is sacred, nothing is left out.

When we start to see the world as sacred once more, we are no longer separate from that sacredness, we are also an intricate expression of the beloved.

This also ties in with the Buddhist understanding of how we create suffering. Through ignorance of our true nature, we feel separate and therefore create suffering from the illusion of a separate self. So by realizing that we are not separate from the source we can move beyond suffering and realize our potential in our life right here now.

### **Beyond our wildest dreams**

As the world revolves around the current crises, maybe what is most needed from us is to awaken to our potential and have confidence in that unique expression of who we are.

One morning after the first Wild Heart gathering last year, I awoke with a deep and powerful question. *What lies beyond our wildest dreams?* As I'm sure many of us have been told since we were young, 'It's beyond

your wildest dreams': but what is?

What lies in the wild caverns of the mystery of our being that is waiting to come forth and offer itself as an exquisite and beautiful gift to the world? What if we are truly an intrinsic part of an evolutionary intelligent source, and part of the mystery of life is to realize our part in the unfolding story?

If so, then our challenge is to listen to the wild and deep intuitive song of the universe, to create a place of clarity, awareness and resonance that can hear the beautiful poem of our soul as it sings its mysterious song back to us through the vast ocean of emptiness.

In the deep silence of our being, we can start to hear the whale songs of our heart and understand that the world is always in communication with us, if we are open to new and ancient ways of listening.

Earlier this year I met Stephan Harding a great scientist and colleague of Satish Kumar at Schumacher college. He spoke of how indigenous people have always understood that the world is constantly communicating to us in so many ways. Whether it's the songs of the wind, the vibrant colours of autumn, summer, spring and winter, the deep clarity of the winter sky, the song of the thrush, the lapping of the waves or the mirrors of experience that are always being presented to us through the myriad reflections of life.

When we open beyond the boundaries of the four walls, when the mandala of our experience isn't confined by a small sense of I, we can stay open and relaxed to the vastness of our being as it constantly unfolds as the very essence of our being. We can really go beyond those wildest dreams. The key to this is authentic presence.

With this in mind I would like to share an abbreviated version of a teaching by one of the greatest Tibetan Buddhist Dzogchen masters of the 20th Century. His name is Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. I hope it is as inspiring as it has been for me and may give you a clearer picture of the essence of what this short and poetic essay has tried to portray. He talks about meditation, but as you will see there is no difference between formal meditation and our practice as therapists, healers or daily life itself.

#### **Awareness in everyday Life.**

Our practice is simply to develop a complete carefree acceptance, an openness to all situations without limit. We realise openness as the playground of our emotions and relate to people without artificiality, manipulation or strategy.

We should experience everything totally, never withdrawing into ourselves. This practice releases tremendous energy which is usually constricted by the process of maintaining fixed reference points. Referentiality is the process by which we

retreat from the direct experience of everyday life.

Being present in the moment may initially trigger fear. But by welcoming the sensation of fear with complete openness, we cut through the barriers created by habitual emotional patterns.

When we engage in the practice of discovering space, we should develop the feeling of opening ourselves out completely to the entire universe. We should open ourselves with absolute simplicity and nakedness of mind. This is the powerful and ordinary practice of dropping the mask of self-protection.

We shouldn't make a division between perception and field of perception. We shouldn't become like a cat watching a mouse. We should realise that the purpose of our practice is to relax and be at ease with our life, right here, right now.

Everything is naturally perfect just as it is. All phenomena appear in their uniqueness as part of the continually changing pattern. These patterns are vibrant with meaning and significance at every moment; yet there is no significance to attach to such meanings beyond the moment in which they present themselves.

This is the dance of the five elements in which matter is a symbol of energy and energy a symbol of emptiness. We are a symbol of our own enlightenment. With no effort or practice whatsoever, liberation or enlightenment is already here.

The everyday practice of awareness is just everyday life itself. Since the undeveloped state does not exist, there is no need to behave in any special way or attempt to attain anything above and beyond what you actually are. There should be no feeling of striving to reach some 'amazing goal' or 'advanced state'.

To strive for such a state is a neurosis which only conditions us and serves to obstruct the free flow of Mind. We should also avoid thinking of ourselves as worthless persons - we are naturally free and unconditioned. We are intrinsically enlightened and lack nothing.

We should realise that true meditation transcends effort, practice, aims, goals and the duality of liberation and non-liberation. Meditation is always ideal; there is no need to correct anything. Since everything that arises is simply the play of mind as such, there is no unsatisfactory meditation and no need to judge thoughts as good or bad.

All phenomena are completely new and fresh, absolutely unique and entirely free from all concepts of past, present and future.

They are experienced in timelessness. The continual stream of new discovery, revelation and inspiration, which arises at every moment is the manifestation of our clarity.

We should learn to see everyday life as mandala - the luminous fringes of experience which



radiate spontaneously from the empty nature of our being. The aspects of our mandala are the day-to-day objects of our life experience moving in the dance or play of the universe.

By this symbolism the inner teacher reveals the profound and ultimate significance of being. Therefore we should be natural and spontaneous, accepting and learning from everything. This enables us to see the ironic and amusing side of events that usually irritate us.

Through awareness we can see through the illusion of past, present and future - our experience becomes the continuity of nowness. The past is only an unreliable memory held in the present. The future is only a projection of our present conceptions. The present itself vanishes as soon as we try to grasp it. So why bother with attempting to establish an illusion of solid ground?.

Simply plunging directly into the moment now, with our whole being, free from hesitation, boredom or excitement, *is* enlightenment.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.

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[www.tigersnest.com](http://www.tigersnest.com)

The next Wild Heart gathering will take place from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> May 2009 on the ancient high weald forest in East Sussex.  
[www.wildheartgathering.com](http://www.wildheartgathering.com)

### **Life as prayer.**

For me this beautiful teaching touches the very heart of our practice: to be fully present to our life as it unfolds its mysterious story. Of course this means being open to the suffering that exists, the grief of losing friends and family, the impermanent nature of our bodies, sickness and ill health, as well as the ever changing nature of our emotions.

Yet all these aspects of our being are the display of our true nature. Just like the changing seasons, our life is a reflection of the great cycles of the natural world. When we start to open to the vastness of our true nature, our life becomes a prayer - sometimes it stutters, sometimes we get caught in webs of conditioning and habitual patterns, but if we can always remember that we are not separate from this wild beautiful poem, then maybe, just maybe we can make the most of the current crises as an opportunity, right Here right Now!